

The Roster “Rebel Rouser” (Issue 9)

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*1/30/13 Well did you know this about Luke Lowery? '62 *
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Just maybe we can assume that there is some symbolism in the practice field being on the Southern side of Robert E. Lee High School. Facing that hard scrimmage worn field is a single frosted glass window, and today it's propped open. It's the window to the Coach's office and a meeting is about to commence. The familiar sound of wooden chairs moving around on the tile floor and clip boards being pitched on the desk signal that lineup decisions might be on the agenda. From a distance, you can hear men's voices and names of players being mentioned. Moving closer you pick up on a discussion, “how about Lowery, we have backs bigger than him.” A voice comes back, “he's a hard working kid and he picks things up pretty quick.” Another voice speaks up, “a good team player, but the kid is just quiet....never says much.” A final response, “he's a hard worker and a keeper”. The chatter moves on to cuss or discuss another player.

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The players on those old clip boards are a tad more mature these days. And, most now realize that there might have been room to know even more about most kids on those lists. They also know that there may have been more depth to a kid, yet it was not fully apparent at that age. Like many others, there may have been Luke's own individual and personal set of questions. Maybe they were questions and answers that might have foreseen the future. Questions and answers that might have surprised some, and they may have even surprised Luke.
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Was Luke a ‘take charge’ guy? Did he know how to strike a balance between fear and courage? Could he balance that courage and faith? Could he be trained in the skills to react in a blink that could save his life or the lives of his teammates? Could he strike a target when he was a target himself? Could he take calculated risks when the stakes are at

their highest? Could he still humble himself every day to know that harm's way spares no arrogance?

Could he pilot an F-4 Phantom Fighter, capable of carrying 18,000 pounds of armaments, with a top speed of Mach 2.2, into 400 combat missions in Southeast Asia? The answer is yes, and if you ask Luke he 'might' go so far as to nod his humble head.

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That undersized, scrappy, and hardworking kid of few words went on to serve two combat tours in Southeast Asia.....one in Thailand and one in South Vietnam. In the U.S. Air Force, he flew missions over North Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. He was no longer a kid on the clip board.

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How did this story take flight? Well, after graduation from LEE, Luke headed up to San Marcos to Southwest Texas State. The Air Force ROTC let him take the Officer/Pilot Aptitude Test as an incoming freshman. He passed the test and had a couple of years before he had to commit. He set that decision aside and pondered his future. Those two years passed in a flash and the war in Vietnam heated up. He got serious about graduation from SWT and committed to the Air Force. Upon graduation, he was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant and he headed to Reese AFB, Lubbock, for pilot training. The challenge to become a fighter pilot is the challenge to become part of a pretty elite team. He had learned on that practice field at LEE, "with effort, I could succeed at something."

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After his tours in Southeast Asia, Luke was stationed in Phoenix, Arizona as an F-4 Instructor. This assignment was meant to be, in that he met his wife, Carol, from Midland, Texas (MHS '64), while stationed there. They teamed up and went to California, and together they attended the Defense Language Institute. No, Luke was not stepping into some international espionage, but instead was on his way to Germany. His new assignment was as an Exchange Pilot with the German Air Force. His expertise was needed to work with German F-4 pilots. He and his wife lived in a small German farming village where they were the only

Americans. Everything was in German, including navigating thru the health care system and having their first son.

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His next assignment was in Alabama as a Liaison Officer with the U.S. Army at Ft. Rucker, The Army Aviation Center. We can assume he had to learn to speak "Alabameese", since his second son is born while there. Luke multitasks while there and earns his Masters Degree from Troy State.

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This 'pilot pilgrimage' continues and he returns to Phoenix as Instructor Pilot flying F-15's. He rose to second-in command, Operations Officer of an F-15 Squadron. It's in Phoenix, when he makes a "Dad Decision". He set his military career path aside, so Christopher and Patrick could get into a good school district for the long haul thru high school. He accepted a position at Bergstrom AFB, Austin, to finish up his 20 year career and retired in 1987 as a Lt Colonel. And those boys went to being an Airline Pilot and a Geologist. Not too bad!!

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That same year he became a pilot for Southwest Airlines and in 4 years he made Captain. Yep, "ladies and gentleman, our Captain today is Luke Lowery from San Antonio LEE." Being an airline pilot was never in his sights, but he found it to be a dream job, "like being the best squadron for 16 years." Not too bad again!!

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He retired from flying in 2004. You can find him enjoying life in Austin.

. *ONE OF OURS, LUKE LOWERY, "COOL HAND" IN THE COCKPIT*