



Major Ronald F. Sopata

April 9, 1946 - September 29, 2023

Major Ronald F. Sopata, US Air Force, Ret. 77, passed away on September 29, 2023 in Lake Forest, IL, peacefully surrounded by his family. Originally from Pittsburgh, PA, Ron was a U. S. Air Force Vietnam Veteran and a Pararescue man (PJ) in an Elite Special Forces Unit. He also served as an F16 Maintenance Officer and performed a tour of duty as a Squadron Commander at the United States Air Force Academy. Ron served his country honorably for 23 years. His numerous decorations included three distinguished flying crosses. He retired as a Major in 1995 and also enjoyed a second career after retirement, as a teacher. The motto for pararescue men is “These things we do, that others may live”. He was fortunate to have been able to rescue many during the Vietnam war, and continued that motto throughout his life, looking for big and small ways to serve those around him. He loved food, fishing and being funny, but his heart was all about friends and family.

Ron is survived by his former wife and forever friend, Margery Sopata of Lake Forest, IL; his three daughters, Lisa (Sajjan) Sharma of Canton, GA; Kimberly (David) Fleuchaus of Lake Forest, IL , and Cynthia Sopata of Ft. Lauderdale, FL; five grandchildren (Daniel and Kiran Sharma and Eva, Gabriel and Pia Fleuchaus), his sister-in-law, Barbara Sopata, and many beloved nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents Joseph and Stella Sopata; sister, Marie Henry and his brothers Joseph and James (Cindy) Sopata.

Family and friends are invited to meet for a gathering on Saturday, October 14, 2023 from 10 am to 11 am with a service at 11 am at the Burnett-Dane Funeral Home, 120 W. Park Ave. (Rt. 176, one block west of Milwaukee Ave.) Libertyville, IL. A repast will follow at White Deer Run Golf Course in Vernon Hills. A committal service with full military honors will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, October 17, 2023 at Fort Sheridan National Cemetery, Vattman Road, Lake Bluff, IL 60035.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Stars and Stripes Honor Flight Wisconsin. Ron was supposed to take his honor flight with them on October 7th, and he would be thrilled to know he helped other vets get to D.C. to see their memorials. Donations can be made at <https://www.starsandstripeshonorflight.org/donate/>

Please share your memories of Ron - however large or small, silly or serious, on his legacy page at www.burnettdane.com or at <https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov/RONALDFRANCISSOPATA/a4b6df> For info: 847-362-3009.

Click link below to view live funeral footage:
<https://client.tribucast.com/tcid/7978152552>

Previous Events

Visitation

OCT **14**. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

Burnett-Dane Funeral Home
120 West Park Avenue
Libertyville, IL 60048
(847) 362-3009

Funeral Service

OCT **14**. 11:00 AM (CT)

Burnett-Dane Funeral Home
120 West Park Avenue
Libertyville, IL 60048
(847) 362-3009

Graveside Service

OCT **17**. 11:00 AM.

Fort Sheridan National Cemetery
Lake Forest, IL

Tribute Wall



“ Burnett-Dane Funeral Home created a Live Stream in memory of Major Ronald F. Sopata



Burnett-Dane Funeral Home - October 12, 2023 at 12:18 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Major Ronald F. Sopata.



October 12, 2023 at 10:24 AM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Major Ronald F. Sopata.

October 12, 2023 at 10:24 AM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Major Ronald F. Sopata.



October 10, 2023 at 09:33 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Major Ronald F. Sopata.

October 10, 2023 at 09:33 PM



“ Ron to me was and remains in my heart and memory as a true and selfless HERO for having put himself in harm's way in the service of our fallen military servicemen wounded in action. The stories that he told of jumping out of airplanes at a very high altitude (far from the landing site), in order to effectively enable flying his body horizontally (know as "Tracking") into a Hot Zone, where he was to supply critical medical attention to those in dire need on the battlefield, is in my mind nothing short of Defining the word "Bravery"! Doing a HALO Jump is, in itself, an incredible feat, and adding in the additional danger of being shot at while navigating his parachute into the landing site only adds to the intense commitment that Ron had in his service to our country and to his fellow service men and women.

I am not alone in being sincerely grateful to him for this service. To have had the blessed opportunity to sit and talk with him about these actions adds to the definition of bravery due to the traumatic effect those experiences had on him, and to muster the courage to speak about them (when he certainly did not have to) adds even more to my view of Ron as a true American Hero!

A few years ago, Ron and I collaborated together with his daughter, Cynthia, and arranged to have him jump as a Tandem student at the dropzone where I regularly jump at for fun. Cindy made her first jump there too and, through that experience, gained a deeper appreciation for and understanding of part of her father's role in his military service. Ron was, since then, forever grateful to both of us for making that possible as he was able to actually "Enjoy" the jump, without all of the other dangerous elements he had experienced previously. To see the look on his face that day, and anytime he recalled that day, was nothing short of a sincere display of Joy and Gratitude!

As a person, Ron was always a pleasant presence and fun to be around. He was a man after my own heart in that he loved to laugh and found the positively humorous side to just about anything. We

never found his humor to be dark or disempowering; instead, he removed any thoughts of sadness or loss in any present situation by taking a point of view that it could be worse and laugh and, even better, we can be grateful for how it's not worse! From my point of view, this is a recipe for continuous joy!

In my observation of Ron as a father, I am full of gratitude for the love and heart that he put into his execution of his role as one. The lasting impressions and values that he instilled in his children, grandchildren and, seemingly, everyone he encountered, is evident and ever active in their beings; such a wonderful thing to behold!

I am now, both saddened at this world's loss and grateful for the contributions that he has made and his legacy lives on yo reflect the value of his life.

Rest in Peace, Ron, knowing that you are forever a respected and valued part of our ongoing lives, each of them full of gratitude for the blessing of having shared being a part of it.

Thank you, Ron, for being the Child of God that you were called to be.

Now, you get to skydive all you want, from and to wherever you want, whenever you want, with whomever you want (I feel you with me often as I jump, thanks for that).

Please enjoy your just rewards for a "Life Well Lived!"

Much love and always in our hearts. Farewell, Ron.





Ron was, and still is, a HERO!

Having been a Para-Medic during his service to our country, he proved his bravery and love for his fellow man by enduring the risks and danger of flying his body, from very high altitudes, across the sky into "hot zones" (where bullets flew trying to shoot him out of the air while under his parachute) with a mission to bring medical aid to fallen soldiers. He brought this dedication and heart into his daily life as a father and is evidenced through the lives of everyone he met.

I am forever grateful for all of the positive influences made through his life, with his daughters, his grandchildren, his extended family and everyone else, where he expressed love, joy and happiness whenever I saw him.

Blue Skies, my friend!

(I will expand more on my memories of Ron in a separate post.)

John Fleuchaus - October 10, 2023 at 03:25 PM



John, I'm just now reading this, as the one year anniversary approaches. So sorry i didn't see this before - was too hard to go on this site. But thank you for your beautiful words. They bring me comfort. So happy you could know him like this.

Lisa Sharma - September 05, 2024 at 01:09 PM

CA

“ Ron was the single most instrumental people in my life growth process. He took me from a broken drama laden girl and led me to being a woman that not only he was proud of but I am also able to securely say I am proud of. I can look in the mirror now and truthfully say I love the person I see. Ron took me on that path and without him, his eternal support and guidance I have no idea where I would be today - still the broken shell of a woman I once was due to an extremely difficult relationship that I had experienced. Ron taught me how to look at myself and not be concerned with anything or anyone outside of me and my interactions - how I spoke with someone, how I spoke to myself, how I interpreted everything through my own biases. I don't know I could go on for hours on what he taught me and how he aided in my growing up. However I could leave you all with a song that I recently sent to him - this absolutely details the relationship. Well there are 3 and over the last couple months I sent him each of these explaining that these are what he gave me in life -

To Sir With Love by LuLu

You Raise Me Up by Josh Grovan

This Girl Is A Woman Now by Gary Puckett & The Union.

Fly high with the Angels my friend.....you are free once again....

You will live on in my memories forever!

"It will be okay"!!!!

Forever-

Candy

Candy - October 08, 2023 at 04:39 PM

KF

Oh Candy- I just saw this. What beautiful words. He cared so much for you.

kim fleuchaus - July 25, 2024 at 07:04 PM



Candy, I'm just now reading this. Thank you for your beautiful words! So comforting. He was a wonderful man that truly cared about others.

Lisa Sharma - September 05, 2024 at 01:10 PM

AM

“*Dear Lisa and the whole Sopata and Sharma family,
Our sincere and warm condolences on the passing of your Father. He was always ready to help you at your house and loved the church and family get togethers. An amazing soldier and remarkable Father, Grandfather, Father-in-law. You and your Sisters and all of the children were his pride and joy. May you all get the comfort and strength you need now to get through his new path to Our Savior.
Very Fondly,
Anne B. McManus and
Eddie J. Barstis, Jr*



Anne McManus - October 06, 2023 at 07:04 PM



Anne, thank you for your kind words. I'm just now reading this, as the one year anniversary approaches, but I guess God knew when I would need to read your comforting words the most. Love you friend!

Lisa Sharma - September 05, 2024 at 01:12 PM

DM

“ Ron was the personal “wonder wagon” at Devonshire Place. I moved here in 2019 and he made sure I felt right at home. My apartment 310 used to be his before he moved to 312 with his beloved cat Cleopatra.
I have only fond, fun, and friendly memories of Ron. I will have my son offer a Mass for him, thanking God for the gift of such a good, good man.
I’ll miss you, Ron. Heaven welcomes you. Dianne Murphy

Dianne Murphy - October 05, 2023 at 03:57 PM

DM

I meant to say Welcome wagon not wonder wagon, but Ron was wonderful!
Dianne

Dianne Murphy - October 05, 2023 at 04:02 PM



Dianne, thank you for these kind words. He really was such a wonderful man that cared deeply for others and just wanted to make people smile. I guess God knew when I most needed to read your words, as I'm just seeing them as the one-year anniversary approaches. I'm glad you were his friend. Thank you for offering a mass for him.

Lisa Sharma - September 05, 2024 at 01:13 PM

WB

“ Ron was the Host for the residents in our building! He had birthday parties each month for those who were living in our building . It was a great way to introduce new people. I am ever grateful for his performing this ritual. We have missed him since he went back to home and won't be able to be physically at the service for him but will be spiritually with him and hope to see him again in heaven! Love, Nan and Bill Burke

William and Nan Burke - October 04, 2023 at 08:37 PM



Thank you for these kind words! I'm just now reading them, as the one-year anniversary approaches. He loved his friends at Devonshire. You all meant so much to him!

Lisa Sharma - September 05, 2024 at 01:14 PM

AC

“*Lisa told me that Ron said his big heart finally gave out. Whatever the reason the world has lost the kindest and selfless person I have ever met. There are so many things in my apartment that Ron did or gave me, every time I see those things or use them, I think of him and how I've missed his presence in this building since he moved away. He put together the cat tower I have, He gave me a plant table of his when he saw I was setting up a plant corner in my living room, I have one of his TV's in my multipurpose room, he gave me a pretty pink tulle box filled with note paper because he knew I wrote to many people and there is chair of his near the elevator for anyone to sit on while waiting for the elevator or to take a rest as needed. Probably the item that will ultimately live on the longest is a photograph he took of me which he had given me in a folder with a sweet note on a file folder that is stored amid all the information that my sons will need once I am also gone from this earth. I have designated that photo to be the one used for my obituary when the time comes. Ron, your sweet gentle soul will forever have a special place in my heart. You are in a different realm but will never be forgotten. I am sending my sincere sympathy and prayers to each family member and to our many shared friends..*

A friend, Jackie D. Cabral - October 04, 2023 at 01:06 AM



Oh Jackie! I'm just now reading this beautiful message you wrote, as the one-year anniversary approaches. Thank you for being such a wonderful friend to my dad! He really was a special man.

Lisa Sharma - September 05, 2024 at 01:16 PM

SA

“ *All blessings and prayers to this amazing family. He was such a kind and loving man to me as a child - I was a minority growing up in the state of Utah. He shared his daughters, kindness, humor, and friendliness. He even saved me from a bad roller skate fall so quickly and accurately. I knew at that moment he was amazing at saving lives. I will always remember him fondly and lovingly. All my love and God's blessings and prayers to my sweet Kim and her family.*

Sheela Alvarado - October 04, 2023 at 01:04 AM



Thank you for these kind words, Sheela! I'm just now reading them, as this one year anniversary approaches. He was such a special man.

Lisa Sharma - September 05, 2024 at 01:17 PM