



Duty, Honor, Country through the Generations

By Genevieve Laucher

Bob Dench and his grandson Jonathan Grizzle share an extra-special connection through the U.S. Military. Bob, a longtime Los Gatos resident, has always had a passion for flying planes, and began working at NACA (the predecessor to NASA) in flight research after graduating college with an engineering degree. He then entered the Navy's aviation training program.

Bob first trained with the Marines, and then became a Naval Aviator and piloted fighter jets. Bob attended flight training in the Pensacola area, then Alabama, and ultimately Texas. Following training, Bob was stationed in Virginia Beach and was typically deployed aboard carriers in the North Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Middle East regions. He loved flying the high performance carrier aircrafts.

Bob, who still flies today, flew his last military flight in 1963, and then pursued a graduate degree followed by entrepreneurial interests. He co-founded several companies, a challenge he embraces, and continues to devote time to today, although nothing could compare to the unique comradeship he cherished within the military. Retirement, according to Bob, is not in his vocabulary.

Although Bob lived in different places while in the military, Los Gatos has always been home. He moved here in 1935 when it was an agricultural area and has seen all the changes through the years. Los Gatos was also home to his sweetheart and wife of 60 years. Both Bob and wife Mickey went to Los Gatos High School, though they didn't meet until later. Today, they enjoy spending time with their three daughters, sons-in-law, six grandsons, and three great-grandsons. All of Bob's grandsons are patriots in their own right. Philosophically, Bob believes that everyone should serve the country one way or another, whether that be through direct service in the military or via another path.

Bob has two grandsons who are fulfilling that belief by choosing career paths similar to that of their grandfather. Colton Vandermade, the younger of the two has just graduated from high school and has been accepted to the Naval Academy in Annapolis. Jonathan, the elder of the two grandsons in the military, trained during college and officially commissioned with the Marine Corps on his graduation day May 2012. One minute Jonathan was wearing his graduation

gown accepting his diploma. Seconds later, the gown came off and he was wearing his formal dress blues taking his oath on stage. From there, he went through a series of training programs. Like his grandfather, he knew he wanted to be a pilot, but Jonathan instead chose to fly helicopters. Also like his grandfather, Jonathan trained at multiple bases – Quantico, Pensacola and North Carolina before joining his fleet squadron in Miramar in 2015. In Miramar, Jonathan's focus has been on aircraft readiness training in preparation for his first deployment across the Pacific scheduled to launch later this summer. In addition, Jonathan and all Marines are trained to react to a variety of situations, including providing humanitarian assistance to environmental disasters.

Jonathan attributes his decision to join the military in part due to an important conversation with his grandfather, regarding future aspirations and lifetime goals. Jonathan knew since childhood, he wanted to join the military and similar to Bob, he wanted to fly. Pilots exist in all branches of the military. Jonathan didn't know which branch of service to choose until he talked to the Marines about their opportunities for helicopter pilots. He was impressed with their leadership and something clicked. From that moment on, he was inspired to join the brotherhood of Marines.

For Bob, it has been a thrill reliving military experiences through Jonathan's eyes. Even though Jonathan flies a different aircraft and has a different mission, there are many similarities. Coincidentally, Jonathan's winging ceremony was hosted in the same chapel in which Bob and his wife were married. But perhaps the memory that bonds these two together more than any other is when Jonathan surprised and honored his grandfather by choosing him to pin Jonathan's newly earned wings on, which earmarked Jonathan with the distinction of advancing to a full-fledged Naval Aviator. The event was a momentous and emotional for the two in addition to all family members present to witness the occasion.

Bob is proud of all of his grandsons and in Jonathan's case, the legacy they share. Reciprocally, Jonathan feels blessed to experience this very special connection with his grandfather. The honor to be involved with something so personally rewarding and important to America is a testimony they have in common.