



Alleman Catholic High School
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www.allemanhighschool.org

He loved to fly

Remembering '63's Lt. John Golz, shot down over Vietnam in 1970

Eddie Golz remembers that April day from second grade all too well.

He was home sick, spending the day across from what is now Jordan Catholic School at home with his mom and younger sister Maureen.

He remembers seeing the black cars pull up and watching his mother. "When she saw the cars, she knew there were problems," he said. "We knew my mom was upset."

The news the U.S. Navy team relayed to his mother that day was that her oldest child, Lt. Junior Class, John B. Golz, had been shot down in Laos, and had not been found. It is believed he was shot down April 21, 1970 in Laos. But his death is listed as April 22, 1970 in the U.S.

John was the oldest of eight Golz children, all Alleman graduates. He would have turned 25 that July. He was not only a 1963 graduate of Alleman, but a 1967 graduate of St. Ambrose College.

The Vietnam War was already unpopular. But John Golz had a goal after graduation from Ambrose. And he enlisted in the U.S. Navy Reserves.

"He loved to fly," Ed Golz, '80, said choosing the exact same phrase used by his sister, Judy (Golz) Schrader '67, in a separate interview. "Loved to fly jets, loved to fly high- performance and fast things.



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“He was always VERY interested in airplanes. He wanted to fly jets. He got all his ducks in a row and did what he needed to do and got it done.”

It should be noted flying A-4 Skyhawks for the U.S. Navy off an aircraft carrier was no easy task. Judy recalls letters home telling of pilots dying in training, crashing into the side of the aircraft carrier.

“At the time, too, the canopies were not known to be always opening if you had to eject, and it threw the pilot right into the canopy,” she said. “It’s why John would never eject.”

His last day, as usual, he flew, as always, solo and was the wing man for his commander in a flight over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The mission was to drop bombs on the trail and delay or stop the supply chain to the North Vietnamese. His commander believed on the first run through, for some reason, the bombs did not release, so they went back in.

“John had always told us, ‘you never go back in ... because then they have you in their sights,” Judy recalled. “The commander had said, ‘we’re going back in.’

“Of course when they went in, John got hit because he was a good wing man,” she said.

It was several days before the Navy let the family know that John was presumed dead because they had not come across anything in their search for him. It set up a somewhat eerie scenario for Judy, who had recently written John about her upcoming marriage plans to her husband, Tim.

“That day I got the letter (back) from him,” she said. He congratulated her in the letter, but also said something she still remembers to this day. “He said something came up and I won’t be able to make it. It was kind of ironic.”

The death was very hard on their parents. “My mom especially,” Ed recalled. “We never got any remains back or anything. For a long time, he was just listed as



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missing in action. To this day, he has a marker at the Arsenal but no remains there.”

“I know I always felt astounded that my mom and dad never got a chance to grieve,” Judy said. Judy’s own wedding took place just a week after John’s memorial. Within just over a year, two other siblings were married, so four were missing from the house, she said.

As both Ed and Judy look back, their memories of their oldest brother are very clear and even bring smiles to their faces.

Words like “outgoing, ornery, determined” describe him, they said. So does the phrase “a loving brother.”

“I thought he was wonderful, but he was a character,” Judy said. “He could drive you crazy as far as teasing you. In his own way, he was shy but very bold at the same time.

“Friends of my mother used to tease her saying she would be serving tea on the White House lawn because John (was so outgoing) he could be President.

“He was that outgoing, that determined to do what he believed in.”

But, had he survived Vietnam, Judy does not see him as a politician. And he had already said no to becoming an astronaut. “Too boring,” she said.

Ed believes he would have been successful, whichever road he chose. He also recalls his oldest brother as “an ornery cuss,” who “always had cool cars.” He would drive back home from Mississippi or Florida from the service and arrive in the middle of the night, Ed said. “He flew into the Quad-City Airport one time.”

He loved all his brothers and sisters, Judy said, and he would even write Ed, just shy of 8 at the time, and Maureen, who was only 5.



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“John loved the little kids, absolutely loved them,” she said. “He wrote home to them. He didn’t talk above their levels. He talked to the person.”

The family is happy veterans today are treated with far more dignity and respect than during John’s time in the service. When a similar scenario to the Golz family happened years later to another local family whose son served in a different war, her mom was pleased at how well it was handled, Judy said, but it also reopened a wound. During the Vietnam War, especially when John was killed, the War had become very unpopular.

Eight days after he died President Nixon announced the invasion of Cambodia. Riots followed at many college campuses and on May 4, four college students were killed during a war protest. Service men were not revered. They were even advised not to wear their uniform on their return trips home. It’s hard to imagine this now, but they were even spit upon back then, let alone not given a ton of honor by their communities. It was a much different time. In some ways, John’s passing got lost in everything else that was going on.

“I wished to God they would have said some nice things about our boy,” Judy recalls her mom saying years later. “She wept without crying.”

Ed still hangs his American flag on Veteran’s Day, even his POW/MIA flag for his brother. But the day he was shot down is 45 years ago now.

Judy is clearly at peace with things. A special moment a few years back has greatly helped. She felt a presence behind her and heard a voice.

“John’s fine,” the voice said. “You can’t see him now, but will see him later.”

“After the shock (of his death) and years have passed, and the realization of how there’s so much more to live beyond what we realized,” she said, “I know he’s absolutely fine.”



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“He’s probably watched over us and taken a few darts that were headed our way. And he’s definitely protected Maureen and Ed.”

John did not smile for some reason during his senior year pictures in 1963, she recalled. It was a picture seen often after his death.

But she believes he is smiling now.

“He’s probably grinning from ear to ear,” she said, “in heaven.”

■ Jim Meenan, Alleman Alumni Relations Coordinator