

David Tsukamoto  
4/10/22

Lt Col. Wilfred Tsukamoto

Wilfred Tsukamoto was born on April 9, 1945 in Pepeekeo, Hawaii. He grew up there, going to Hilo High School as well as earning his Eagle Scout rank. All his friends decided to join the army and so he also wanted to join. His counselor called him into his office and encouraged him to go to college first as he was very smart. After high school, he chose to go to the University of Washington where he studied aeronautical engineering and was a part of the college's ROTC program. While in college, he also met his wife, Faye Hashimoto, whom he married and had 3 kids with, Wendy (1968), Brandon (1969), and Sheri (1980).

After college he decided that he wanted to work in the Air Force to fly planes. So he joined the Air Force in 1967 as a 2nd Lieutenant, an officer rank due to his time in the ROTC program in college. Unfortunately, due to his poor eyesight, they didn't let him become a pilot. Instead, he worked as an engineer to upgrade post-World War 2 aircrafts to make them more compatible with Vietnam counterinsurgency warfare.

Then in April 1972, he was given a temporary duty assignment in Vietnam, in exchange for the ability to choose his next assignment. In Vietnam, he served as an in-country engineer for

the Air Force Logistics Command (AFLC) Rapid Area Maintenance (RAM) Team. As an in-country engineer, he would assess battle-damaged aircrafts and report his observations to the

AFLC. While there, he was based in the Tan Son Nhut Air Base which was fairly secure aside

from the occasional rocket attacks. He traveled to multiple air bases throughout Vietnam and Thailand to inspect aircrafts.

After returning to the US, Wilfred decided to get his masters in Systems Management at the Air Force Institute of Technology, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. Wilfred, his wife and 2 kids moved from Sacramento, California to Dayton, Ohio, where they stayed for the next 6 years. Once he had earned his degree, he started working at the F-15 project office at Wright-Patterson

AFB. After living in Ohio, he moved to his next assignment which was at the Los Angeles Air Force Base where he served as a system engineer. There he worked with the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program which provided world-wide weather coverage for all defense organizations. Once his work there finished, he started to work under the Air Force Inspector General. His job was to resolve acquisition management issues from Air Force programs throughout the Air Force, so he got to travel a lot with his team of about 6 people. He would also frequently travel to Washington D.C. to report directly to the Air Force Inspector General. He worked this position for 2 years and then he was assigned to the Secretary of the Air Force Special Projects (SAFSP) at the Los Angeles Air Force Base. He worked there for 6 more years until he finally decided to retire from the Air Force in 1989.

Even though he decided to retire from the military, he still wanted to work, so he worked at TRW, a company which was later bought out by Northrop Grumman. He then retired from

Northrop Grumman in 1989.

Throughout the interview, one thing that really struck me was their sacrifice. Wilfred Tsukamoto spent 22 years of his life serving in the Air Force, and most of that time he spent away from his family, working on an Air Force Base. While he had a family, he sacrificed a lot of time in order to serve his country. Wilfred could've just worked a civilian job and made a

stable living without the sacrifice, but he chose to serve in the military. The great sacrifice that all veterans have to make is clear, it is the time and energy that they must sacrifice that makes them so deserving of our respect. They sacrifice the option of a normal life, to live the life of a soldier where they can come back different people than they once were. They fight battles so that

we never have to, so that we never have to see the realities of war. The amount of respect that veterans deserve is immeasurable and nowadays it's lacking as people are unaware that our freedom came from their sacrifice.

Not only did Wilfred have to sacrifice, but his wife, Faye, also had to sacrifice a lot. For example, when Wilfred was notified to leave for Vietnam on a Thursday, he was leaving the following Monday. This quick, yet monumental shift forced Faye to take Brandon, age 2 and Wendy, age 3, to Hawaii to live with relatives. She had to close up the house in Sacramento by herself, and take her two small children on a plane to Hawaii. This shift happened again, years later in Ohio when Wilfred was transferred to Los Angeles, but he needed her to come to LA, by herself with the two kids. She had to pack up all their things, sell their house, and move to LA with their two kids with all their stuff.

The kids, Brandon and Wendy, also had to sacrifice a stable life. They were constantly on the move. They didn't really have a place to call home. While they had their mother and each other, their dad wasn't home much. A lot of their childhoods were spent in a car traveling across the country to move to some new city in a new state. They lived in California, Hawaii, Alabama, Ohio, and Texas, seemingly never really settling into one place until they were both much older. The whole family had to sacrifice due to his service in the military and that is why veterans as well as their families deserve so much respect, because they all have to sacrifice so much in order to serve our country. Not only did I learn a lot more about my grandfather's life, but I also

learned the importance of respecting our nation's veterans. They've all sacrificed so much so that

we can live normal lives, our respect is something that they have truly earned and deserve.

For me, this interview became a lot more than a scholarship. I had never known much about my Grandpa's or even my dad's childhood, but thanks to the interview I learned so much more. I learned about my grandpa's path throughout the military, and to be completely honest, I didn't even know he served in the Vietnam War, I thought he served during the Korean War. I learned that he spent 22 years of his life in the military and then continued to work for TRW. During the interview, I got to see another side to my grandpa. The typically calm and collected man was describing himself as an ambitious man who wanted to fly planes, but he couldn't, so he became an engineer to work on them. I learned a lot from the interview, not only about veterans, but also about my grandpa and his past.