



## Mike Connaughton

March 15, 1937 - January 16, 2022

Mike Connaughton died in the company of family at the VA Hospital in Tampa in the early hours of Sunday, January 16, 2022. He was 84.

John Michael Connaughton (“Mike”) was born on March 15, 1937, in Minster, Ohio, to John Robert and Vivian Mae Connaughton (m. Vanderhorst).

Always a hard worker, as a young boy, Mike delivered newspapers, riding his bike all over Minster in the mornings before school. He later helped his father with his hauling business and, during his college years, he bussed tables at a sorority house and the student union cafeteria. Upon meeting his fiancé Ellen for the first time, Mike’s mother told her that said she always knew Mike would become a pilot. As a child, his most cherished toy was an airplane.

Mike graduated from Minster High School and then attended the Ohio State University for three years, eventually earning his bachelor’s in aviation management from Troy State. He entered the Aviation Cadet Program of the U.S. Air Force in 1959, and was commissioned a 2d Lt and awarded his pilot wings at Reese AFB, Texas, on November 30, 1960. (Full assignment history included below.)

Mike was presented with the Silver Star by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird for the his role in the Son Tay Raid, a clandestine mission to rescue American Prisoners of War in North Vietnam on November 21, 1970. Of his career in the military, Mike said, “I always promised myself the day it felt like work, I’d quit.” Mike’s forced mandatory retirement took place on December 1, 1988. He then flew for Southern Air for nearly nine years, making runs for the United Nations, UNICEF, and various Pentagon and government contracts, delivering assistance around the world.

A quiet, gentle leader with a boisterous laugh and a generous spirit, Mike was modest about his accomplishments and he dedicated himself to his many communities. He was a member of the Minster Knights of Columbus for over 61 years, the American Legion, and

St. Paul's Catholic Community. He served on the board of his neighborhood, where every Tuesday morning golfers knew if they saw Mike's name in their foursome they were guaranteed a day full of practical jokes, camaraderie, and "gimmies."

He had a strategic mind, honed from years spent developing Special Operations, and he delighted in finding the challenge in everything, whether tracking the best price on gas around town, finally getting tickets to the Masters, wrangling his family's place in line to ensure the front seat of the roller coaster, rebuilding his TR6, or surprising his wife with spontaneous gifts. He was a devoted father who made it his mission to thrill his children beyond their wildest hopes every Christmas morning and provide steadfast advice over the years, giving reminders about oil changes, nudging about retirement savings, and emphasizing the importance of building some fun into the monthly budget.

Mike loved traveling the world. He never missed a running of the Indianapolis 500. His greatest pleasures in life were flying and golfing every chance he got, attending every reunion that came along, dancing with his wife to Johnny Mathis, and spending time with his many good friends. He worked hard and he played hard. He loved life and he believed in enjoying every minute of it. He is survived by his loving wife, Margaret "Ellen," his devoted daughter, Lisa, son, John, younger sister, Marcia Boerger, nieces, Cathy, Sue, Jeannie, and nephews, Patrick, John Robert, Tim, Nick, and Mike.

A viewing is planned for Sunday, Jan. 23, from 5 to 7 pm, at Page - Theus Funeral Home. A funeral mass will take place at St. Paul's Catholic Church on Monday, Jan 24, at 11:30 am, followed by Committal Service and Military Funeral Honors at Florida National Cemetery ("Bushnell") at 1:30 pm, and reception at 4:30 pm at the Manor at the Plantation at Leesburg.

His Silver Star Citation reads:

Captain John M. Connaughton distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing enemy force during the Prisoner of War search and rescue operation at Son Tay, North Vietnam, on 21 November 1970. On that date, Captain Connaughton participated as Pilot in a combat flight which led the force into Son Tay. Captain Connaughton, through exceptionally precise navigation, overcame adverse weather and extremely active enemy air defenses and insured accurate arrival time over the target which was extremely critical to the success of the mission. Captain Connaughton's unusual ability to quickly adapt to the situation allowed him to supervise the critical drop procedures which materially contributed to the surprise element. By his exceptional gallantry and extreme devotion to duty, Captain Connaughton has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

Full military detail:

Lt Connaughton remained at Reese AFB, serving with the 3500th Pilot Training Squadron until January 1961. After complete B-52 Stratofortress Combat Crew Training, he served as a B-52 pilot with the 524th Bomb Squadron at Wurtsmith AFB, Michigan, from April 1961 to February 1966, and then served as a C-130 Hercules pilot with the 18th Troop Carrier Squadron and then the 40th Tactical Airlift Squadron at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, from February 1966 to August 1967. His next assignment was as an MC-130E Combat Talon I pilot with Detachment 1 (later redesignated the 15th Air Commando Squadron) of the 314th Tactical Airlift Wing at Nha Trang AB, South Vietnam, from August 1967 to September 1968, followed by service as an MC-130E pilot with Detachment 2 of the 1st Special Operations Wing at Pope AFB, North Carolina, from September 1968 to October 1971.

Maj Connaughton served as an MC-130E instructor pilot and flight examiner with the 318th and the 8th Special Operations Squadron at Pope AFB and at Hurlburt Field, Florida, from October 1971 to March 1976. Maj Connaughton served as Chief of Unconventional Warfare Plans Branch at Air Force South Division of NATO Forces, Southern Europe, in Naples, Italy, from April 1976 to April 1979. Lt Col Connaughton served as Chief of the Unconventional Warfare Plans Branch with Headquarters U.S. Readiness Command at MacDill AFB, Florida, from April 1979 to March 1982, and as Chief of the Special Operations Division with Detachment 3 of 23rd Air Force at Osan AB, South Korea, from March 1983 to March 1984. His final assignment was Commander of Base Operations, Small Arms, and Training at MacDill AFB.

For anyone who is unable to attend the services at the funeral home, you may watch a live stream of the services by following the link below:

<http://webcast.funeralvue.com/events/viewer/67424/hash:6A91F535352FE62C>

# Cemetery

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# Events

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**Florida National Cemetery**  
6502 S.W. 102nd Avenue  
Bushnell, FL, 33513

**JAN 23**    **Viewing**    05:00PM - 07:00PM

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Page - Theus Funeral Home and Cremation Services  
914 West Main Street, Leesburg, FL, US, 34748

**JAN 24**    **Funeral Mass**    11:30AM

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St Paul's Catholic Church  
1330 Sunshine Ave, Leesburg, FL, US, 34748

**JAN 24**    **Graveside Service**    01:30PM

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Florida National Cemetery  
6502 S.W. 102nd Avenue, Bushnell, FL, US, 33513

# Comments

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“ An external video has been added.



**Page-Theus Funeral Home and Cremation Services** - January 27 at 08:32 AM

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“ Bill And Maryann lit a candle in memory of Mike Connaughton



**Bill and Maryann** - January 23 at 08:06 PM

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“ Mike was one of my closest high school friends. We spent many times together enjoying our school days and beyond. Mike obviously was devoted husband and father and his resume about his military and flying experiences makes me feel proud that he was a very special person and will be sorely missed. Duane Bachman

**Duane Bachman** - January 21 at 07:21 PM

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“ Charlie and JoAnne purchased the Red, White & Blue Large Sympathy Vase Arrangement for the family of Mike Connaughton.



**Charlie and JoAnne** - January 20 at 02:48 PM

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“ Shades of Purple was purchased for the family of Mike Connaughton.



January 19 at 10:39 AM