

Sam Johnson Chapter Hosts National Defense Briefing Series Featuring Historic Bosnia Rescue

DALLAS, Texas — Nearly 31 years to the day after one of the most remarkable combat search and rescue operations in modern military history, the Air & Space Forces Association's Sam Johnson Chapter 232 joined four partner organizations in presenting a National Defense Briefing Series (NDBS) program featuring the men directly involved in the rescue of then-Capt. Scott O'Grady.

The June 7 event brought together O'Grady, retired Air Force Capt. T.O. Hanford and retired Marine Corps Capt. Jim "Lefty" Wright to share their firsthand experiences from the June 1995 rescue operation in Bosnia during NATO's Operation Deny Flight.

The National Defense Briefing Series is a collaborative effort jointly sponsored by five Dallas-area military and veteran's organizations: AFA's Sam Johnson Chapter 232, the Navy League, the Association of the U.S. Army, the Military Order of the World Wars and the Jewish War Veterans.

The quarterly, nonpartisan program educates citizens on national security issues, encourages informed discussion with subject matter experts and supports veteran and first responder charities.

O'Grady recounted the events of June 2, 1995, when his F-16 Fighting Falcon, call sign "Basher 52," assigned to the 555th Fighter Squadron at Aviano Air Base, Italy, was shot down by a Serbian surface-to-air missile over Bosnia. For six days, he survived behind enemy lines while evading hostile forces and awaiting rescue.

Hanford, then assigned to the 510th Fighter Squadron at Aviano Air Base and flying as "Basher 11," described the critical moment on June 8 when he detected O'Grady's faint radio transmissions while nearing fuel limits and under pressure to return to base. His decision to continue searching helped initiate the rescue effort.

Adding a unique perspective, Wright, a CH-53E Sea Stallion pilot with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit embarked aboard USS Kearsarge in the Adriatic Sea, detailed the execution of the high-risk rescue mission that successfully recovered O'Grady from hostile territory.

The program, moderated by former 31st Fighter Wing Commander Lt Gen (Ret) John Campbell, marked a rare joint appearance by O'Grady and Hanford. While both have shared their experiences individually over the years, opportunities to hear the synchronized perspectives of the survivor on the ground and the pilot who helped locate him are uncommon. The addition of Wright's account provided attendees with a comprehensive view of the operation from air, ground and rescue force perspectives.

The presentation highlighted the courage, professionalism and teamwork demonstrated by Air Force and Marine Corps personnel during one of the most celebrated personnel recovery missions of the post-Cold War era.

The National Defense Briefing Series continues to provide North Texas audiences with direct access to military leaders, veterans and subject matter experts while strengthening public understanding of issues affecting national defense and security.