

DAD, I'M STANDING WHERE YOU DIED!

SANTIAGO PEAK, CA
MAY 8, 2009



My Father was killed in a plane crash in the Santa Ana Mountains at the onset of the Korean War in 1950. All my life, the event has been somewhat of a mystery to me, even after I'd talked with his Marine buddies and received crash site photos from the site, taken by the rescue team. Three other young pilots perished with him that day. I was almost four when my Father died; today I'm 62.

So the bizarre coincidence of a conversation I had with a perfect stranger at a recent funeral in St. Louis left me open-mouthed. When asked a question about my late parents, I mentioned the California plane crash. This stranger kept asking questions about the event and stated, "I think I just read about that!"

"But that was almost 60 years ago! How could you have just read about it?" He was a pilot and was certain he had seen it in some publication and would get back to me.

This lead me to an incredible man--Pat Macha--first through his web site. When I accessed the site and found my father's picture on the home page, I was astounded. The accompanying report was more detailed than any of our family had ever received about that fatal day.

I was even more incredulous that wreckage of that plane still existed atop Santiago Peak just East of El Toro Marine Base, where we lived briefly in NAMAR housing before my Father's death.

I told my wife, Aileen, "Well, you *know* I have to go there now." And she replied, "I knew you were going to say that...and *I'm* going with you!"

To my amazement, Pat Macha told me he'd get us up there. When I asked what it would cost to get this done and what official requests I had to make, he replied "nothing". He arranged everything. And he invited us to stay with him at his home with his lovely wife, Mary Jane.

What I thought was going to be a one-jeep ride up to the summit turned into an entourage of incredible volunteers filling three SUV's, and including relatives of another pilot from that crew.

You're reading this because, obviously, you're one of those incredible folks. None of you had met us before that morning.

LAGUNA BEACH
August 1950



BILL & BERNICE GRUBBS
Honeymoon, 1943

Here was Pat, giving an entire two days to total strangers because of his passion for these quests back in history.

Debra Clarke, (you have plenty of other things to do on a Friday, I'm sure. After all, that's a *big* forest!) also gave us your time and guidance. And incredible patience!

Retired Ranger Tom Maloney was a thoughtful, educational guide to the summit and provided great information on the flora and fauna and crash debris along the way. Let me repeat, **RETIRED** Ranger, and yet you took personal time to be there for us, and it's greatly appreciated. As much, I appreciated the rope on the way down!

Dave Schurhammer, who I knew was in construction from the moment I shook his hand (because his name is Schur-HAMMER and he looks like every concrete craftsman I've ever met) took a day off work to make the trek. Your historical information and debris retrieval work was incredible, Dave.

Likewise for Pat's son-in-law Pete Armes, who also missed a day from his business and turned off his cell phone so he wouldn't be bothered. You led the way for us to the very top, Pete. Thank you.

And finally, writer/photographer Chris Epting accompanied us to record the event, and was totally respectful and insightful with his questions. Thank for that sensitivity, Chris.

And each of you who went to the top carefully gathered various cockpit artifacts and what Tom called 'hands on' items—those things which the four men would have strapped to their persons that morning—and laid them at our feet like they were sacred relics.

They are. To us, they are.

The most astounding item was that Dave found one pilot's brass military pants buckle. There's only a 25% chance of whose it was, but...you never know!

Here's what you gave to me, my friends. Closure is not quite the word, because I've known it was over since I was a young lad:

But I got a lot of answers, first from the website, then from research I did in preparation for the trip to Santiago Peak. I also finally got timelines and chronology in perspective for the first time in my life, because info came so piecemeal and varied throughout the last 55 years or so that I never chronicled them.

The one fact that absolutely brought me to my knees, however, was the cross painted in tribute by some nameless ground crew member or pilot who made that arduous trek back up the mountain to mark the crash site with paint. We all know what an effort that was! We've been to the mountain.

And, yet, the fact that the Cross was never part of the lore I received from my Mom, other Marine Pilots, the Marine who gave me the crash pictures or other family was puzzling. We lived within sight of the crash site on El Toro, yet no one had ever passed that touching information along. I just couldn't understand that, because we got so much post-mortem correspondence.

And then it hit me. Whoever did that may have never told anyone. He/they just *did it*. After all, these were WWII vets who had seen much more death in the air. So it just sat there on that natural granite obelisk for so many years unseen by anyone.

Then, in 1965, along came an astounding young college kid named G. Pat Macha...

**NOT EVERY PILOT HAS A
HEADSTONE CREATED BY
GOD MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO!**



So now, thanks to you, I finally know as much about that fateful day as I possibly can. My sister Billie, who was 5 months old on that afternoon, never knew her father. To her, he is a non entity. A picture on the walls of her childhood. And she's loving this information, all new to her!

But to me, he was *always* alive in my memory. Whether it was a blessing or a curse, I remember so much of him, particularly in the time at El Toro. Watching planes land with him kneeling beside me ("Look, Ronnie, these next two don't have propellers!"), seeing him kiss my Mom as he returned from a day of flying (I tried on his leather flying jacket, thinking, "Will I ever be that big?". When I found it years later in an attic, it was too small for me!). A day at Laguna Beach.

Because I've always sought out his history throughout my life, I'll take it as a blessing. And then, when I thought nothing new could be unearthed, all of **you** happened!

And because of you, I now have a pictorial, video and mental history of the grand, magnificent theater where his final act was played, which I will share with all the Grubbs family and friends, who—like me—never quite knew.

He would be proud of all of you for what you did for us...and him. We certainly are!

Thanks, and God bless you all!



1st Lt. W. M. "Bill" Grubbs, USMC
9/10/20—11/18/50

*Don & Arlene
Grubbs*