

WI Dept. of Military Affairs: 128th Air Refueling Wing and Make-A-Wish Wisconsin team up for a one-of-a-kind wish fulfillment

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The 128th Air Refueling Wing held its first joint pilot-for-a-day and honorary commander ceremony Aug. 3, 2022, at General Mitchell Field, Milwaukee.

Caleb Zimmet's wish was to be a pilot. Unfortunately, Department of Defense regulations won't allow anyone under the age of 17 on an orientation flight. This meant flying on a KC-135 was out of the question.

Members of the 128th Air Refueling Wing adjusted fire and decided to make Caleb's visit a joint venture.

The 128 Air Refueling Wing's first Make-A-Wish event entailed a full day of ceremony, training, tours and Caleb's favorite foods - pizza and ice cream.

Upon arriving to the wing, Caleb was greeted by Col. Daniel Aber, 128th Air Refueling Wing vice commander, and several other support personnel.

Caleb was soon escorted into a hangar where over two hundred wing personnel stood at attention to observe the honorary commander ceremony.

"The induction ceremony, making Caleb our Wing's first ever honorary commander, was truly magical," said Aber. "The energy in the room was spectacular. Filled with immeasurable joy and excitement as we witnessed a true leader, inspiration, and aspiring aviator join our ranks."

By looking at him you wouldn't be able to tell Caleb is fighting a medical battle because his bright smile and stoic appearance does not admit such.

However, the truth is Caleb is living with a brain tumor and has endured long hospital stays, treatments, and so much more.

Following the ceremony nearly every Airman in attendance got in line to shake Caleb's hand, many of them taking the unit or morale patch off their sleeve to present as a keepsake for the new commander.

Next, Caleb attended an abbreviated flight school led by Capt. Justin Gruber, a pilot with the 128th Air Refueling Wing.

"Caleb and his family are amazing people," said Gruber. "It was a humbling experience to be a part of this event for someone who has been through so much at such a young age."

At the end of the flight school Caleb was awarded his pilot wings by Gruber and given a framed photograph of a KC-135 Tanker signed by members of the 128th Operations Group.

After a quick visit to the Jet Engine classroom, Caleb and his family were escorted to the ramp where Caleb and his mother boarded the personal aircraft of Maj. Bill Peters, a pilot with the 128th Air Refueling Wing, for a private flight over Milwaukee.

Caleb and his family were then given a tour of the KC-135 aircraft. The wing public affairs team also took the opportunity to have Caleb take a portrait sitting in the pilot's seat of the aircraft.

At this point in the day, the newly minted commander broke for chow, and invited the entire wing to join him for pizza and ice cream in Sijan Hall.

Following along the entire day was Jennilyn Parulski, Director of Volunteer Services for Make-A-Wish Wisconsin, admiring Caleb as he took to his new role as honorary commander.

"When we talk about wish ideas and a child determining what will be the one they wish for, we use the phrase of getting to the heart of the child – what makes that child unique, what is special about their personality, what is at the center of who they are- and we utilize these details within the creation and design of that wish for

our wish child,” said Parulski.

Caleb finished up his first day as an honorary commander with a visit to the flight and boom simulators, which for anyone that likes video games, was a great deal of fun.

Before finishing his first day as an honorary commander, Caleb and his family met back at Sijan Hall to be presented with a few more gifts and to say goodbye to his wing escorts.

“The Airmen at the 128th provided a day that not only fulfilled his wish of the pilot experience, but one that was filled with so many personal touches, all tailored to Caleb’s likes and favorites, and his unique-self,” said Parulski. “The 128th provided a one-of-a-kind wish for Caleb for which we are extremely grateful. You could see the joy radiating from Caleb’s face throughout the day, and it was clear his parents felt that this wish had a significant impact on all of their lives.”

The Airmen of the 128th Air Refueling Wing were beyond honored to make this wish happen for Caleb.

May you have blue skies and tailwinds!