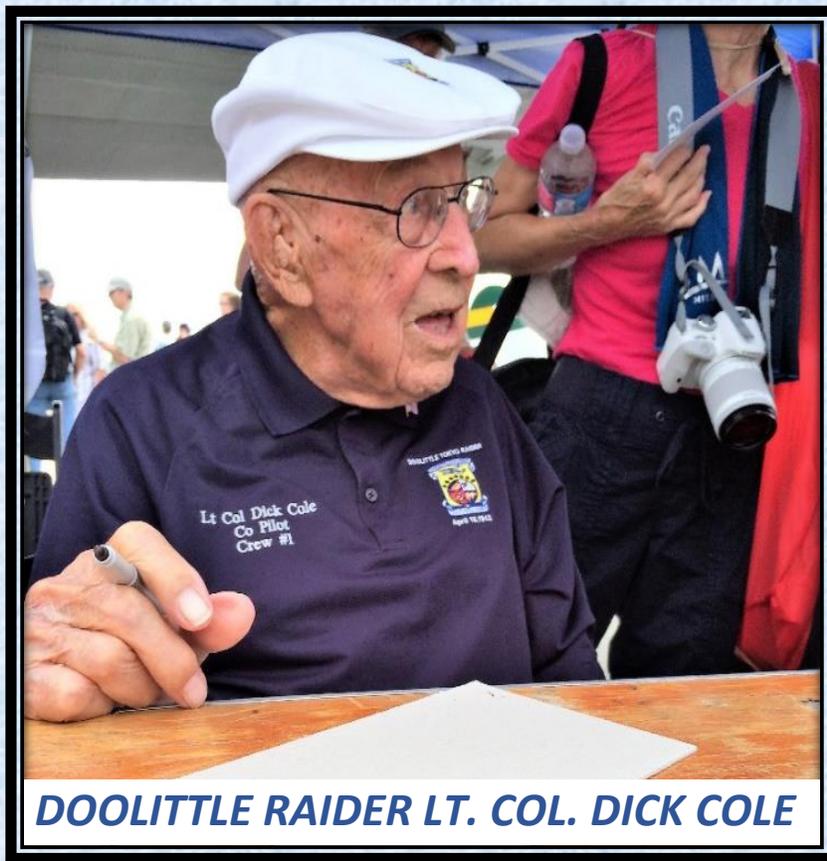


SMOKE FOR BREAKFAST

The annual Atlanta Warbirds Weekend supported by the Dixie Wing's Commemorative Air Force exceeded expectations this year at PDK (DeKalb-Peachtree Airport). Tens of thousands attended the event in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the AVG (American Volunteer Group), better known as the famous Flying Tigers. Their legendary shark-faced nose P-40 Warhawks outgunned and outflew the nimble Japanese Zeroes in occupied China before America entered WWII. The Warbird Weekend agenda was the largest gathering of airworthy P-40s since 1954, and I had the honor of meeting two members of the original Flying Tigers in attendance.



DOOLITTLE RAIDER LT. COL. DICK COLE

Another legend in attendance was Lt. Col. Richard 'Dick' Cole. Speaking with this gentleman was talking to history. On April 18, 1942, 16 heavy B-25 medium bombers took off from the aircraft carrier USS Hornet to bomb Japan, thus giving America a much needed boost

in morale. The Army pilot who planned and led the mission, Col. Jimmy Doolittle, was piloting the first B-25 to launch. His copilot was Richard 'Dick' Cole. Of the 80 men known as The Doolittle Raiders, Lt. Col. Richard 'Dick' Cole is the only living survivor at 101 years of age.

Incredible stories at Warbird Weekend strolled the tarmac, touched the metal of planes they once flew into combat, and patiently signed books as long lines of admirers and historians bid for attention. And among a plethora of vendors and visitors and veterans, sat Capt. Brian Settles in the shade of a tent hawking his book, ***"Smoke for Breakfast, a Vietnam Combat Pilot's Story."*** As a mixed-race child, Settles was given away to an orphanage when he was 7 days old. As a young man, he

piloted the F-4 Phantom jet fighter in an unpopular war. And this is his story.



6 MONTH OLD BRIAN SETTLES

Just seven days old, only one week in this old world for the little boy before being given away to the Lincoln Nebraska State Orphanage. He would remain in the orphanage for almost 3 years until a couple from Muncie, Indiana heard about a mixed-race child up for adoption in Nebraska.

Settles related his early childhood: “My parents got on a train and came out to Nebraska to adopt me then took me back to Muncie. I struggled with feelings of inadequacy, of not being good enough, because of the abandonment then the adoption. My mother was wonderful. She was a librarian which is a good thing since I developed a love for books and reading. Children today don’t have a love for reading, and that’s a sad commentary on our society.”

His mother was the catalyst, talking her son into attending Ball State University after an athletic scholarship to Colorado fell through. The choice of Ball State channeled his future in aviation: Joining the drill team by enrolling in the Air Force ROTC program, attending the ROTC flight instructor’s agenda, and

after graduation in August '66 entering the pilot undergraduate training program.

Settles' still remembers his dreams of pro sports: "I figured the winning formula for success and acceptance would be basketball and football, but back to back knee injuries shattered my hoop and gridiron dreams. I keep telling people that I traded my basketball and football uniforms for a fighter pilot's G-suit."



A PILOT'S PILOT SORT OF THING

On his decision to pilot fighters: "I am repeating myself, but I kept feeling that I simply wasn't good enough and that I had to that I was. So I chose to fly the Phantom, feeling I really had the fighter pilot's spirit within me, but part of that spirit also reminded me I had to prove my worth, that I was good enough, bad enough, and courageous

enough for anything the macho guys could do since fighter pilots are the pilot's pilot sort of thing."

Pausing a moment, Settles clarified, "Let me explain that, fighter jocks don't look down on other pilots, it's just part of the image. I flew 199 missions in Vietnam. I loved flying the F-4 Phantom. I

was one of the last back seat pilots before they transitioned to all back seat navigators at the end of my tour. I thought right out of pilot's training a copilot's job was great, you gained aviation experience, flew wingtip to wingtip formations, and experienced air to air refueling. Landings are a little tough from the backseat, but I loved it, but I didn't love the war enough to volunteer to go back to have a front seat assignment."

On his Vietnam service: "I was stationed at Da Nang in I Corps with the 366th Tac Fighter Wing from August of 1968 until the completion of 199 combat missions. We were known as 'The Gunfighters', but President Johnson had shut down North



SETTLE'S POSING WITH AN F-4 PHANTOM

Vietnam to bombing which blocked our chances for air to air combat. We did escort recon planes over the North, but could only fire when fired upon. Other than that, most missions were air to ground bombing and strafing in South Vietnam."

Asked if he recalled a special mission, Settles

replied, "Piloting the F-4 was a special mission. We sat on alert

duty with a Phantom cocked and ready to go at a moment's notice. When 7th Air Force called to notify us that Marines, Army, or ARVN (Vietnamese Army) were in peril of being overrun we'd be airborne immediately. Those were special missions for us."

Troops were appreciative. "When I was a Special Duty Officer, marines would wander into the squadron and ask to meet with Phantom pilots. Those young marines said they wouldn't be alive today had it not been for the F-4s that made a particular strike. That was a very meaningful experience for us, knowing that what we did as Phantom pilots helped those boys come back home."

His scariest missions? "Search and rescue missions, always. When we had downed pilots and crewmembers that needed to be extracted and rescued as soon as possible, well, things could get a little hairy.

Those search and rescue exercises were most likely the only time that the general rules of operating your aircraft could be suspended. Just

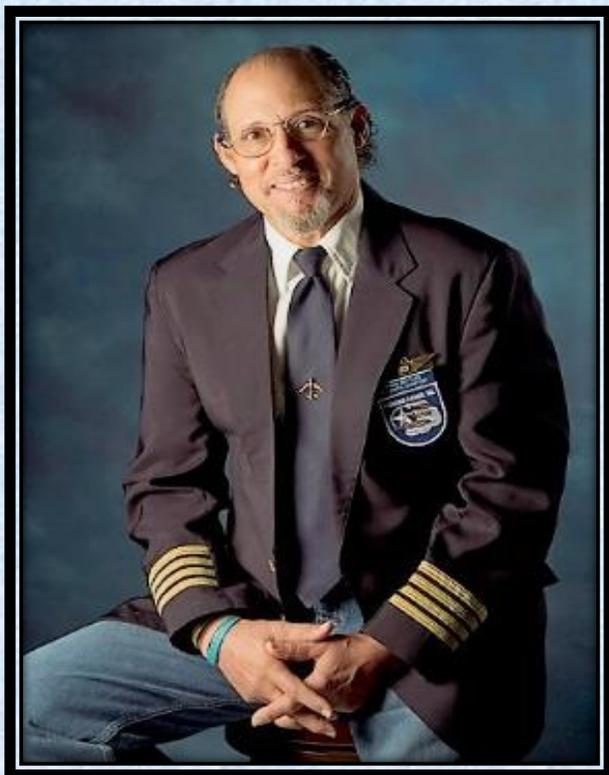


A "GUNFIGHTER" ON A STRAFING RUN

about anything was in order to rescue those guys. We could get down in the weeds to assist downed airmen, to suppress the 'bad guy' activity; we were allowed to do what needed to be

done. Usually we had to follow the rules of engagement, but with a search and rescue, well, it was 'Katie bar the door' stuff."

Settles completed 199 combat missions. "After Nam I flew the KC-135 tankers. I was offered an Air Force Academy appointment but turned it down for employment with Eastern Airlines as a commercial airline pilot. I flew with Eastern for 15 years until they were engulfed in strikes and shut downs and bankruptcy. On a lark, I took a job driving a taxi for what I thought would be about six months. Well, that turned out to be a thirty month nightmare, driving 300 miles a day in Atlanta traffic, six days a week for less than a third of what I was making as a commercial airline pilot. I was a single parent trying to keep two teenage sons off the streets, you do what you have to do."



Settles was finally reemployed in commercial aviation and retired at 60 years of age as required by the then old-fashioned rules on pilot retirement. Among several successes, including earning a Master's Degree in International Relations from the University of Southern California, Settles served as the Chair and Assistant Professor of Airway Science at Delaware State, is an active member of Kappa Alpha Psi and

the Airline Pilots Association, Retired Airline Pilots Association and Organization of Black Airline Pilots. He enjoys writing, fishing, his church affiliation and seeking God's purpose in his life, and teasing his grandchildren.

Captain Brian Settles grew up as a mixed-race child in an era of inequity and seclusion, not to mention personal isolation along with feelings of inadequacy. He defeated the social and personal obstacles, became a Top Gun, earned a Master's Degree, and in doing so has given new meaning to the shabby categorization as 'mixed race' - to recognize 'mixed race' as the best of both races and cultures. We are all God's children.

