

CHARLES SAMUEL DELLA PERUTA

Lieutenant Colonel Charles S. Della Peruta, USAF (Ret.), slipped the surly bonds of earth on 17 September 2014 after a four-year battle with multiple myeloma. He was 78 years old.

Charlie was born on 9 April 1936 in Bound Brook, NJ, where he attended high school and became an outstanding wrestler. After three semesters at Maryland and Rutgers, he entered USNA in June 1956, where he competed as a varsity wrestler for two years before leaving the sport to focus on academics. Charlie always had a bigger passion—airplanes and flying. Unimpressed by the quality of officer leadership at USNA, he chose to pursue silver pilot wings instead of Navy gold. In June 1960, he graduated with a naval science degree and a commission as an Air Force second lieutenant.

Three days later, he married Joyce Benes, his high school sweetheart, in their New Jersey hometown and never looked back. He earned his Wings at Vance AFB, OK, in 1961. A flying assignment with MAC in Hawaii and a tour with the Defense Mapping Agency followed.

He earned an advanced degree in industrial engineering at Missouri, and then served as a T-28 instructor/military advisor in Thailand during the Vietnam War. Tours at the Pentagon and the Recruiting Command rounded out his career. After retiring in 1980, Charlie followed his passion and worked for the next 20 years as a salesman for LearJet and Dassault-FalconJet in New Jersey. He often took friends for rides in his own plane—a Mooney. In 1988, flying co-pilot on a fam flight in a twin-engine turboprop, Charlie was in a landing accident and suffered serious injuries, including the loss of an eye. Undaunted, he purchased a car wash near his home in Martinsville, but continued to fly his Mooney and sold airplanes on the side. Classmates visiting for a weekend often worked a shift at the car wash as a quid-pro-quo for dinner at his house.

Charlie was laid to rest with full military honors at the Air Force Academy on 20 October 2014. Family and military friends threw nickels on the grass to send him off to join the tumbling mirth of sun-split clouds one last time. We will remember Charlie for his big smile, his love of jokes, his Italian heritage and his money-making schemes. He was one-of-a-kind and will be missed.

Charlie is survived by his wife, Joyce; their children, David and Susan; and three grandchildren.

January-February 2015 Shipmate