

THE QUIET WARRIOR

A Navy Hero and Friend

I knew "Red" Shirley, as a friend, A great fighting leader, a special human being with a deep sense of responsibility and a Navy Hero. He was a no nonsense guy, but he could laugh and make you feel good. He reached out to all of us, who were new to this game of War, and prepared us for our challenge. He was a teacher. a leader, a Quiet Warrior, who lead by example. "Follow me," he said, and he ment just that, even as he flew below the rim of an active volcano, to teach us discipline and trust.

I was proud to be his wingman those days and be numbered among his friends. We looked the "tiger in the eye together," this man and I. He brought me home many times and when my plane was torn by shell and fire, he saw me down and safe.

I shall never forget you, "Red" Shirley. I am proud to have served as your wingman and fellow officer, as part of Air Group 27, aboard the CVL Independence and the World's Greatest Navy. It was men like you, that made it so, "old friend".

"Red" and Virginia came to Chicago in 1984 for our first AirGroup reunion and we shared a memorable weekend. He brought me a complete record of his days aboard the Independence, which I still read and enjoy. We played golf that day and the head of my driver flew off with a mighty swish, trailing string. It looked like a tumbling bird or a wild rocket. It really broke him up. I later stuck him with a screwy golf ball that wobbled when you putted it and that finished him. We adjourned to the bar for drinks. "At away to go, Hoosier Base."

During the second reunion in 1985 at Pensacola, "Red" and I got together again, as we toured the Lexington and the Naval Museum and relived his adventures with the Princeton and his 12½ victories. It was a moving experience to hear him relate these times, but there was a difference. He was having trouble recalling some of these experiences. I recall one evening, he asked me to walk with him outside the hotel. He took me to his truck and we sat there and talked. He told me about the real estate business and after awhile I noticed he had tears in his eyes, and I felt as if he wanted to tell me something. He seemed to be having trouble recalling facts and when I spoke of our Independence call sign, "Hoosier Base", he corrected me and said, "No"; "Hatchet Base", the Princeton call sign. I didn't correct him, but I could sense a change in him and I hoped for the best.