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U.S. Air Force Capt. Elijah Supper, 77th Fighter Squadron pilot, shows the capabilities of an F-16 CJ Fighting Falcon to Stan Goldstein, Wild Weasels Society General Secretary, at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, on February 3, 2012.

From Skyward Strikes to Life at Village on the Green

The Journey of Stan Goldstein

By Nick Fortuna

At 89, Stan Goldstein plans to celebrate a milestone birthday next July, but reaching age 90 is nothing compared to the thrill, pride, and sense of accomplishment that came when he hit an even bigger round number for the U.S. Air Force almost six decades ago.

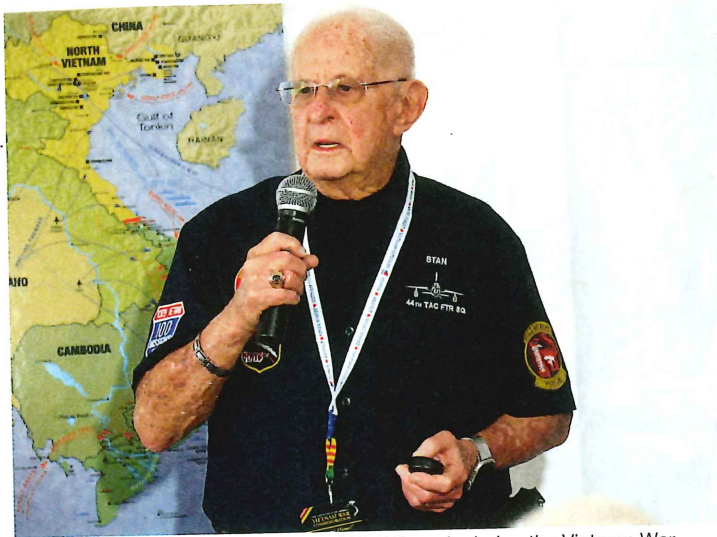
Goldstein, a resident of Village on the Green in Longwood, said he's still being recognized for the courage he showed in Vietnam, where he and fellow Air Force Maj. John Revak completed 100 combat missions.

Members of the famed Wild Weasels, Goldstein and Revak forged their friendship while outrunning surface-to-air missiles and relying upon each other to survive. Not surprisingly, they remain close to this day, and Goldstein, who never saw a problem he didn't want to solve,

has carried his exacting military standards into retirement. Just ask the folks at Village on the Green.

Goldstein and his wife, Jo, moved to the continuing care retirement community (CCRC) in 2011, and though he has few complaints, he's not shy about sharing his opinions. Shortly after arriving at Village on the Green, he began attending meetings of its Residents Council, and he's been an active member for the past 12 years, missing only a few meetings during that time.

Goldstein played a key role in getting the Residents Council to meet each month instead of only 10 months a year, and in a nod to the summer uniforms he wore in the Air Force, he got the council to loosen its dress code so that jackets and ties were no longer required.



Stan explains the involvement of the Wild Weasels during the Vietnam War during a 50th celebration of the end of the Vietnam War at the Air Force Association in Washington, DC.



Goldstein with his F-105.

He's also helped to write and review the CCRC's bylaws, develop its marketing materials and organize a program teaching residents how to use smartphones, computers and tablets. He even organized gambling pools for the Super Bowl and Kentucky Derby, giving residents a chance to win a few bucks.

"I've served on numerous committees, including finance and culinary," Goldstein said. "I'm always examining how things are done and trying to make this place better. I believe in rules as long as the rules make sense. If they don't, then I try to let them know as politely as I can what things I think need changing."

Goldstein said he's proud to serve on the board of the Brede-Wilkins Scholarship Fund, established by Village on the Green charter residents in 1988. The fund, part of the Central Florida Foundation, is sustained by residents' donations and has awarded millions of dollars in scholarships to high-school students working as dining-room servers and other employees at Village on the Green.

For the past 11 years, Goldstein has organized Memorial Day and Veterans Day services and parades at the CCRC, and he collected donations to install a memorial bench under a tree on the property to honor Village on the Green residents who served in the military.

For Goldstein and his wife of 47 years, a former speech therapist, moving to Village on the Green was a wise decision, and he takes



comfort in knowing that should anything happen to him, Jo will always get the care she needs. He said the friendships they've made with fellow residents and staff members have been especially rewarding, providing the couple with a strong sense of community.

"Everyone here is so friendly that you form friendships almost instantaneously," he said. "It's like you're inheriting a big family."

Destined to Fly

Born in the Bronx in 1934, Goldstein said he knew he wanted to be a fighter pilot at age 8, when he saw the John Wayne film "Flying Tigers," about the volunteer group of Americans who fought the Japanese in China before the United States entered World War II. At the time, Goldstein couldn't have known that his own career would be more death-defying than anything put on film.

Goldstein was in the Air Force ROTC while attending New York University and earning a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering. He would later get a master's degree from the University of Missouri while being trained to fly. All that analytical instruction came in handy when Goldstein was tasked with determining the proper staffing levels for various departments at Air Force bases.

A life-changing moment came in October 1967, when Goldstein was told that he would become a Wild Weasel. As recounted in Dan Hampton's book "The Hunter Killers," which features Goldstein and Revak on its cover, the Weasels flew some of the most dangerous missions of the Vietnam War, serving as targets for surface-to-air missiles.

Each F-105 Thunderchief jet fighter would have a pilot, called a nose gunner, and an electronic warfare officer situated in the back of the plane. Revak was a nose gunner, and EWOs like Goldstein were jokingly referred to as the pilots' trained circus bears, so as a Jewish kid from New York, Goldstein naturally got the nickname Kosher Bear.

The Weasels would position themselves between the Air Force fighters and bombers flying overhead and the surface-to-air missile installations of the North Vietnamese. The bears in the back of the planes would search the sky for missiles streaking toward them and relay that information to the nose gunners.

"You would see the missile coming at you, and it was as large as a telephone pole," Goldstein said.

The pilot would position the approaching missile at either 10 o'clock or 2 o'clock relative to the plane, and at precisely the right moment, he would put the plane into a nosedive, with the missile



Stan poses with the builder of a model of his F-105 Wild Weasel Fighter and the River Rat Museum Director.



Stan poses for a photo as he presents an Air Force Cadet with the Air Warrior Courage Foundation educational grant at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

in hot pursuit. After rapidly losing altitude, the nose gunner would abruptly pull up, and the missile, unable to maneuver as deftly as the plane, would crash into the ground.

From there, the Weasels would return to their flight position, try to identify missile installations to take out and await the next missile attack. The incredibly risky assignments meant that the Weasels would sustain heavy losses.

In fact, when the first Weasels learned exactly what their role would be, one of them blurted out, "You gotta be shitting me!" That phrase would become the Weasels' motto, with the acronym YGBSM still adorning the insignia patches sewn onto their shirts and uniforms.

Goldstein said knowing that Revak and the squadron were depending on him to perform kept his fear in check.

"You wanted them to shoot at you so they wouldn't shoot at anyone else," he said. "I looked at it as a very binary event: You're either going to get home or you're not. My big concern wasn't being shot down and dying but becoming a POW. To me, those were the true heroes of the war – the guys who were captured and tortured all those years.

"Your job wasn't necessarily to survive but to make sure the other guys survived and got back to the bar."

Mission No. 100

Goldstein and Revak had just completed their 99th mission when President Lyndon B. Johnson announced that all air, naval and artillery bombardment of North Vietnam would cease, an apparent nudge toward the negotiating table.

The flying team eventually notched their 100th mission on Nov. 25, 1968, during a failed attempt to rescue the crew of a downed reconnaissance flight, who fell captive to the North Vietnamese. The mission left Goldstein and Revak with mixed emotions about reaching their lofty milestone, but when their plane touched down, it was time for the whole squadron to celebrate.

Hoses from a firetruck doused the crew, and a bottle of champagne kicked off a big party that lasted hours, Goldstein said, adding that he still proudly wears the shirt featuring his patch for surviving 100 missions.

"Everyone coveted a 100-mission patch," he said.

After Vietnam, Goldstein became an electronic warfare instructor and helped to train Israeli aircrews. He also participated in the Yom

Kippur War in 1973 by collecting and sending back captured Egyptian surface-to-air missiles. He eventually retired from the Air Force as a lieutenant colonel in 1983.

Goldstein then marketed signals-collection receivers and other aviation black boxes to the Department of Defense and private-sector companies before retiring for good in 1994.

These days, Goldstein enjoys playing golf near Village on the Green and serving on the Residents Council, but he's just as likely to be found off campus. He's served on the boards of the Red River Valley Pilots Association, the Society of Wild Weasels and the Air Warrior Courage Foundation, a charity serving active-duty members of the military, veterans and their families. Each of those organizations has honored Goldstein for contributing to its mission.

Goldstein attends local and regional meetings of those organizations and enjoys sharing his wartime experiences with veterans and young people. The aircraft he flew in with Revak, named the Crown 7, still holds a place in military history as well. A painting of the aircraft entitled "Big Brass Ones," by Keith Ferris, is part of a permanent exhibit at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in Dayton, Ohio.

A large digital representation of that painting also is being featured at the River Rats Museum at Aviation Heritage Park in Bowling Green, Ky., which just opened in October. The museum features a permanent exhibit dedicated to the Wild Weasels, with model replicas of the Crown 7 available in addition to the life-sized digital copy of the painting.

Goldstein said he's grateful for the recognition, but he's happiest when he's solving problems for others, especially through the Air Warrior Courage Foundation.

"My great pleasure is being involved in trying to help people and trying to make things better tomorrow than they were today," he said.

And if residents at Village on the Green ever want to hear some white-knuckle war stories, Goldstein has plenty to share. Given the perilous nature of his Air Force service, it's remarkable that he's still around to tell them.

"God takes care of fools and drunks, and that's why I'm here," Goldstein said with a laugh, quoting an old saying among fighter pilots.