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20th SOS mourns loss of past commander

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1st SOW Public Affairs

11/2/2007 - **HURLBURT FIELD, Fla.** -- Family, friends and members of the 20th Special Operations Squadron gathered at Beal Memorial Cemetery in Fort Walton Beach, Oct. 22, for the burial of former 20th SOS Commander, retired Col. William Tackas.

The weather seemed appropriate for the occasion as many gathered under umbrellas to watch the Hurlburt Field Honor Guard fold the American flag over the casket. The flag was then given to Col. Brad Webb, 1st Special Operations Wing commander, who then with words of comfort handed the flag to Colonel Tackas' son.

Members of the 20th SOS stood in formation during the ceremony to honor their squadron's first commander. The honor guard performed the 21-gun salute.

"Colonel "T" was a larger-than-life personality that influenced every PAVE LOW warrior from 1980 to the present," Colonel Webb said, "While he will be sorely missed by all Air Commandos, his legacy will be pervasive far into the future and throughout Air Force Special Operations Command."

Colonel Tackas held command of the 20th SOS from 1980 - 1982. He was an expert in helicopter requirements and special operations aircraft. He had a total of 7,780 flying hours, 6,180 of which was in a helicopter. Colonel Tackas traveled extensively throughout Europe and the pacific at bases worldwide. He completed 30 years of service in the Air Force, and retired, July 1, 1988.

"He sparked what we're able to do now; be the best elite helicopter squadron in the Air Force," said Capt. Keith Snook, a pilot with the 20th SOS. "He will always be remembered as the beginning."

Colonel Tackas was born on Sep. 13, 1936. He passed away Oct. 16. He is survived by his five children; William Jr., Sally Jo, Craig, Douglas and Karen. He was buried in his flight suit and the famous red scarf worn only by members of the PAVE LOW community.



Members of the Hurlburt Field Honor Guard carry retired Col. William Tackas' casket to the graveside ceremony at Beal Memorial Cemetery in Fort Walton Beach Oct. 22. Colonel Tackas was the first commander of the 20th Special Operations Squadron. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Ali Flisek)