

NAVAL AVIATION CENTENNIAL CLOSING CEREMONY

by Michelle Rouch

WASHINGTON DC, - For the 100th anniversary of Naval Aviation, the 100th Anniversary of Naval Aviation Foundation, <http://navalaviation100.org/>, celebrated across the United States a yearlong tribute to the men and women for their historical achievements in the US Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard services. The Centennial of Naval Aviation Commemorative Gala commenced the closing ceremony at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., Thursday, Dec. 1, 2011. Tom Costello, NBC News correspondent served as the evening's Master of Ceremonies.



Centennial of Naval Aviation Commemorative Gala,
National Building Museum

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Guests of honor attending the black-tie gala were the Honorable Leon Panetta, United States Secretary of Defense; members of the House and Senate; his Royal Highness, the Duke of York, Prince Andrew; the Honorable Ray Mabus, United States Secretary of Navy; foreign military guests from Italy, Japan, and Korea; Admiral James Winnefeld, USN, Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Admiral Jonathan Greenert, USN, Chief of Naval Operations; Admiral Robert Papp, Commandant of the Coast Guard; General Joseph Dunford, USMC, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps; Vice Admiral John Currier, USCG, Deputy Commandant for Mission Support; Captain Chris Ferguson, USN, Commander, NASA final Space Shuttle Flight as well as presenting sponsors, Boeing, Dennis Muilenburg, President & CEO, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Breitling, Raytheon, Rolls-Royce and many others for their support. Dignitaries convened in the VIP Reception, exhibiting a collection of Naval Aviation artwork by artist Michelle Rouch.



From left to right: James DiMatteo (Capt. USN), USMC Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., USN Adm. Jonathan Greenert Chief of Naval Operations, USN Adm. James A. Winnefeld Jr. Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Thomas Hudner (Capt. USN Ret.), Ray Mabus Secretary of the Navy, Leon E. Panetta Secretary of Defense, Tom Costello, USCG Adm. Robert J. Papp Jr., Dennis Muilenburg, Ms. Katie Everhart

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Captain Jim DiMatteo, USN, Foundation President welcomed honored guests and shared VADM Kilcline, USN (retired) vision how the Naval Aviation Centennial should be celebrated. Thomas J. Kilcline, Jr. wanted the celebration to be more than a few golf tournaments and black-tie affairs. Captain Jim DiMatteo expressed, "He wanted it to be a celebration for the entire nation throughout the United States in multiple locations impacting as many people as possible."

Message of Courage, Commitment, Loyalty, Vision and Honor was the evening's theme: Courage, "the ability to fight though fear for an honorable purpose;" Commitment, "the vow to continue the mission even when the cost is high;" Loyalty, "the dedication to protect another person despite great personal risk;" and Vision, "The ability to create the future."

Arizona Senator John McCain, Naval Aviator, shared his long line history of his fathers and grandfathers, both admirals in the United States Navy. Senator McCain, who subsequently endured nearly 6 years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam, offered words of wisdom to raise more leaders who are willing to take risks, versus training more managers who avoid risk.



Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta speaks with Prince Andrew, the Duke of York

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Defense Secretary Leon Panetta acknowledged, “Tonight we celebrate a magnificent history of American Naval Aviation. It is a history perhaps no finer chapter than [Senator] John [McCain] pointed out the Pacific campaign of World War II. It was a time for bold defensive action, for daring in the face of grave risks, and for the kind of innovation that matters most. It was in other words, a mission for Naval Aviators.”

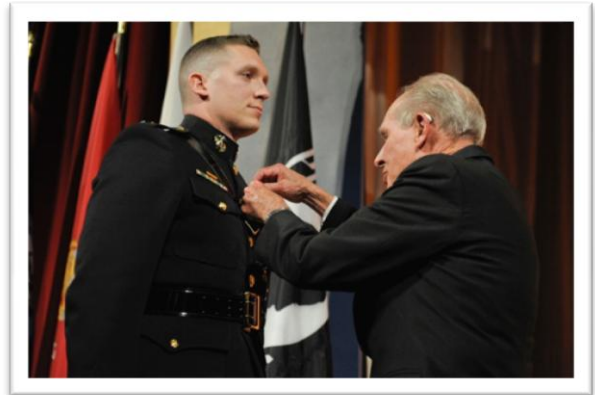
Captain Thomas Hudner, USN (retired), who is the only living Naval Aviator, received a standing ovation in recognition of his Medal of Honor for his heroic act in trying to save the life of his wingman during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War. The Medal of Honor is the highest level of military decoration, bestowed by the President.

The Bridges of Toko-Ri clip, a 1954 film that was based off of a novel, setting during the Korean War about a naval aviator that was assigned to bomb a group of heavily defended bridges.

Captain Chris Ferguson reflected on his thoughts to the audience of Naval Aviation, Astronaut “Jim Lovell, a lasting legend of courage with zero margin of error.”

Admiral James Winnefeld recognized “the true secrets to our success, of course it’s our people...it’s the crews, the maintainers at all levels, ships company to keep the aircrafts airborne and who love them so much, like a son or a daughter, it’s our industry partners, many who have helped sponsored this evening, and whom we are very grateful, continue to drive innovation and push the edge of what’s possible so we can best defend our country. And of course the air crews, the men and women you heard about throughout the evening, giants in the world of Naval Aviation on whose shoulders we now stand.”

Later, Admiral James Winnefeld introduced Captain Brian E. Luther, commanding officer, and 2 crew members with a live stream video feed from the USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) during their transiting home.



Capt Thomas Hudner, USN (Ret), Medal of Honor Recipient Wings the Newest Naval Aviator

*Credits: Photographer Leigh Vogel
Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/hellmuthpr/page2/>*

Winging Ceremony was awarded to Rebekah Cranor, USN, Jeremy Weber, USMC, John Sauve, USCG, Bradford Brodersen, USN, and Justin Ito, USMC.



Centennial of Naval Aviation Series at the VIP Reception Artist, Michelle Rouch

To complete the evening’s event, legendary country music artist Lee Greenwood performed a series of patriotic songs and ended the ceremony appropriately with “God Bless the U.S.A.”

