

Fighter Pilot Advises Cadets To Persevere

A chance reunion of two high school buddies at a wedding in Georgia resulted in a healthy jolt of inspiration for the 11 local Civil Air Patrol cadets of the Delaware Valley Squadron.

Bill Pittenger of Readington Township and Ed Zukowski, who's being reassigned to Belgium, were classmates at Newton High School and played varsity baseball together. Now Mr. Pittenger is a first lieutenant in the Civil Air Patrol and his old friend is a Navy lieutenant commander.

Lt. Cmdr. Zukowski accepted Lt. Pittenger's invitation to come tell the cadets how he became an F-18 Hornet fighter pilot. The squadron meets at the Acorn Montessori School in Clinton Township.

When he went there, his primary message for cadets was to stay focused on their goals. "I wasn't an outstanding student in high school but I studied hard and did well," the aviator said. "I wasn't a standout athlete, but I participated in school

sports. I always knew that I wanted to be a military aviator and my path wasn't always a smooth one, but I stayed focused and kept my options open."

He joined the Navy ROTC and earned his commission as an ensign in 1993. He earned his pilot's wings in 1996.

Since then he has served in the Arabian Gulf in support of the Iraq War and accrued over 2,100 flight hours, of which 1,800 are in the F-18 Hornet, and logged 511 carrier-arrested landings on five aircraft carriers.

Lt. Pittenger owns an Internet retail company based in Flemington and is an active member of the Civil Air Patrol, performing ground search and rescue missions for the Air Force.

For information about the Civil Air Patrol or the Delaware Valley Squadron visit delval.njwv.cap.gov or contact the squadron commander, Capt. Shannon Bingert, at shn16@msn.com.