

Message on Colonel Robert Cranston

From MSgt Norm Medland, USAF (Ret'd)

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NOTE:

During the 1960's, Colonel Robert Cranston was assigned as Officer in Charge of the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service in Los Angeles, overseeing the operation of AFRTS worldwide. During this period he planned and put into operation the basic concepts for the **American Forces Vietnam Network**, spending considerable time in Vietnam to accomplish this mission. During this period, Cranston was promoted to full Colonel.

Dear AFNers All:

Huddleston, VA 24 Feb (Special) Colonel Robert Cranston was memorialized on Thursday and Friday of this week by hundreds of his family and in the rural Smith Mountain Lake community of Huddleston, Virginia, and the nearby city of Bedford, Virginia. On Thursday evening from 19:00 hours to 21:00 hours, at least 70 people came to view the Colonel, resplendent in his green dress uniform, lying serenely in his casket, flanked by two huge bouquets of red white, and blue flowers, at the Burch - Messier Funeral Home in nearby Bedford, a city with its own historic connection to World War Two.

Dozens of the Colonel's Smith Mountain Lake neighbors, and his family members from around the country talked and viewed an amazing collection of photos and artifacts from his career as one of the Founding Fathers of Military Broadcasting. Among the collection were autographed photographs of General Dwight Eisenhower, Commander of the Allied Forces during World War Two, as well as General Omar Bradley, another leader of the campaign. One of the most unique objects was a four foot long stick weapon with an embossed bronze plate reading from the "Grateful Audience of the AFRTS Station in Asmara, the city in Ethiopia, which, today is in the separate nation of Eritria.

Towering over all was a four foot poster of the Von Bruenning Castle in Hoechst, where for more than five years, Colonel Cranston commanded the American Forces Network, Europe with its three stations in France and seven in then West Germany. There were scrapbooks of his entire career, including many pictures of Colonel Cranston meeting famous people, and German and Austrian officials during the period prior to his AFN command when he ran The Blue Danube Network as a Captain. There were scrap books filled with pictures of the various AFN stations and photos of several Schloss Fests at the Headquarters grounds in Hoechst. There too, was the Netherlands Medal of Merit, and commendations from commanders in Taiwan and an official medal from the Government of South Korea. Standing to the right of the casket was a large framed board with a green cloth backing which held six rows of the Colonels, medals, decorations and Unit insignia, totaling more than 30 individual items.

Many of his neighbors at the Lake knew Colonel Cranston as simply "Bob" their neighbor and friend and one of the most active people in the Bedford County Republican Party. Both he and Sandy had served as Chairmen of the GOP here for several years each.

On Friday afternoon from 15:00 hours to 17:00 hours, an even larger group gathered at the Huddleston Volunteer Fire Department Hall to celebrate his life. Your reporter was asked by Sandy to be the Master of Ceremonies, and a color guard was provided by the Bedford County Junior R.O.T.C. who presented the colors at the front of the hall, while the audience stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance. Colonel Cranston's son-in-law Matt Anderson of Lynchburg, Virginia said the benediction, and the audience sat down to eat a sumptuous meal that had been brought to the Fire Station by the women of the community.

During the meal, Sandy walked among the 20 tables, chatting with virtually everyone in attendance. After lunch, Sandy addressed the group, thanking them again, collectively for coming and honoring Bob. She briefly teared up as she noted this was the same room in which he had celebrated his 90th birthday more than three years before, and noted she hoped they would all stay friends with her now that Bob has gone.

I then took the floor and tried my best, in a 15 minute talk to place Colonel Cranston's life prior to his settling at Smith Mountain Lake in the 1980s into context. I told the group about the scope of The American Forces Network, and the earlier Blue Danube Network in Austria. I explained that I was not only representing myself, as a retired Private in the U.S. Army, and a newscaster at AFN during his command, but I also wanted them to know I was representing all of you, men and women who had served under him and other commanders, and the millions of U.S. military officers and men and their families, who had listened to radio and television broadcasts all over the planet, broadcasts and telecasts, for which Colonel Cranston was responsible.

I told them in some detail about the Castle, and the Main river and the seven German groundskeepers, and the AFN Club, but I also explained how Colonel Cranston when on to command The Armed Forces Radio and Television Service from its headquarters in Los Angeles. And I went on to tell them that as satellite transmissions came into being, he pioneered in sending radio and television to the farthest corners of the Globe where U.S. military units were and are stationed, and to many ships at sea. I explained to them that as I was talking, in Kabul, and Kandahar, and in other parts of Afghanistan, American Forces Afghanistan Network broadcasters were talking to the troops, but with one significant difference from when I served. They are broadcasting in full battle gear, with their locked and loaded M-16s within easy arm's reach because the whole country is considered a war zone.

Now for a personal admission. I had made a promise to take and wear my kilt to these ceremonies, in honor of Bob's Scottish heritage which I share. Both our fathers were born in Scotland and both our mothers were born in London, England. Well I took all the parts that go into wearing the kilt in its formal state, the "Bonnie Prince Charlie" tux, but I forgot the kilt. When I realized that, I felt I was and am the biggest fool who ever wore an Army uniform and spoke a single word on AFN or AFRTS. I was mortified, as many of you can imagine. However as I walked among the guests at both services, wearing my blazer, and shirt and Argyll and Southerland Highland regiment tie, I

slowly came to realize that God had given me a slight elbow in the ribs. That it was probably Divine Intervention that made me forget the kilt. Many of these people are retired military, including many officers, and others are people who have never often left Bedford County, Virginia! . My Scots tux would have seem, at least to some, "over the top" I came to realize. Many of the guests were very casually dressed and so what I ended up wearing was probably more appropriate. So I got over my anger at myself, and all Sandy's family told me it was no big deal. They kindly reminded me more than once that I wore my kilt to the Hospital, and made sure Bob saw the Pfc. stripes he awarded me on his 90th birthday when I also was wearing my kilt. That, they assured me were the most important times to have been wearing it.

On another personal note, Maria Anderson, one of his grandchildren, is a whiz as are all 12 year-olds with her cell phone camera, and so attached to this e-mail are some random shots of the Celebration of His Life on Friday and some of the Funeral Home gathering. They are not edited, so please don't be too critical, but they should give you some feeling of what it was like to be there.

Sandy is doing remarkably well for a woman who has just lost the love of her life, a man she told me gave her back her self-respect, and self-confidence., after a marriage, during which her previous husband did nothing "but run her down." As many of you know, the Cranston's three dogs sense someone is missing. The two outside dogs, Jake the black and brown small German Shepard type, and Mollie, the Golden Lab look a bit forlorn as they sit on the back porch looking out on the lake. Inside, Cinnamon is on her "perch" in the living room, on the sofa back, where a cinnamon-colored towel makes her "roost" comfortable. The cat, "Dancer" hates company and with all the people around, has been hiding out of view my entire visit.

Lastly, but with great feeling, I want you all to know I am writing this e-mail from his computer, in his study, with his reading glasses resting on some of his hand-written notes within arm's reach. My fingers tremble just a wee bit as I strike the keys, because I feel his presence here, perhaps looking over my shoulder to see if this copy is as well written as he thinks it should be.