

NWFMOA Member Col. Jake Bush, USAF, Ret., Honored by Auburn University (Article from the Northwest Florida Daily News, November 3, 2019, by Jim Thompson, jthompson@nwfdailynews.com)

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Jake Bush, pictured here in uniform as a Lieutenant, spent more than 30 years in the Air Force, including service in the Berlin Airlift and in Vietnam.



A picture of one of the C-54 aircraft participating in the Berlin Airlift speaks to the volume of food and other goods transported to Berlin during the 15-month crisis.

BLUEWATER BAY — An Alabama farmboy took the field Saturday at Jordan-Hare Stadium as the Auburn Tigers took on the Ole Miss Rebels, but didn't block, tackle or run routes. Which isn't to say that Jake Bush, now less than two weeks short of his 97th birthday, doesn't have any experience in running routes. In fact, he was on the field Saturday at his alma mater to be honored as a Ford Game Day Hero for his work as an Air Force pilot in running one of the biggest routes in history — the Berlin Airlift. The Ford Game Day Hero program is a season-long initiative of Ford and Auburn's athletics department to pay tribute to nominated military personnel and their families.

It's a doubly sweet recognition for Bush, who holds a degree in aeronautical administration from Auburn, where he also taught in the Reserve Officer Training Corps from 1954 to 1958, during his time in the Air Force. "We got a medal for it, the Medal for Humane Action, and that's exactly what it was," Bush said modestly, reflecting recently on his role in the Berlin Airlift as he and his wife, Kathy, also a retired Air Force officer, sat in the living room of their Bluewater Bay home. After World War II, both Germany and its capital city, Berlin, were partitioned among the United States, Soviet Russia, France and England. The Russians, in a bid to gain control of all of Berlin, closed all of the highways, railroads and canals into western-controlled Berlin. Rather than acquiesce, the Americans, English and French decided to supply the people in their sectors of the city by air. They would eventually deliver nearly 2.5 million tons of supplies into West Berlin before the Russians lifted their blockade. "It gave you a little bit of a bump to know that you had participated in that recovery," Bush said.

Bush was on hand for all 15 months of the airlift, which began in June 1948 and ended in September 1949. First flying a C-47 and later, a C-54, Bush and his crews for the most part delivered coal, bagged and stacked in the aircraft, to Royal Air Force Station Gatow. Once, however, Bush flew a load of what was supposed to be aluminum planking for runway construction that, in retrospect, might actually have been a load of much heavier steel planking, which also was used to build runways. Unofficially, Bush said, "it kind of broke the record of what you could carry in the airplane. Like I said, we never verified that one way or the other. But we did have a little trouble flying the airplane."

Bush, who retired from the Air Force as a colonel in 1974, was drafted into World War II in 1943, leaving his job with Seaboard Railroad in Georgia. "I kept insisting I wanted to be in the Army Air Corps, and they, fortunately, let me," Bush recalled. He had grown up on a farm in Alabama's Elmore County, where his family raised cotton and corn — "I can remember if we had two bales of cotton, that was great," he said — and inherited his love of flying from his mother. "My mother loved to fly," he said, "and they came around with this Ford Trimotor, and for \$10 you could go for a ride. ... So I went up with her for that ride, and that started me."

After being drafted and getting assigned to the Army Air Corps — which would become the Air Force a few years later — Bush spent the remainder of the war years in training, first in radio school and then in gunnery school before he was selected for pilot training. He decided to make the military a career as he saw fellow World War II veterans casting about after the war, trying to decide their futures. Bush got orders to Germany in 1948 and as soon as he got off the transport ship in Bremerhaven, he was sent to Wiesbaden Air Base. "And the next day, I made my first trip to Berlin," he said. From Wiesbaden, Bush was sent to Fassberg Air Base and almost missed a chance to continue

being a part of the airlift. "I was kind of a jack of all trades in Fassberg," he said. At one point, he continued, his wing commander "pointed out to me that I was going to do this and that instead of flying the Berlin Airlift. But like anybody else who wanted to get in on the action, I kind of conned him into an 'in-between.' When he needed something to be done, I would be tasked to do it. In the meantime, I flew the Berlin Airlift as much as I could."

Initially a somewhat haphazard operation, the Berlin Airlift soon became a model of organization, Bush said. "The timing of it was really sensational," he said, with aircraft taking off or landing every few minutes. In the crowded skies, pilots were assigned to fly in specific corridors, at specific heights and specific airspeeds, Bush explained. Ground controllers "did great work" in marshaling all the air traffic, Bush said. "They were short flights, fortunately," Bush added. Still, pilots and aircrews worked about 12 hours a day and then got about 12 hours of rest before starting again. We normally made about three trips in that 12 hours," Bush said, "and of course, it was around the clock."

After the Berlin Airlift, Bush was assigned to Munich, where he flew air transport missions and then returned to the United States to fly with Special Air Missions, ferrying high ranking military officials and dignitaries. He got orders to fly the B-26 Invader bomber in Korea, but the war ended before he reported for duty, a circumstance that he said was OK with him. "I was very happy," Bush said. "Those guys were flying at night, among the mountains and everything else. It was dangerous stuff."

But Bush did see action in Vietnam, flying the venerable C-130 transport aircraft before his 1974 retirement. After a brief time in the auto repair franchise business, Bush got into military contracting and he and his wife moved from California to Florida. In September, they attended their first Berlin Airlift Association reunion, where Bush was one of three airlift pilots in attendance as the city of Wichita unveiled a monument to airlift participants. "It was very, very enlightening, learning about what has happened to those people since the Berlin Airlift and how the Berlin Airlift affected their lives," he said. Personally, Bush is philosophical about being one of the few remaining flesh-and-blood connections to the historic airlift. "I wonder sometimes why I'm still around, to tell you the truth," he said, "and I get a little bit amazed at the fact that I am. But yet at the same time, you're happy that you're still here."