



Duane I. Beland

August 8, 1947 - February 19, 2023

Chief Master Sergeant Duane I. Beland died February 19, 2023, from complications with Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP). Duane was born August 8, 1947, in Tecumseh, Michigan, to Orin Beland and Mary Elizabeth Freund Beland, graduated high school in Lakewood, Ohio and joined the United States Air Force in 1965.

While serving in the USAF, Duane was assigned to the 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service in Da Nang for twenty-two months. He flew as the Flight Engineer, Hoist operator and Gunner, on Jolly Green Giant Helicopters for more than 300 missions, 60 of which was over North Vietnam and was personally involved in 28 rescues under fire. Duane earned numerous medals and oak leaf clusters, among them were a Silver Star, three Distinguished Flying Crosses (V for Valor), Air Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters, AF Achievement Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters, Vietnam Service Medal with one Bronze Star, RVN Gallantry Cross with Palm with one device, Vietnam Combat Medal, and a Purple Heart. His unit earned two Distinguished Presidential Unit Citations with One Oak Leaf Cluster and an Outstanding Unit Award with Five Oak Leaf Clusters. Duane's many awards and medals were for extraordinary and meritorious achievements while participating in aerial flight and for gallantry in action.

He was a quiet, patient man that rarely talked about the Vietnam War. The family learned of the honors the USAF bestowed upon him in the Bloomington Indiana Herald Times. It was an article by the late Larry Incollingo who wrote,

“...at 5’8”, Sgt. Beland was hardly a giant...but was the possessor of a gigantic record of achievement.”

In 1972, Duane graduated from the Aircraft Maintenance Program at the Northrop Institute of Technology and accepted a position with Norman Rockwell Associates. As a civilian contract mechanic, Duane posted to the Republic of South Vietnam to work on Army helicopters for 12 months, and while he never mentioned the nightly bombings, he did comment that “...the pay was good, but the ice cream was terrible.”

Duane returned to the US and spent two years working for an Alaskan survey company, and while Duane ‘s first love was flying, he soon fell in love with the beauty and extremes of the Alaskan land. He moved to Anchorage, Alaska first joining the Alaska Air National Guard working as Crew Chief on C-130s with the 176th in Kulis. Promoted to Chief Master Sergeant, Duane went on to serve with the 168th Air Refueling Wing at Eielson AFB where he served in the Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Supply Hope Operations.

In 1990, he married the love of his life, Audra Mailander, in North Pole, Ak. They spent a lot of time fishing at Valdez in Prince William Sound and soon ended up buying a boat. One boat led to another bigger boat, until Duane needed to get his Merchant Mariner Credentials. To support their boat habit, they formed the Silly Billy Charters & Tours. Almost every weekend they made the round trip from North Pole to Valdez to take paying customers out for salmon, deep sea fishing and tours. Duane was always busy: while still working full time, he earned a BS and a MS in Aviation Safety. He repaired and rebuilt airplanes – usually because he wanted to trade for another Cessna. While flying was one of his greatest joys, he was also an avid reader and talented writer. Duane has published gripping stories about rescuing downed crews in combat zones and the heartbreaking times a rescue failed. Duane and Audra moved to Sequim, Washington, where he continued to commute to Alaska until retirement in 2012. In 2014, his beloved wife Audra, died unexpectedly. Not long after that, his health began to decline. Duane needed to be near his family and asked his sisters to move him to

Bloomington, Indiana. He was officially diagnosed in June, 2019, with PSP; an ugly and debilitating disease associated with the Herbicide Defoliation of Viet Nam. His primary caretakers were his sisters, Sharon and Barbara, who loved him fiercely and miss him even more. For those who knew and loved him, Duane's death is an irreplaceable loss and the void will always be there. Duane Beland is survived by his sisters, Sharon Ann Beland Smith (Patrick) and Barbara Beland; nieces; Michelle Smith (Tom Walker) and Kelsey Smith; beloved Aunt, Barbara Huff and brother-in-law, Chuck Mailander (Brenda). Also surviving is Audra's daughter, Jordann Haddon (Robert) and grandchildren, Janelle and Robert.

We want to thank both Shannon and the staff at Bell Trace, for going above and beyond their job descriptions with their kindness in caring for Duane during his illness.

The family followed Duane's wishes to be cremated and that there was to be no memorial services.

Allen Funeral Home and Crematory have been entrusted with arrangements. Online condolences, photos and memories may be shared with family and friends at www.allencares.com

Tribute Wall

MJ

“ 3 files added to the album Washington State Early 80s



Mark Jones - January 06, 2024 at 02:36 PM

MJ

“ My condolences to the family. I was checking to see if this is the same Duane Beland that lived in Washington State for a few years and worked at High life helicopters? If so, I have many memories to share. My email address is emptyjones@gmail.com

Mark Jones - December 26, 2023 at 06:35 PM