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## Fellow Twirly Birds

September 9, 2014 excerpt from news article

“A total of 12 American military helicopters, thrown off course by foggy weather, dropped down onto farmers’ fields in rural northern Poland to ask locals for directions.

The appearance of five Black Hawk helicopters and a twin-rotored Chinook helicopter in a Gruta rapeseed field shocked locals, who, after overcoming concern, rushed to the aircraft to snap pictures with the American pilots.

“The Americans came over and asked where they landed,” resident Waldemar Krukowski told TVN24 television. “They wanted to know the name of the village.”

Sound like a familiar navigation technique to you “pioneer” helicopter pilots?

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Once again thank we must thank Twirly Birds Bob Petite and Marty Pociask for their efforts to preserve helicopter history. The August/September issue of VERTICAL magazine contains another article written by Bob entitled “High Flyer” recounting the beginnings of Turbomeca, SUD/SNIAS and the French helicopter industry. (Notice that we are not using the “Airbus” terminology.) Pioneer helicopter pilots did not fly “Airbus”. Pictures for this story were provided by Twirly Bird Jeff Evans. Also mentioned in the article is the famous French test pilot and Twirly Bird Jean Boulet.

You may recall that Jean Boulet set an altitude record in the Alouette II, climbing to 29,932 feet in 1955. After reaching that record altitude the engine quit and Jean entered autorotation. During a TB conversation over adult beverages, Jean recounted the flight. When we asked about autorotating from 30,000 feet he said that what got his attention was that a cloud layer had formed below him and he had to autorotate through the cloud layer with no instruments. When asked how he managed that feat, he said that the sun was very bright and he just kept the sun in the top of the bubble. No problem for a Twirly Bird.

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Twirly Bird Marty Pociask preserves yet another part of our history with an absolutely fascinating interview of Twirly Bird Jim Meade in the summer edition of the HAI ROTOR magazine. This magazine is available at no cost, both in a paper and an electronic version. You can find ROTOR magazine on line at Rotor.com, Jim's interview begins on page 62.

(We have also attached Jim Meade's interview for those Twirly Birds receiving this newsletter by mail.)

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Marty Pociask has requested assistance from Twirly Birds who may have information about Twirly Bird Leonard LaVassar. " I was wondering if you could post something in the Twirly Birds newsletter asking members who knew or worked with Leonard LaVassar, for information on his career.

We are also trying to track down a Baron Wilfried von Englehardt, who worked with Leonard. The Baron was a test pilot with MBB, and worked with Leonard, and for a time thereafter, exchanged correspondence. I believe he is still alive and living in Austria. I am hoping he can shed some light on Leonard, and I thought perhaps some of the Twirly bird members remember Leonard and can recall some events that took place during his long career. Leonard and Hal Symes were both involved in the Argentine locust eradication program. While there, Leonard taught Juan Peron's pilots how to fly helicopters.

Leonard has many first test flights to his credit, including the 107, H21, YCH-1B, and Tilt Wing. I would appreciate any information on Leonard that the members may be able to provide."

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Congratulations to Twirly Bird Ed DiCamppli, previously HAI's executive vice president, now the Chief Operating Officer. Ed has been with HAI for more than 29 years and is the longest serving staff member. Many of us have had the pleasure of working with Ed who deserves a lot of credit for HAI's expansion of services to all members. Ed's quiet and effective leadership within the HAI, and the industry, was recognized by the Twirly Birds who unanimously voted to induct Ed as an associate Twirly Bird.

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It is my sad duty to attach obituaries of three Twirly Birds who have "gone west". Each of these pioneer helicopter pilots made significant, meaningful, and diverse contributions to the industry.

1928 - 2014 | Obituary | [Condolences](#)



Barbara J. Garbell

Barbara Juanita Jenkins Garbell

went home to her Heavenly Father on August 21, 2014. There she joins her late husband Gerald Garbell, her son Gerald Jr., her parents Floyd and Maggie Jenkins, her brother Bill, and her sisters Betty, Julia, and Martha. She is survived by her two daughters, Laurel Lynn of Edmond, Oklahoma and her husband, Greg, and Tina Kennedy of Spokane, Washington and her husband, Joe. In addition to her daughters, she is survived by four grandchildren including David Lynn (Michelle); Michael Lynn; Jon Lynn (Minde); and Nicole Kennedy; six great grandchildren including Mackenzie, Danny, Alexa, Christian, Jonny, and Noah; and, two sisters, Lois White and Ree Greenhill, both of Florence, Alabama.

Barbara was born in Florence, Alabama on October 18, 1928 and spent her first 19 years there until she met the love of her life, Gerald "Jerry" Garbell. Barbara and Jerry married in Florence and then began their great adventure in life together moving west to Alaska and California before eventually landing on Mercer Island, Washington where they spent the rest of their lives together. Barbara became the vice president and co-owner of their company Aero-Copters and served in those roles for over three decades. While helping run their business, she decided to become a helicopter pilot, and, in 1973, she was officially recognized as the 153rd Whirly-Girl (female helicopter pilot) in the world.

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Although she left the American south long ago, she was known for her terrific southern hospitality, always welcoming guests into her home and cooking great southern dishes. She was a proud member of G.R.I.T.S. (Girls Raised In The South) and occasionally travelled back to Alabama to see her family. She was a lifelong member of the Church of Christ, and she was a congregant at the Woodinville congregation when she passed away. Her family thanks the congregation of the Woodinville Church of Christ for all of the kindness, compassion, and time they spent with her over the years, especially in her final months.

**Owen Q. Niehaus**

Aviator and Renaissance Man

O. Q. Niehaus  
482 Reno St.  
Rochester, Pa.



Owen Quintin Niehaus, 91, passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on July 13, 2014. He was born in Rochester, PA and was predeceased by his parents Elmer Willard Niehaus and Gladys May Copestick Niehaus. He is survived by his wife of 68 years, Caryl nee Gramer, his daughter Christine Niehaus and her husband Harris Simon, all of Williamsburg.

Owen's fascination for flight began very early. At the age of 9 he was building model airplanes, eventually moving into flyable versions. In his teens he designed a towline glider that set a world record. He took flying lessons and earned a private license prior to World War II. He signed up for cadet training in the Army Air Corps. After receiving his commission in Class 44A he was assigned as a flight instructor. Soon thereafter he signed up for helicopter training. He was one of the nation's first 15 helicopter pilots, and in 1945 was the first person to test fire a 75 millimeter recoilless weapon from a helicopter. Two years later he became the second man in the free world to accumulate 1000 "first-pilot" hours in a chopper.

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While in the military he was chosen to set up the Air Corps' helicopter-pilot training school. When he retired from the military as a Captain he worked as a test pilot for Bell Aircraft Corporation in Niagara Falls, NY, soon becoming the company's Chief Test Pilot for both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. He had flown 67 different types of aircraft.

During his career flying helicopters he made many rescues saving many many lives. He received the "National Heroism Award in World War II," was designated an "Honorary Speed Merchant" for Albacore Submarine Speed Trial Participation, the William McGuire Award as a Helicopter Pioneer, The Helicopter Assn. Of America "Pioneer in Helicopters" Award, and designated an "R-4 Helicopter Pioneer" by Sikorsky Aircraft. He was also a member of the Twirly Birds, which originally was open only to pilots who had soloed in helicopters prior to V-J Day. When he ended his flying career he joined the engineering department at Bell.

In 1969 Owen and his wife Caryl moved to New Orleans. He joined ECI, Inc., a local insurance and pension planning firm, which he purchased two years later. Then he expanded the firm to three states while Caryl played an integral role by managing the business transition.

While in New Orleans his involvement in volunteer work covered a wide spectrum of interests from opera to wildlife. He served as Secretary of the New Orleans Opera Association for 22 years, and was one of the initiators of its Endowment Fund. He held other memberships including the New Orleans Employee Benefit Planners Assn., the New Orleans Estate Planning Council, the National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. (director), Metairie Rotary Club, the Foreign Relations Assn. Of New Orleans, International House, the New Orleans Museum of Art, and a charter member of the American Helicopter Society.

Mr. Niehaus was a Paul Harris Fellow with Rotary International, he received the 1993 Great Gentleman Award from East Jefferson General Hospital, he and his wife were "Sweethearts" in 2001 for the American Heart Assn., he was honored with the Strength in Age Award from LSU Medical Center, and in 2002 he was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Niagara Aerospace Museum. In addition to his awards Mr. Niehaus held many patents.

He was a true Renaissance man with a passion for learning something new, with the motto "If it has an unknown component, I like to dig in. If I find a subject interesting I get excited about it. I want to know more and to contribute to the subject." On many fronts his contributions have been outstanding.

A memorial service will be held Wednesday, July 23, 2:00 p.m., at

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Williamsburg Presbyterian Church. The family will receive visitors after the service in Stevenson Fellowship Hall at the church. In lieu of flowers memorial gifts may be sent to Williamsburg Faith in Action, 354 McLaws Circle, Suite 2, Williamsburg, VA 23185; Respite Care Center (RCC) of Williamsburg United Methodist Church, 500 Jamestown Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185; or Williamsburg Presbyterian Church, 215 Richmond Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185.

### Vernon Albert



Funeral services will be held on Monday, September 15, 2014 at 12:00 p.m. at First Baptist Church in downtown Lafayette for Vernon E. Albert, 72, who passed away on September 11, 2014 after a long battle with cancer. Visitation with the family will be on Sunday, September 14 from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Delhomme Funeral Home on Bertrand Drive, Lafayette and at 11:00 a.m. until time of service on Monday, September 15 at First Baptist Church. The burial will follow the service at Lafayette Memorial Park Cemetery.

A resident of Lafayette for over 40 years, Vernon was born in Lebanon, Pennsylvania on March 31, 1942 to the late Sarah P. and Carl H. Albert. The son of an Army officer, Vernon lived in Germany for six years starting in the late 1940's before his family settled in San Antonio, Texas.

Shortly after graduating from Douglas MacArthur High School and attending San Antonio Jr. College for two years, he went to work for the Army and Air Force Exchange Services, which eventually took him to Fort Polk, Louisiana where he met his future wife in August 1962. In 1963, Vernon decided to enlist in the United States Army. When Vernon went to New Orleans to take the Army recruitment test, the helicopter flight school program first opened up and he decided to stay a couple of extra days to take the test. He was sworn into the Army on Good Friday, 1963 by his father and recruiting sergeant. According to the sergeant, Vernon was the first pilot to join the Army to go directly to helicopter flight school and then into combat. While home on Christmas leave from flight school in 1963, Vernon and Reatha were married.

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Upon completion of flight school at Fort Rucker, Alabama, Vernon was assigned to Vietnam as a combat helicopter pilot. While serving in Vietnam, he accumulated over 1000 combat flight hours and 2408 combat sortie hours. His service in Vietnam earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross for volunteering for a middle of the night mission to rescue Army advisors who were trapped in hostile territory with no means of escape. He was also awarded several Air Medals and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry for valor. He completed his Army career as a combat flight instructor at Fort Rucker, Alabama and was honorably discharged in 1967.

In 1967, Vernon joined Petroleum Helicopters, Inc. (PHI) as a helicopter line pilot. Earning his way to upper management, he served in management for 19 years and held the position of Vice President/Chief Pilot for 10 of those years. Vernon took every opportunity to serve the helicopter industry, not the least of which was being invited by NASA to fly as a guest test pilot in their microwave landing system tests in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Also during this time, Vernon had the opportunity to fly as an invited guest test pilot with Allison Detroit Diesel Aviation Engine Division. This project involved numerous flight test hours on enhanced engine performance and during which time he established three helicopter world speed records, which he still holds today.

Vernon was a long time member of Helicopter Association International (HAI), the association that manages the international helicopter industry. In the late 1980's, Vernon was elected by industry peers to six years of service to the HAI international board of directors, serving one of those years as chairman of the board. In 1995, HAI awarded Vernon the highest honor the industry has for service, the Lawrence D. Bell Memorial Award.

In 1994, Vernon retired from PHI and formed Albert & Associates, Inc., an aviation consulting firm servicing oil, insurance and aviation companies to enhance the safety of their programs. He was qualified in courts across the country as an aviation expert. However, one of the highlights of his career was the contract to work with the FAA in establishing the low altitude flight routes and the heliport system throughout the Atlanta area for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. Vernon's career took him around the world, filling three passports along the way.

Vernon spent his spare time with his family and supporting his children and

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grandchildren in their endeavors. He coached girls soccer in Lafayette for 10 years, including 6 years with a select team that won five state championships and was first runner-up at the US Youth regional tournament in 1989. He assisted in coaching the Comeaux High School girls soccer team to the 1993 state championship.

If Vernon were to choose to be remembered in any capacity, he said it would be that he was a man who loved the Lord, who believed in family, prayer, and divine guidance. He was faithful member of First Baptist Church, Lafayette for over forty years where he served as a deacon, was a member of the same Sunday School class since 1973 and volunteered in several ministries over the years.

Vernon will be greatly missed by his wife of over 50 years, Reatha Albert; his two children, Jeff Albert and his wife, Dr. Jennifer Miles, and Andrea Albert and her husband, Chip Carriere; and his grandchildren, Jessica, Emily, Jordan, Blake and Austin, who affectionately called him "Pop." He is also survived by his sisters, Isabel Meloni and her husband, Louis, of San Antonio, TX and Joyce Rodgers of Enterprise, AL and his brother-in-law, Nolan Richardson and wife Bess of Lake Charles, LA, and sisters-in-law, Gloria Grogger and husband Dean of Overland Park, KS and Rhett Johnston and husband Tom, of Prairie Village, KS along with numerous nieces and nephews, an uncle and several cousins.

Vernon loved to spend time with his family and found it a privilege to take care of them. He and Reatha created a home where everyone was welcome. He was kind and humble and exemplified the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). His family and friends will miss his gentle spirit, his big heart, his willingness to serve others, and his homemade ice cream.

Barbara, Owen, Vernon and all the rest of you Twirly Birds,

**KEEP YOUR ROTOR IN THE GREEN!**

Steve Sullivan

Please remember that the Twirly Birds have endowed a chair at the University of Texas. Any documents, log books, flight manuals or other memorabilia will be cataloged and stored for future generations. Don't leave these items for your kids to throw away.