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News Release

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We invite any media interested in interviewing our VA staff to learn more about care and services to contact our Public Affairs Officer at 989-497-2500, extension 13010 or e-mail tara.scheuer@va.gov

90-Year-Old Army Veteran's Final Bucket List Item Surprise

Gerald Mahl, U.S. Army Veteran, was granted his wish to mark off the final item on his bucket list from his daughter, Deborah Muirhead, Administrative Assistant at the Saginaw VA Healthcare System in Michigan. Until about two years ago, Deborah's aging father lived alone and worried about his safety. She knew he was lonely and suggested he move closer to her. Without hesitation, Gerald agreed and moved into an assisted living facility where he absolutely loves it. Not only is he closer to his daughter, but he is also closer to the VA where he receives all the medical care he earned. Now he shares all of his military and life stories with other residents and staff, which is an additional bonus, and also appears happier.

Go back in time to 1953, Gerald, at the age of 20, volunteered for the draft. Part of his ambition was to help save someone else who may have had a family avoid the draft during the Korean War. Interestingly, his brother joined the Marine Corps at the same time and they happened to discover both were stationed near South Korea. The brothers would keep in touch by communicating on field phones and were just lucky enough to be approved for R & R leave so they could spend time together. Gerald served as an Aircraft Electrician and transported supplies, on a two-engine supply plane, back and forth to the southern part of Korea. "My dad always had a passion for aviation," stated Deborah. "When he returned home from Korea, he set out to get his commercial pilot license, eventually flying 301 planes. He always loved telling his stories of his time in the service."

Deborah shared that her dad would often reminisce about his aviation days and shared with her his last wish, but never gave any thought to it actually coming true. She remembered his last wish, which was how he would love to go up in an airplane one more time before anything happened to him. It inspired her to make several phone calls and coordinate his upcoming 90th birthday surprise, his final bucket list item. The day had finally come as Gerald and the family set out to the airport. As they neared, they made him close his eyes. Once they arrived, Deborah asked her dad if he knew where they were? He confirmed he knew they were at the airport. The next moment was

priceless, when she asked her father if he remembered what he said to her about the one thing he wanted to do before anything happened to him? He was completely surprised and with a huge smile on his face he said, “Yeah, go flying. Are we going up in the air today or something?” The pilot was truly wonderful and let Gerald take control of the plane. They flew over his old house on 16 acres, where he lived for nearly 52 years. Gerald was on cloud nine, as you can tell by the smile on his face, making this a most memorable day for the family. To be able to gift their father the ability to cross off that one final item on his bucket list was most heartwarming and a treasured experience for all.



Gerald is very proud to have served this country and also that he had the opportunity to live out his dream being a commercial pilot. He treasures the days he served and the experiences life has brought his way. Gerald Mahl, proud father, proud Veteran and proud American – bucket list accomplished.

The Aleda E. Lutz VAMC in Saginaw, Michigan operates an 81-bed skilled nursing and rehabilitation Community Living Center. It provides care to over 40,126 Veterans in a 35-county geographic area, from mid-Michigan to the Mackinac Bridge. Veterans can also receive care at one of our nine VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics located throughout Michigan. More information about this VA can be found at <https://www.va.gov/saginaw-health-care/>.

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