

A Sopwith Moment

Squadron Salutes Snoopy Patch's Creator



The original Snoopy Patch was created by Joseph Congleton Jr., above, in 1967. Forty years later, the patch continues to inspire the Sandy Springs Cadet Squadron. Congleton stands by his OH-23 helicopter during Warrant Officer Rotary Wing Aviation candidate training. He went on to use his aviation skills to serve his country in Vietnam. In a firefight on the ground, he sustained injuries that severely disabled him for life.

By Kimberly L. Wright

More than just a mere ornament on cloth, the Snoopy patch has been an integral part of the Georgia Wing's Sandy Springs Cadet Squadron's infrastructure for four decades.

Recently, the squadron celebrated the patch's 40th anniversary by paying tribute to the man who created it — former cadet and Vietnam War veteran Joseph Congleton Jr.

More than Fabric

The patch knits together the

squadron's past, present and future. The squadron's newsletter is called "The Sopwith Camel," the name of Snoopy's imaginary aircraft he used to battle the Red Baron and the actual name of an aircraft the British flew during World War I. The patch is also prominently featured on the squadron's Web site at gawg.cap.gov/GA045 and, of course, on the cadets' uniforms. In fact, the squadron is often referred to as "the Snoopy squadron."

Cadet Commander 2nd Lt. Kyle

Strait said the patch is a wonderful symbol for the unit.

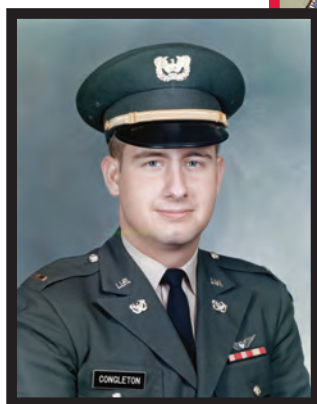
"It's one of the most unique patches in the Georgia Wing," said Strait. "It's very special to us."

Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Brian Berry noted, "The patch repre-

Lt. Col. Brian H. Berry, commander of the Sandy Springs Cadet Squadron, left, joins Joseph Congleton Jr., former cadet commander, holding a copy of the Snoopy patch, alongside Cadet 2nd Lt. Kyle J. Strait, current cadet commander. Inset, U.S. Army Warrant Officer 1 Joseph E. Congleton Jr. is shown in his uniform in this 1969 photo.



Photo by Maj. Michael A. Reed, Georgia Wing



sents the continuity of a squadron that has done some great things in the past and plans to do wonderful things in the future. It shows a determined Snoopy facing a difficult foe, taking a few hits on his doghouse and yet, with either a grin or a grimace on his face, working through his problems and facing his challenges.”

Birth of the Patch

In 1967, Congleton, then the

squadron’s cadet commander, was a young man with a bright future

ahead of him. “Joe was a very good cadet, very motivated,” said Harry Topliss, who succeeded him as cadet commander.

He and his good friends Topliss and Phil Braden decided the squadron should have a unique patch. Congleton created a sketch

showing Snoopy perched on the top of his doghouse in the guise of a World War I flying ace.

The Snoopy cartoons were very popular at the time. “The Flyin’ 45th” referred to the squadron’s charter number.

“We looked at each other and said, ‘Well, let’s see if we can get this approved,’” said Topliss.

Correspondence seeking approval to use the patch generated a personal letter from “Peanuts” creator Charles M. Schulz, who responded he was “flattered [they] should wish to do so.”

The determined Snoopy atop the doghouse has been the squadron’s emblem ever since.

“In hindsight, it’s a wonderful fluke of history, and I’m very, very proud to have had any association with it,” said Topliss.

The Ultimate Sacrifice

After graduating from Sandy Springs High School in 1968, Congleton received a nomination to the U.S. Air Force Academy. When flat feet kept him out of the academy, he enrolled at Georgia Tech to

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— Lt. Col. Brian Berry
Sandy Springs Cadet Squadron commander

Charles Schulz gave the Sandy Springs Cadet Squadron permission to use Snoopy in its patch in this 1967 letter to squadron member Harry Topliss.

pursue a degree in aerospace engineering.

He soon decided college life was not for him, so he joined the U.S. Army to become a helicopter pilot, advancing quickly through the training regimen. After graduating sixth out of 148 students in the advanced Rotary Wing Aviator Course, he was given the stick of the Army's newest weapon, the AH-1G Huey Cobra. Before long, the Army sent him to Vietnam.

While on a mission supporting special forces near the Cambodian border, Congleton was severely wounded when his detachment, part of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), was caught on the ground in an intense firefight. His war wounds left him with severe disabilities, including a diminished capacity to communicate and limited use of one arm.

Past Meets Present

The squadron recently honored Congleton during a celebration of the patch's 40th anniversary. The occasion included a presentation of a proclamation from the city of

Sandy Springs honoring the unit for its longevity.

"It was more than just a celebration of a patch, a symbol. It became an opportunity to honor Joe Congleton for his service," said Berry.

Nancy Wilson, Congleton's sister,

said the honor meant a lot.

"He was very excited about being honored for creating the Snoopy patch," she said. "I know he is thrilled they are still using the patch today. Not many things you do in life still have an impact and meaning 40 years later." ▲

