



Charles Littleton "Tod" Fridge

August 26, 1940 - September 16, 2024

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Captain Charles "Tod" Littleton Fridge, named and nicknamed for his paternal grandfather, finished his remarkable race and went to be at the hand of God on Monday, September 16. His beloved wife of 57 years, Lana Sue (Reichle) Fridge, was by his side.

Born to Carleta Buxton Fridge and Bill Fridge in Dallas, Texas, on August 26, 1940, Tod attended University Park Elementary School through the second grade, when he went to Lancaster, Texas, public schools. He graduated with the Class of 1958, after an athletic career playing football, baseball, tennis, and track.

By the age of 18 when he received the first of his formal pilot's licenses Tod had already solo-flown various airplanes. He had logged nine years of flying after his father, a test pilot and salesman for Luscombe Aircraft Corporation, taught him to fly at the age of nine.

Tod won a full football scholarship to Texas Christian University, part of a long athletic career that also saw him complete 10 marathons, including the last

four-borough New York Marathon. Tod continued his aviation journey in the U.S. Air Force and became a crew chief on a B-52 bomber, singularly responsible for the aircraft. The aircraft he crewed is now on display in the Air Museum in Duxford, England.

After the Air Force, Tod became a corporate pilot and accrued over 22,000 hours of flight time. He flew Beechcraft 18s, Learjets, Falcons, Sabreliners, Boeing 737s, and every model of Gulfstream through the Gulfstream V. Tod flew over Antarctica and every other continent on the globe, except Australia, a feat few have accomplished.

Beyond seeing countless horizons, Tod's flying career brought him to the most important, grounding moment of his life in 1967: he met and married Lana Sue, then a Braniff flight attendant. Lana Sue was the love of his entire life. She was his anchor and partner in a life built on faith and family and service to others. She was everything to Tod. They focused on the long game together.

After his corporate flying career, Tod "retired" to a second, 24-year career teaching pilots from all over the world. At CAE Simuflite, Tod imbued his students with his relentless precision and world-class flying expertise so they could learn every aspect of safely piloting and understanding Gulfstream jets.

The greatest lesson Tod shared came from a near-catastrophe. Soaring to nearly 48,000 feet in a Learjet 55 in the skies over the Atlantic Ocean returning from Trinidad and Tobago, Tod attempted to climb in the dark night over a raging storm. The plane got sucked down into the maelstrom. The jet was spinning out of control when Tod intentionally put the aircraft into a stall as he had been taught as a child. He clutched the yoke to his chest and shut his eyes until his head hit the left bulkhead a lesson from his test-pilot father. Once in the spin, he relied on his training, pushing the yoke down and level, stepping on the right rudder opposite of the collision his head felt, and

reducing his thrust. The Learjet pulled out of the storm over clear night waters at 8,000 feet, saving the lives of his passengers and his crew.

The FAA determined the jet lost over 40,000 feet before his extraordinary efforts resulted in regaining of control of the aircraft to return to Texas with every soul aboard safe and unharmed.

"If you don't focus flying or your life on being high enough, you'll never recover from a spin before disaster," he later taught his son, speaking not only of aviation but referring to a personal relationship with God and life itself.

Only two weeks before the near miss, Tod's test-pilot father Bill had presciently taken him on an acrobatic flying refresher course. Bill insisted on testing him on intentionally creating a stall that would result in utilizing the spin recovery he had been taught at an early age. The same technique his father taught and insisted on reinforcing is the one Tod employed over the Atlantic that saved lives. To this day, the Federal Aviation Administration has no other report of a pilot intentionally putting himself into a stall with the intent of regaining control. Tod was one-of-a-kind.

A big man with an unassuming, assured presence, Tod lived by precision and training. The chalkboard in his garage had exactly the number of hours the oil in his lawnmower had been used, and family cars were grounded for an oil change when they were nearing the 3,000-mile mark.

That attention to detail contributed directly to Tod's 50 years of professional flying with zero accidents or violations, which the FAA recognized in 2021, bestowing him with the exclusive "Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award." Tod formally hung up his wings that year, at the age of 81.

He was one of God's sheepdogs, there to protect the flock.

The physicians who oversaw Tod's battle with cancer over the last 25 years called him a "man among men." The invincible, indefatigable Captain Tod loved life as an avid outdoorsman. He traveled the world to hunt and fish, from trips with his son to Argentina, to fish salmon in Alaska, and trout in the United Kingdom. Tod kept a small fishing rod in his truck for the opportunity to fish any body of water when the occasion presented itself, which it did frequently. In the last year of his life, he continued to drive himself to various Texas dove fields in his quest for one more sunset after a good days' hunt.

Tod is survived by his wife, Lana Sue; his son Charles Littleton Fridge III and fiancée Emily; his daughter Chace Fridge Sweeney and husband Michael; and Bernadette and Michael Gendron. They have 17 beloved grandchildren: Charlie Fridge, Christian Fridge, Carter Fridge, Abbie Simmons Gamboa and husband Gabe Gamboa, Emma Simmons, Jackson Simmons and wife Princess, Libby Simmons, Ruby Simmons, Ethan Simmons, Jojo Simmons, Tate Simmons, Annemarie Simmons, S.J. Simmons, Mary Gendron, Aaron Gendron and great-grandson Enzo Gamboa.

On Monday, September 23rd a celebration and memorial will be held at his church, First Baptist Hurst located at 1801 Norwood Drive, Hurst, Texas 76054, with visitation at 10:00 a.m. followed by a memorial service at 11:00 a.m.

Friends and family will gather at Byrum Funeral Home, located at 425 N Dallas Avenue, Lancaster, Texas 75146, on Wednesday, September 25th from 5:00-7:00 p.m. for visitation and fellowship.

Cemetery will be scheduled for a later date.

Cemetery Details

Edgewood Cemetery

695 Nokomis Road
Lancaster, TX