

NOTAM 6 - 2020 (Johnson) 6/07/2020



The Golden Eagles®



Commander Robert A. Johnson, USN (Ret.)

Golden Eagle

Gentlemen,

It is my sad duty to report that Golden Eagle, Commander Robert A. Johnson, USN (Retired) made his Last Take Off in the early morning hours of Sunday, 7 June, 2020 with his wife Gail and three sons by his side. Bob was born in northern Wisconsin in the small farming community of Brill, WI. He and his

brothers grew up in that rural environment and spent countless hours at Rice Lake. Bob developed an early love for aviation and attended the University of Wisconsin on an NROTC scholarship, graduating with a BS in Civil Engineering and a BS in Naval Science, receiving his commission as an Ensign in June 1957. Right after graduation he and Gail, his wife of nearly 63 years were married in Berwyn, IL, just outside of Chicago, on June 28, 1957.

Bob earned his Wings of Gold on 21 November, 1958 after Basic Training in the T-34B and T-28B/C at NAS Pensacola, FL and Advanced Training in the F9F-8T at NAS Beeville, TX. While he was in flight training, both of his scheduled CARQUALs were cancelled in the T-28 and F9F-8 due to hurricanes. His logbook was stamped "FIELD QUALIFIED" and he pressed on to his Fleet assignment as the first "Nugget" pilot to fly the A-3D. However, due to attrition of the community's B/Ns, he initially trained and flew as a B/N until the pipeline caught up. While in route to this assignment he attended A-3D Maintenance Officer Training at NAS Alameda, CA where he bagged time in the T-33 to remain current.

Finally transitioning to the pilot seat in VAH-123 at NAS Whidbey Island, WA, Bob made his very first carrier arrested landings in the A-3D aboard USS Kitty Hawk before reporting to VAH-4. He embarked in USS Oriskany in late 1959 for his first deployment to the Western Pacific where the airwing responded in support of the Taiwan government during the Quemoy-Matsu Islands crisis. His second deployment with VAH-4 was embarked in USS Lexington, again to the Western Pacific during the early 60's when the bombing of South Vietnam President Diem's palace required numerous sorties showing U.S. presence for support of South Vietnam prior to the Tonkin Gulf incident. Notably, for the entire USS Lexington deployment the airwing flew with a field mirror landing system chained to the deck on the STARBOARD side of the landing area (check your scan in-close!) and they operated still flying the night "VFR" pattern. Whales, both day and night, coming aboard 27C Carriers...precision required!

Bob's first shore duty tour took him to the Navy Post Graduate School in Monterey, CA from February 1963 to June 1965 where he found flight time in the T-2A while earning his MS Degree in Aeronautical Engineering. Rolling back to the fleet, Bob transitioned to flying the RA-5C, training at RVAH-3 before joining RVAH-13 at NAS Sanford, FL. He made two deployments while in RVAH-13, first embarked in USS Kitty Hawk and next embarked in USS America, deployed to WESTPAC and combat from Yankee Station in the Tonkin Gulf. During this tour Bob flew 109 combat missions, including a mission to take the first photos of the pontoon bridge in Vinh on the first operational flight of the AAS-21 IR sensor, in heavy weather and under extreme radar-directed AAA fire.

In January 1969 Bob attended the US Navy Test Pilot School, Class 53 and upon graduation was assigned to the Carrier Suitability Branch of the Flight Test Division, NATC Patuxent River, MD. He became Branch Head as a Lieutenant Commander in what was designated a Commander's billet. While there until the summer of 1972, he flew carrier test flights in the A-3B, RA-5C, A6, EA-6B (initial Sea Trials), A-7, F-4 and C-2A. He flew the ACLS Deck Motion Compensation Trials aboard the USS Coral Sea, where he recalled "swells were so long and high that on occasion both the bottom of the bow and the four screws turning could be seen at the same time." A true bagger, Bob set a record for carrier landings in one day by making 50 traps aboard USS Kitty Hawk in support of a very high priority test program to clear the C-2A for carrier operations after two fatal crashes.

Selected for command, now Commander Bob Johnson returned to RVAH-3 in July 1972 for refresher training in the RA-5C before reporting as XO of RVAH-7 based at NAS Key West, FL. He made his fifth and last deployment flying the RA-5C as CO of RVAH-7 to the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean, embarked once again in USS Kitty Hawk. On that deployment in 1974 he participated in an Air Show for the Shah of Iran.

Bob's final tour was again in Command, when in December 1974 he became the 18th Director, US Naval Test Pilot School at NATC Patuxent River, MD, as the most junior Director ever, performing in a Captain's billet. He was hand-picked to "correct severe safety and morale problems and reorganize the school." He credits his success in achieving these goals to a team effort with his wife Gail. A stern, but compassionate and extremely fair leader, he motivated his crew with the motto; "Write the Plan, Fly the Plan, or Plan to get Hammered!"

Bob retired from active duty in August 1977, completing just over 20 years of service flying the most challenging naval aircraft in the most demanding environment at sea. He was extremely proud of a career in which he was always assigned to duty involving flying, never had an accident, and in his command tours, never lost a pilot or an airplane. He accumulated nearly 4200 flight hours, flying 46 different types of aircraft excelling in both flight test and combat, where he was awarded the Air Medal, 9 Strike Flight Air Medals and 3 Navy Commendation Medals with Combat V.

Bob transitioned to the private sector in 1977 and began a second career in the aerospace industry. He first landed a job with McDonnell Douglas as marketing Director for the F/A-18, primarily negotiating foreign sales to Canada and others. After two years in St Louis, he received an offer from Northrop and moved the family to California where he served as the Customer Requirements Manager for the Northrop B-2 Spirit Bomber program, settling in Palos Verdes Estates, CA. There, after his career in aerospace, he followed his passion for

civil engineering from his college years as a Wisconsin Badger, and became active as a General Contractor, building a widely respected reputation and strong bond with the Palos Verdes community.

Bob was especially proud of being a Golden Eagle. He and his wife Gail were always a bright light attending the West Flight mini-Reunion Luncheons, traveling from Palos Verdes in L.A. to San Diego to join up with other long-time friends and share stories that continued to improve with age. Bob is survived by his loving wife Gail, three sons Scott, Kristopher, and Niclas, and two granddaughters, Sarah and Hannah.

The family will conduct a private spiritual closure ceremony at their Palos Verdes home this weekend. No decision will be made for a celebration of life and Memorial Service until the current restriction on large gatherings is lifted, with interment to follow, most likely at Miramar National Cemetery. A Special Notice will be published when details are available.

He will be missed!

In sadness,
Jay A. Campbell, Pilot
