

‘Cobra One’

Reporting as ordered Sir!



On Wednesday the 8th of December a special ceremony took place on the 4800 ward of the Loma Linda University Children’s Hospital. The United States Marine Corps welcomed it’s newest and youngest F-18 pilot, eleven-year-old Edward “Eddie” Villa Jr., better known to his aerial ace buddies as “Cobra One”. For as long as he could remember, Eddie Jr. has wanted to be a jet pilot. His dreams of navigating a mighty military jet through the earth’s atmosphere and engaging the enemy in a “dog fight” were his life’s passion and

he would settle for nothing less.

Then came the shattering news, Eddie was diagnosed with a cancer of the stomach (adenosarcoma) and his dreams of soaring with the eagles would have to be put on hold. Social worker Delores Conejo, of Loma Linda Children’s Hospital, called the Debbie Chisholm Memorial Foundation and told us about Eddies’- dream and wondered if we might be able to help. I immediately called Marine Corps Air Station Miramar and spoke with First Lieutenant DeWey, of Public Affairs, and requested their help on this wish. Next, I called Flight Suits Limited, in El Cajon, and ordered an actual pilot’s flight suit and helmet complete with Eddies’ call sign “Cobra One”. The wish was set!

On the 8th of December, at 1200 hours, a beautiful white stretch limousine arrived at Loma Linda carrying Captain Ed Rush and First Lieutenant J.A. Hanley (BATS Squadron) along with Captains T.W. Richter and P.M. Burger (VICKINGS Squadron), actual Marine Corps Fighter Pilots. Also accompanying the pilots on this joyous occasion were Riverside County Sheriff Larry Smith, RSA President Pat McNamara, San Bernardino Sheriff’s Safety Employees Association Executive Director Dee Feldmeir, Sergeant Jim Hansen (USMC PAO) and Laura Eliassen of the Word Mill Public Relations.

As the entourage entered Eddies’ hospital room we witnessed a very sick little man put on his best game face and he lit up like the forth of July when he saw the pilots in their flight gear. Eddie was officially inducted into the pilot corps with a hand signed proclamation from MCAS Miramar commanding General, Major General William G. Bowdon and he was presented with his “gold” flight wings, flight suit, aviator helmet and a signed enlarged photograph of an F-18 jet. Eddie was commended for his courage by Sheriff Smith and RSA President Pat McNamara presented him with an official RSA hat.

The 18th of December was a bright beautiful day with clear blue skies tailor made for flying. With clearance from the heavenly tower, “Cobra One” was given the green light for his final

flight and he aimed his imaginary F-18 skyward to join formation with heavens angels. The following Monday Eddie's dad called and told me that when those pilots entered his son's room wearing their flight gear, it was the first time in a long time he saw his boy smile. After we had left Eddie's room, Eddie lay in his bed staring at the large photograph of the F-18 Hornet and no doubt imagined himself at the controls. In addition, this little man who barely had the strength to talk decided to put on his helmet so he could get a pilots eye view of the F-18 before him. To Eddie's parents Mr. Edward Villa Sr. and Mrs. Maria Campos we of the Debbie Chisholm Memorial Foundation thank you for letting us be a part of your sons life and sharing in his dream. To Eddie "Cobra One" we say, keep your F-18 on standby alert for the rest of us to one day join you for some flying lessons!

Corky Bell