



## A Career in Flight

An Interview with Kenneth Ramage  
By Michael Zucker

Always a proud Arizonan, Ken Ramage enlisted in the Air National Guard on May 12, 1976 at age 19. At that time, he was a student at Arizona State University. Through the Air National Guard, he obtained his pilot's license. Ken had always wanted to be a pilot, and joined American Airlines as a commercial airline pilot when he left the military in 2006. In the thirty years Ken was in the military, he travelled the world with his "Guard Family."

In 1976, Ken completed his officer training in Tennessee and his pilot's training in Texas. He then went to water-survival training in Florida and land-survival training in Washington, where he spent time hiking and learning survival techniques. Ken next went to Prisoner of War training, where he learned what to do if he were ever captured by the enemy. He was trained how to resist interrogations, and was taken to the forest and told to burn his uniform. Ken knew that burning his uniform could be video recorded and used as anti-American propaganda. He refused. His officers punished him by putting him in a cramped cell for twenty-four hours. Ken slept through the entire imprisonment. When the instructors came to his cell and asked if he were ready to burn his uniform, he refused again, asking if he could return to sleep.

Ken's first trip as a pilot was to Hawaii, but then he quickly left for Germany. He spent ten days in Frankfurt refueling F-4 planes. He was then sent to Korea and the Philippines. Ken's trip to the Philippines was one of the most memorable experiences in his career. Soon after his unit left the islands, a volcano erupted, making Ken's group one of the last to visit. They went to Turkey and refueled reconnaissance planes over the Mediterranean Sea. They stayed in a Five-Star hotel and had a wonderful time. Food and souvenirs were exceptionally cheap, and would remain so until the Gulf War.

In the late 1980s, Ken's unit went to Panama during elections. Outbreaks of violence on the street were common. While the pilots were getting ready for dinner, Ken turned on the television. He watched a small skirmish in the news. A gunshot on the news sounded as if it were close by. "That was realistic!" Ken exclaimed as he turned to his friend. "This television has good sound!" As Ken studied the screen, he realized *his* hotel was in the background of the skirmish. He and his friends quickly left the building. He managed to escape a precarious situation only to be sent to a more dangerous location.

In 1990, Ken's unit was on a tour of the Pacific when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Iraq's economy was weak, and Saddam Hussein wanted to seize Kuwait's oil fields for trade. The oil would also fuel his military so he could resume his war with Iran. The United Nations was shocked by Iraq's aggression against innocent Kuwait, and the US led a coalition to liberate the country. The United Nations' plan was to gain aerial superiority and destroy Iraq's army from the air. Ken's unit was deployed to Germany. There, they refueled planes on their way to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Ken's unit was in Saudi Arabia when Desert Shield began. His unit was critical in fueling the planes that destroyed Iraq's capabilities to fight. Within six months, the coalition had defeated Iraq, and the war was over. Ken was awarded the Kuwait-Liberation Medal and the Saudi-Liberation Medal for his role in the war. He was also awarded Air Craft Commander of the Year in his unit.

Ken received many medals during his career. Pilots in the Air National Guard receive an award every fourteen missions. By the time his thirty-year-long career was over, Ken's uniform was covered with medals. Ken rose through the ranks, and in the mid-1990s, Ken's unit continued to travel the world. He even had time to run with the bulls in the Azores. Then, a crisis arose in the Balkans.

The Yugoslav Wars were Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II. Mass murder, rape, and other war crimes shocked the world. In the late 1990s, NATO intervened and established a No-Fly Zone over Yugoslavia. Because of the Rules of Engagement, NATO planes were forced to circle and identify the targets as hostile before attacking. Ken's unit was to provide fuel for these aircraft.

An American pilot flying his F-16 over the Adriatic recognized that he did not have enough fuel to return to base. Ken and his copilot took off from Italy. They flew into the "No-Fly Zone" and within forty minutes they reached the distressed plane. They refueled the F-16 in the air, saving the pilot from crashing into the ocean. Ken received an Air Medal for his actions. By 1999, the struggle in the Balkans had ended, and Yugoslavia was successfully partitioned.

In the aftermath of Al Qaeda's attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan. Fearing Saddam Hussein was trying to acquire nuclear weapons, the US invaded Iraq two years later. Now a colonel, Ken was too high-ranking to fly into combat. He took on an administrative role before retiring from the military in 2006, as the Commander of his Guard unit. At his retirement ceremony on September 11, 2006, he swore his oldest son, Chris, into the Air National Guard.

Ken Ramage is now a pilot for American Airlines. He lives with his two sons, Chris and Mat, in Phoenix, Arizona. Both of his sons are now in the Air National Guard, and they enjoy hobbies like hunting and shooting together. In the thirty years he was in the military, Ken travelled the world and served his country proudly. He forged friendships with the men and women he served with over the years, and has now passed the torch to his sons.

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*Michael Zucker is a senior at Chaparral High School in Scottsdale. He took on the Advisor role at Chaparral when he could not find a teacher free to sponsor him and a group of students who wanted to interview veterans. Michael also successfully edited all essays submitted for the book and spread the word about the club to help it grow this year. He wrote a short novel based on his grandfather's World War II experience.*

**Kenneth C. Ramage**, born 6 September 1956 in Winterhaven, Florida, enlisted in the Arizona National Guard because he wanted to become a commercial pilot. He became a pilot for the Guard and travelled the world with his Guard Family. He went to Hawaii, Germany, Turkey, and many other places. His unit was the last to visit the Philippines before a volcanic eruption temporarily suspended American placements. During the Gulf War, his unit refueled planes on their way to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. That year, he was awarded Aircraft Commander of the Year in his Unit. During the Yugoslav Wars, Ken and a copilot refueled a plane that was in danger of crashing into the Adriatic Sea. He retired from the military in 2006 after swearing his oldest son into the Air National Guard. Ken is now a pilot for American Airlines and enjoys hunting and shooting with his sons.