



*315<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Alumni Association  
315<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Excellence over the Years  
Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina*

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***Happy New Year 2021***

The New Year is once upon us again. Fireworks have been purchased, party favors are in place to make all the noise, a bottle of fine wine will be on Ice, and the fireplace will be lit for some warm and fuzzy atmosphere. Most of you that I've been talking with recently will play it safe and social distance at home with family and friends. We will remember it's the thought that counts.

During this wonderful holiday season, we always enjoy looking back on the past. There will be many old songs playing that we remember from our younger years. There will be old news reels, old automobiles and aircraft will be on display, and all the Hollywood stars that have passed on before us will be there. The list will be endless and it will bring back many enjoyable memories of our past.

## Looking back at one of our own, Lt Col (ret) Derek L. Duke

Derek certainly has a colorful past in the 943<sup>rd</sup> Group and the 315<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing. Derek's son Lee Duke had this to say about his father on Veteran's Day 2012:

My Dad, like many of yours, served our country. Derek Duke flew in Vietnam, Panama, Desert Shield and Desert Storm 1 and 2, retiring as a Lt Colonel with over 250 combat missions in Vietnam. He was awarded the distinguished flying cross, air medal, and countless others. He and his best friend Bob Stephens were the only two that survived the war from their USAF flight class. Those of who know men and women that have served know the price that has been paid. Thank you dad and thank you to every other US veteran. Rest in peace General Stephens.

The archives indicate that Derek was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt in the 300<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 943<sup>rd</sup> Group in 1969. Colonel Charles Willis was the commander and not related to our current 315<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Commander Colonel Adam B. Willis. I believe Derek was flying for the airlines at the time. I'm a close personal friend of Derek and his lovely wife Pat. They live in Statesboro GA where Derek is on the city council. My sister Jane and Al live twenty minutes away in Rocky Ford. My family has considered going down there on January 30<sup>th</sup> to celebrate my 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. Derek and Pat may be coming over if they are available as they have been there to visit us previously.

Derek's best friend Bob Stephens was squadron commander of one of the flying squadrons. If my memory serves me correctly I believe it was the 701<sup>st</sup> Squadron. Later Bob became our 315<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Commander and eventually Bob became commander of the US Central Command at MacDill AFB in Tampa Florida and served there during 9/11. Bob was promoted to Major General and passed away far too soon. We had a memorial service in one the hangers and some retirees were in uniform. There was a very low and slow C-17 flyover.

Many of our Airmen have flown west for that last time and the guard will be covered. Those of us who remain continue to celebrate holidays and festive gatherings like we are doing right now. Life is no longer plentiful like it was when we were young and we no longer have any to waste.

I had hernia surgery yesterday and will be in a state of recovery for the next several days and not permitted to drive I will take my place on the couch in front of the gas burning logs in the fireplace. I will tune in the celebrations at Times square and get all warm and fuzzy in my PJ's. Everyone I've been talking with so far will be doing the same. It's a safe way to celebrate.

Enjoy and we'll be talking in 2021.

*Del Oxford, Communications*

[ddoxford@aol.com](mailto:ddoxford@aol.com) [delox1936@gmail.com](mailto:delox1936@gmail.com)









