

Chronolog Forward

The Early and Pioneer Naval Aviators Association, better known as “The Golden Eagles,” founded in 1956, functions as a living memorial to those early Naval Aviators who pioneered and provided the leadership for the development of this unique military aviation force. Originally, the membership was limited to 100 whose designation as Naval Aviators for the most part were within the first 1,900 who qualified for their wings. Membership was later expanded to include pioneer jet and helicopter pilots and aviators who qualified for carrier landings during the period when the USS Langley (CV-1) was the only airplane carrier. Over the years the membership limitation has been expanded to 200 early pioneers, membership qualifications were broadened, but qualifications remained highly restrictive. To perpetuate the spirit of the earlier members, selection for membership is made from those who are pioneers in some new aspect of Naval Aviation, or who are respected by their peers as leaders because of their outstanding skills as a pilot, their wide experience, good judgement, personal character, and their dedication to flying.

This Chronolog is provided for the support and preservation of Naval Aviation and in honor of the members, their spouses and other members of their families whose support and sacrifices made Naval Aviation the unique force that it is today. The material provided herein is not a definitive history, but is an assembly of individual biographies which cover most of the advancements and milestones of events and accomplishments of Naval Aviation since its beginning.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the planning, organization, assembly, editing, and printing of this Chronolog was accomplished almost single-handed by Captain Jerry M. Zacharias, USN (Ret.), a Golden Eagle. For this massive effort all the Golden Eagles are deeply grateful. Col Raymond R. Powell USMC, MGen Kenneth W. Weir, USMCR, CAPT John F. Manning, USN, and RADM Robert H. Shumaker, USN have continued this effort.

Noteworthy accomplishments of the current Golden Eagle membership include:

- Participants in the Battles of Coral Sea, Midway, Guadalcanal and other significant WW II, Korean, Vietnam, Desert Shield/Desert Storm and the Balkans Conflict campaigns;
- 1 Medal of Honor recipient;
- 3 Congressional Space Medal of Honor recipients who were Navy astronauts;
- 14 Navy Crosses (some multiple awards), 55 Silver Star awards, 38 Purple Hearts, 319 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 93 Bronze Stars, and 4,191 Air Medals;
- 32 enemy aircraft shot down. Group includes 3 Fighter “Aces”;
- 13 holders of world speed, altitude, distance, endurance, time-to-climb or other records;
- 13 former leaders or members of the Blue Angels Flight Demonstration Team;
- 8 Navy astronauts who flew in Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, Discovery, Challenger, Endeavor or other space flights;
- 3 former Chief of Naval Operations;
- 9 former Vietnam Prisoners of War;
- 61 graduates of the Navy Test Pilot School;
- 50 graduates of the U. S. Naval Academy;
- Collectively this group represents over 1.36 million flight hours, 45,278 combat missions, 149,036 carrier arrested landings, and 16,600 ship rotary wing/VSTOL ship landings.

In addition, for deceased Golden Eagles, 9 were Medal of Honor recipients, and others were awarded 110 Navy Crosses, 94 Silver Stars and 50 Purple Heart medals. A total of 41 deceased Golden Eagles were “Fighter Aces” and shot down 406 enemy aircraft. Eighteen deceased were world record holders, six were astronauts and seven were POWs.