



ELI SETENCICH

Outages demonstrate a powerful coincidence

Empower America! Unplug PG&E!

There's a pattern here, I swear (or cuss). The juice always seems to vanish in the hottest of summer or the coldest of winter, or when you least need it or you're in North Dakota.

Just when the powers that be in the company find a conscience, admitting a recent fire and outage was actually their fault, coming out foursquare for affirmative action.

Just when my daughter saves up, packs up and flies out from Chicago for a weekend high school class reunion.

Just when the 49ers are on the television, and never mind it was only an exhibition game. For the Faithful, nothing is an exhibition.

On the bright side, at least it didn't happen during the Republican National Convention. As if anybody would notice.

General practitioner: Power failure was never a problem with Jim Kilpatrick, and over his 70 years he had a few, both in fighter planes and race cars, but he always finished putting the best spin on them.

He put another spin on the tale that there are old pilots and there are bold pilots but there are no old bold pilots. He was both.

The general knew only one speed, whether in an old F-86 or an old Porsche: Full, to the fire-wall.

The few times he slowed down was during a tour as a grouchy member of the Fresno County grand jury and Mondays taking names and kicking buttons at Fresno Rotary meetings.

Retired Brig. Gen. James A. Kilpatrick, ex-commander of the Fresno Air National Guard Fighter Wing, died the other day preparing to do what he loved best: race.

Traveling fast was the way he went, and not always in the air or on the track. Coming back across the desert once, race-driving crony Milt Minter at his side, he was pulled over. Instead of pleading for mercy, he flashed a file of papers at the CHP officer who promptly motioned him on his way.

"I never knew what was in the papers," Minter recalls. "But the cop backed up and practically saluted." It was neither the first nor last time Gen. Kilpatrick sped away untouched.

To air was human

The man's flying was even hotter, from the days and nights in the prop-driven P-51 Mustang in the early days of the Guard in the Bay Area chasing Navy reservists out of the air and resisting a constant temptation to fly under the Golden Gate Bridge to the newest and fastest jets.

It was on-the-job training without the trainer, no instructor, just you alone. "Strapped in and off you went and good luck," he once explained.

It was with the MIG-killing F-86s of the Korean War that Jim Kilpatrick and three of his closest and best were the Bald Eagles, the Fresno ANG's personal aerobatic team that showed off at air shows and could turn the Blue Angels green.

"It was the most enjoyable flying I've ever done," he told anybody who would listen. "And we got paid twice a month for it."

Above all, James A. Kilpatrick was a class act, from his crewcut down to his racing boots. Generous to a fault, fun-loving, always up to a challenge, he lived life to the fullest, the kind of rare general that a buck private not only looks up to but respects and admires.

As he liked to say, always with a laugh: "He who dies with the most toys wins." He had the toys.

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