



Meet José M. Portela, Brigadier General

The McKinney Duplicate Bridge Club is a diverse group of individuals from many states and several countries. No one would have guessed, however, that the group would include two Air Force Generals! (Long-time member Major General Al Joersz was featured in an earlier article.) Brigadier General José M. Portela, on the other hand, recently started playing bridge after his retirement. He states that his wife had been playing bridge for several decades, but he only learned the game two years ago under the tutelage of Lou Minter who presided as the bridge instructor on a two-week Regent ocean cruise. Despite this brief experience with the game, Portela's analytical mind and broad life experience in tactical thinking have enabled him to quickly excel at the bridge table.

José Portela was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico where he received his primary and secondary education before enrolling in the University of Puerto Rico earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration at the age of 19. He then joined the United States Air Force as a Second Lieutenant where he underwent pilot training at Webb Air Force Base in Texas. After receiving his pilot wings in 1970 he was promoted to first lieutenant and was assigned to a Military Airlift Squadron in Charleston, SC. He became the youngest C-141A aircraft commander and a captain at the age of 22. Throughout the 1970s and '80s he served in a variety of flying, command, and staff positions in South Carolina, California, Delaware, and Texas during which he was promoted to major. He served in Viet Nam, the Persian Gulf War, and Desert Storm racking up more than 22,000 flight hours and earning 21 honorary badges, including the coveted Air Force Distinguished Service Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross. From 1992 to 1995 Portela served at the Pentagon and was promoted to colonel. He received training in a wide array of strategies including Joint Warfare Operations and decision making. Training at the National War College and the Naval War College were also part of his career path.

From 1995 to 2004 José served in numerous positions ranging from vice commander and inspector general at Dover Air Force Base to mobilization assistant to the undersecretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs at the Pentagon. It was during that period that he was promoted to Brigadier General. In 2004 Portela returned home to his birthplace to serve as Commander of the Puerto Rico Air National Guard in San Juan. After more than 43 years of service and leadership Brig. General Portela retired from the Air Force in 2012. He was not ready to give up flying entirely though. He became a captain for U.S. Airways and left the

cockpit in 2014 with over 25,000 hours of airtime. He continued to work in aeronautics, however, and retired as an FAA inspector in 2020. He then served as a safety and glass cockpit expert for the Airline Pilots Association as well as serving on the Defense Advisory Council on Hispanic Issues.

Josè Portela is also a family man. He married his wife, Margie, in 1970 and will soon celebrate their 54th anniversary—no mean feat for a military family who must endure long separations and many transfers. They have one son, Josè, Jr., who has his own law practice in Dallas. A daughter-in-law and two grandsons complete the Portela family: Josè III is a law student at Baylor and Jacob is a junior in high school. The Portelas live in Dallas and Josè enjoys playing bridge 3-5 times a week. It may be a challenge for him to catch up with his wife, however. She is a life master!

Submitted by Nancy Connors, McKinney Duplicate Club reporter