

August 31, 2007

Edward S. Modica

Col. Edward S. Modica, U.S. Air Force retired: BUFF-1 flew his last mission on Aug. 29, 2007. A veteran of three wars, he was a devoted father, great comrade-in-arms and friend who was loved by all. The colonel was born on May 17, 1924, in North Bergen, N.J., the fourth son of Santa and Mary Gallagher Modica. He graduated from North Bergen High School in 1941, and enlisted in the Army Air Corps as an Aviation Cadet in February 1942. He completed P-40 training in mid-1943 and saw action in North Africa later that year before returning to the United States to teach P-40 transition training in Tallahassee, Fla. Ed returned to combat in the Far East Theater of Operation in March 1944. Before shipping overseas, he married his childhood sweetheart Margaret "Midge" Nees, his beloved soul mate for the next 44 years.

Ed transitioned to the P-51 and also qualified in the B-25 during his initial missions with the 1st Air Commando Group and became operational with the 3rd Air Commando Group in May 1944. He participated in the battles of the Philippines, Formosa, and Okinawa by the end of World War II. After the war, Ed served as a staff officer for the Army of Occupation in Japan. He returned to the United States in the fall of 1946 and was assigned to Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Miss., flying P-51s and C-47 aircraft. In June 1950, he was sent back to Okinawa, Japan, and began combat operations flying P-51 Mustangs in defense of the Pusan Perimeter in Korea.

He returned home to an assignment at Maxwell AFB in May 1952, and then was assigned to Lowery AFB, Denver, Colo., as initial cadre to the new U.S. Air Force Academy. After seeing the first

class graduate in 1959, Ed and family departed for the 81st Fighter Wing, Bentwaters, United Kingdom. He was chief of supply under Wing Commander Col. Robin Olds and Director of Operations Col. Chappy James. He returned to the U.S. in June 1964 to Eglin AFB, where he served as Chief of Supply for the Air Armament Center. In November 1968, he began transition training to his favorite aircraft the H-3C "Jolly Green" Air Rescue and Recovery helicopter and transitioned to the HH-53C "Super Jolly" before going overseas. He deployed to Ubon, Thailand, in 1970 as Commander, 40th Air Rescue and Recovery Squadron. After an assignment to Military Airlift Command, Scott AFB from 1971 to '73, he became an air attaché to Australia until 1975. His last assignment was to McGuire AFB, N.J., where he retired in May 1976.

During 34 years of military services to the United States, Ed was awarded the Legion of Merit (1OLC), the Distinguished Flying Cross (1OLC), Bronze Star Medal with V Device (1OLC), the Meritorious Service Medal (2OLC), numerous Air Medals, and campaign ribbons and awards. He was a life member of the Air Force Association, original member of the World War II Air Commando Association, Daedalians, Quite Bird Men, and first elected president of the Jolly Green Giant Association.

Ed and family returned to Fort Walton Beach in 1976. In 1987, Midge passed away and one year later he met and married a truly great lady, Judy Godin of Montgomery, Ala. For the next six years, they cut a rug across the southeast United States. Judy passed away in 1994. Afterwards, Ed became a permanent resident of Destin, Fla.

He is survived by five of his six sons and one daughter including Ed Jr. and his wife Joyce of Mary Esther, Fla., Robert and wife Susan of Pascagoula, Miss., Elizabeth and husband David Hensley

of Acworth, Ga., Mark of Gulf Breeze, Fla., Stephen of Atlanta, and Matthew of Fort Walton Beach, Fla.; his stepson, Jack Godin of Montgomery, Ala.; as well as seven grandchildren.

A visitation is planned at Emerald Coast Funeral Home, 113 Racetrack Road N.E. from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday.

A funeral Mass will be celebrated at Corpus Christi Catholic Church, 307 Beach Road, Destin, Fla., on Saturday, Sept. 1, at 11 a.m., followed by a graveside service with military honors in Destin Memorial Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that you make a contribution to the American Cancer Society and Covenant Hospice of Destin.