

Charlie Grace



When Charlie Grace joined the Army Air Corps in 1944, all the recruits had dreams of flying the lightning fast P-51 Mustang, himself included. Despite enjoying a 28 year military career, he never got the chance to pilot the aircraft, and it has always remained his wish to one day get behind the controls. Thanks to Brookdale and the non-profit Wish of a Lifetime™, Charlie finally fulfilled his wish when he traveled to Kissimmee, Florida, and took flight in a fully operational P-51.

“It was so exciting that at age 91, I could still fly an airplane like that,” said Charlie of his Wish experience. “Just the idea that I could do something like this again, I never could have imagined. I feel like a kid again.”

The P-51 outfitted with dual controls allowed Charlie, who hadn’t piloted a plane since 1986, to truly experience the thrilling speed and maneuverability of the aircraft. Once he hit 1,000 feet of altitude his reflexes started coming back to him, and it didn’t take him long to start performing barrel rolls, loops and Cuban eights. “I thought my reactions would be slow, but they were right there,” said Charlie. “The first time I was upside down on a barrel role, it was just like back in the old day.”

Charlie’s military career took him all around the country and he eventually earned the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force. He spent 31 years flying for Republic Airlines after he left the military, and collectively achieved a grand total of 26,400 hours in the air. He jokes that he has actually only spent 88 years on earth as three of them he spent in the air.

Now retired, he resides at Freedom Village at Bradenton where he serves as a resident ambassador, chairman of the library council and the military flight crew chair. This Wish helped commemorate his service to his country as well as fulfill a dream that he did not think was possible.

In 2010, Brookdale Senior Living and Wish of a Lifetime formed a partnership to provide a helping hand in making some of the dreams of Brookdale’s residents come true. To request a Wish, residents fill out a Wish application explaining an experience they would like to have fulfilled and how that experience relates to one or more dimensions of Brookdale’s Optimum Life® platform. Optimum Life cultivates whole-person wellness through fulfillment in the six key dimensions: purposeful, emotional, physical, social, spiritual and intellectual. Since the partnership’s inception, more than 800 Brookdale seniors have had their Wish granted.