

“Requiem for a Wild Weasel”

by Dave Parsons

-For Colonel Jerry Hoblit (Ret.)

I found his oil company executive business card pinned to the Conroe YMCA bulletin board, scrawled with a handwritten: I'm looking for a handball game, call. I called and the following week, his appearance at the courts did not surprise, as I mistakenly thought, a typical businessman, not very large or muscular and with a typical all-business half-smile and cool, look-through-you board room handshake,

and so, we played our first game, which became surprisingly challenging and spirited pushing me with unexpected “gets” slowly revealing another presence, the vestige of the inner body of my opponent, a fierce warrior heart emerging as he relentlessly guarded the front wall, precisely re-killing my every attempted kill shot, and though I was the more experienced, more skilled, I was in a real dogfight to become victorious in the game and first match that would begin a long series of four-wall wars, and many, many years of moments of fellowship and brotherhood,

each time peeling back further my first impressions of the man, finding deeper comradery and an uncommon thunder in an enormous heart, mirroring the powerful heart of the F-105 Thunderchiefs he mastered flying while fighting in that labyrinthine “real war” over the Asian jungles, becoming a most highly skilled player, playing the deadly role of a Wild Weasel, that was the moniker he flew under, roaring ahead, leading the many American sorties, putting himself out front of the squadrons, taking on the spears of the hidden enemy silos, inviting their many attempted kill-shots and then with the greatest of tenacious and skillful graceful aplomb, avoiding the lancing shots, then piercing that wall of shrouded jungle, when he dove into the breach of errant air for the resounding re-kill.

Notes: Col. Jerry N. Hoblit (Ret.), a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, flew over 100 Wild Weasel combat missions in Vietnam and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, three Silver Stars, and the Air Force Cross, among many other honors. He lives in Conroe, Texas with his wife Rosalie.

Wild Weasel is a code name given by the U.S. Air Force, to an aircraft, of any type, equipped with radar-seeking missiles and tasked with destroying the radar and Surface-to-Air (SAM) missile installations of enemy air defense systems. The job of a Wild Weasel was arguably the most dangerous mission faced by fighter pilots in the Vietnam War.

David M. Parsons, 2011 Texas State Poet Laureate, co-founder of MCLAC Writers In Performance Series and the Greater Conroe Arts Alliance. He is the recipient of an NEH Dante Fellowship to the SUNY Geneseo, the French-American Legation Poetry Prize, and the Baskerville Publisher's Prize. His first collection of poems, *Editing Sky*, was the winner of the 1999 Texas Review Poetry Prize and a 2000 Violet Crown Book Awards Special Citation. His other books, are *Color of Mourning*, *Feathering Deep*, *Reaching For Longer Water* (Texas Review Press/Texas A&M University Press Consortium), *David M. Parsons New & Selected Poems* (TCU Press), and *Far Out: Poems of the 60's* (Wings Press, Co-edited w/Wendy Barker). He has taught Creative Writing at Lone Star College-Montgomery for over twenty years and in many other venues across the state, including Inprint Inc. Parsons was inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters in 2009. He lives with his wife, Nancy, award winning graphic designer and fine artist in Conroe.