

Aeronautical engineer Donald Lowell Francis died January 29, 2016 in Phoenix, AZ. He was 91. A 1946 graduate of the California Institute of Technology and a veteran of the Navy V-12 program, Don was an engineer on defining projects for the aviation industry, including research and development for nuclear propulsion, the DC-10 engine, and the Airbus A320. He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Ruth Ross Francis of Corvallis, OR; children David of Cave Creek, AZ, Rebecca of Corvallis, Elizabeth of Providence, RI, William of Santa Rosa, CA; and grandchildren Devon Fliss of Battle Ground, WA, Lauren of Seattle, WA, and Lulu Amirault of Providence.

Don grew up in Auburn, CA, the second son of engineer and rancher Joseph B. and teacher Florence O. Francis. He was a member of Placer High School's Class of 1942. He and his two brothers Bill and Hugh and sister Janet spent summers in the Sierras at the family cabin on Palisades Lake near Soda Springs. Later on, Don labored on his father's pear ranch.

Don's early career included several years at the famed Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, CA, where he also earned his Professional Engineer's Degree at Caltech in 1949. After the War, amid growing interest in the "peaceful atom," Don joined General Electric Co. and worked on several teams testing nuclear aircraft at the Idaho Test Reactor near Idaho Falls, ID, and the Vallecitos Atomic Laboratory near Livermore, CA. His roles in the Aircraft Engine Group at GE and on the DC-10 took the family to Newport Beach, CA. In 1973, Don joined Garrett AirResearch in Phoenix and played several key roles in the Turbine Engine, Jetstar and Propulsion Product divisions. When Garrett joined the international industry group to design and manufacture the Airbus A320, Don spent several years as A320 program manager in Frankfurt, Germany. He retired from Garrett in 1988.

In addition to his professional accomplishments, Don was an avid sportsman; his pursuits included sailing, skiing, tennis, flying, hunting and scuba diving. He bought his first plane in 1950, built a glider with brother-in-law Lou Mass, and was a member of the International 14 crew from Balboa Yacht Club that won the Founder's Trophy at the International Championships in Rochester, NY, in 1948. He became a serious hunter while living in Idaho, and the family spent many vacations skiing in the Rockies and the Sierra Mountains.

After retiring from Garrett, Don and Ruth continued to travel throughout Europe; memorable trips also included to Tonga in the South Pacific with Ruth's sister Letty Lerille and her partner Ray Smith, China, Russia, and Croatia. Yearning to devote more time to sailing, in 1995 Don and Ruth moved to Blaine, WA, where they moored a Cal 34 at Semiahmoo Marina and spent many happy months cruising in the San Juan Islands. In his final years, Don and Ruth relocated to Carefree, AZ, near son David and finally to the La Siena residence in Phoenix. He read widely and enjoyed opera and classical music. A brilliant member of the Greatest Generation, Don is remembered as a respected leader in aviation, a generous father, good friend, and devoted husband.

A memorial in celebration of Don's life will be held at the Auburn Library in Auburn, CA on August 14 at 11 AM. Please contact daughter Elizabeth at ElizabethFrancis2@gmail.com for more information. Ruth can be reached at Stoneybrook Assisted Living; 4650 SW Hollyhock Circle, Apt. 105; Corvallis, OR 97333.