



50 years ago...

Only July 26th, 1964, my father, John G. Merriman, lead a flight of three T-28's piloted by Rene Garcia and Jack Varela to attack a column of Simba rebels near Kabalo, Republic of the Congo. Following the strafing run and the destruction of the target my father reported an oil loss and it was determined that he would be unable to return to the base at Kamina and should instead affect an emergency landing at Kabongo. On his approach, the aircraft stalled and crashed, so violently that both Garcia and Varela doubted his chances of survival. Although Jack Varela offered to land and affect a rescue, Rene Garcia felt it hopeless. Since they had apparently lost one pilot, he could not risk another, so the flight reluctantly returned to Kamina.

The next morning a truck arrived at Kamina carrying my father who had been discovered by sympathetic Congolese. He had suffered a broken back, both ankles and shoulder bones but was still miraculously, alive. He remained at Kamina until five days later when he was transported to a Leopoldville hospital. On August 20th he was anonymously put aboard a USAF cargo plane for transport to the United States and somewhere over the Atlantic ocean near Ascension island, he died of a pulmonary embolism.

In April, 1965, my mother accepted his posthumous Intelligence Star medal at the Langley, Virginia headquarter of the Central Intelligence Agency, the citations read: "For his fortitude and courage in an overseas area of extreme hazard. Volunteering for an assignment which he knew was fraught with danger and hardship, Mr. Merriman lost his life as a result of hostile action while engaged in an activity of great concern to the United States. His exemplary conduct served to inspire his associates and maintains the finest traditions of service to our Nation."

A half a century is a long time and I have had the privilege of knowing many heroes some deceased and others still living but I still have difficulty recalling my father as a hero. To me, he was just "Dad".

- Jon Merriman, son of John Merriman

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