

Biographies

Excellence in Aviation Awards recipients 2011

Colonel Buzz Aldrin, USAF retired

Since retiring from NASA and the Air Force, Col. Aldrin has remained at the forefront of efforts to ensure America's continued leadership in human space exploration. He devised a master plan for missions to Mars – the "Aldrin Mars Cycler" – a spacecraft transportation system with perpetual cycling orbits between Earth and Mars. Dr. Aldrin has received three US patents for his rocket systems and schematics.

Buzz Aldrin was born in Montclair, New Jersey on January 20, 1930. His mother, Marion Moon, was the daughter of an Army Chaplain. His father, Edwin Eugene Aldrin, was a Colonel in the Air Force, a Sc.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and an aviation pioneer.

Buzz graduated from the US Military Academy at West Point and joined the Air Force where he flew F86 Sabre Jets in 66 combat missions in Korea, shot down two MIG-15's, and was decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross. He earned his Doctorate of Science in Astronautics at MIT and wrote his thesis on Manned Orbital Rendezvous.

Selected by NASA in 1963 into the third group of astronauts, Aldrin was the first with a doctorate and became known as "Dr. Rendezvous." The docking and rendezvous techniques he devised for spacecraft in Earth and lunar orbit became critical to the success of the Gemini and Apollo programs, and are still used today.

In 1966, on the Gemini 12 orbital mission, Buzz performed the world's first successful spacewalk, overcoming prior difficulties experienced in all American and Russian extra-vehicular activity (EVA), and set a new EVA record of 5 ½ hours.

Then, on July 20, 1969, Buzz and Neil Armstrong made their historic Apollo 11 moonwalk, becoming the first two humans to set foot on another world. They spent 21 hours on the lunar surface and returned with 46 pounds of moon rocks. The largest worldwide television audience – an estimated 600 million people, witnessed this unprecedented heroic endeavor.

Upon returning from the moon, Buzz was decorated with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest American peacetime award. An international goodwill tour followed, where he received numerous distinguished awards and medals from 23 countries. Buzz and his Apollo 11 crew have four "stars" on the renowned Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Dr. Aldrin reaches out to today's youth with his illustrated children's books: *Reaching for the Moon* and *Look to the Stars*, both New York Times best sellers. His 2009 New York Times best selling autobiography, *Magnificent Desolation*, has inspired the lives of readers worldwide. In addition, he has authored two space science-fiction novels: *Encounter with Tiber* and *The Return*. His non-fiction works include the best-seller historical documentary, *Men from Earth*, and an early 1970's autobiography, *Return to Earth*.

His recent turns on *Dancing With The Stars*, *30 Rock*, and *WWE Raw Live* are helping to keep space on the forefront of everyone's minds. His recent trip with President Barack Obama aboard Air Force One to the Space Conference at Kennedy Space Center was testament to how influential his opinions are to the lead decision-makers in Washington.

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Jens K. Neelsen:

Born in Germany in 1945, Jens graduated from the German School of Hotel Management in 1965 and was subsequently known as the youngest hotel general manager in Berlin at age 24, managing the exclusive Hotel Europaeischer Hof. From 1969 to 1974, Jens was an international Hotel and Tourism Consultant in Germany, Yugoslavia, India, Spain, Monaco and the U.S.

In 1975, together with his partners, Jens bought and subsequently managed the Essex House Hotel and Convention Center in Lancaster, CA. It was anticipated that this would be a relatively short term investment, a turnaround acquisition. Fate, however intervened and he ended up serving as the General Managing Partner of the Essex House from 1975 to 2010, growing the Essex House from a small hotel to a full service hotel complete with a Convention Center. In 1975 while managing the Essex House, Jens also founded Nina Ltd. Hotel and Real Estate Development and Management Company.

From 2005 to 2008, Jens served as a Board Member of World Hotels AG Frankfurt, Germany which is a global hotel reservation, sales and marketing company with 500 hotels in 70 countries. Jens is a Lifetime Member of the Global Hoteliers Club, whose membership is limited to hotel executives who have worked on at least three (3) continents.

In 2009, Jens was named a Senior Managing Director of CWC Asset Advisors, Inc. a San Diego based multi-faceted financial and real estate services company.

In September 1993, Jens volunteered to serve as a founder and host of the first Flight Test Historical Foundation "Gathering of Eagles" fund raising dinner to benefit the Air Force Flight Test Center Museum at Edwards Air Force Base. This marked the beginning of a long, close association between Jens and the Flight Test Historical Foundation, with him serving first as a Director and ultimately as a Trustee of the Flight Test Historical Foundation.

During that time, with Jen's help, the Gathering of Eagles is now in its 18th year and has grown from a casual reception to a highly successful annual awards ceremony and symposium attended by the world's greatest test pilots and aviation history enthusiasts from all over the world. Jens tireless efforts, generosity and contributions have greatly helped the Flight Test Historical Foundation realize their goal of building the Air Force Flight Test Center Museum at Edwards Air Force Base and turning it over to the Air Force.

Jens has also been an effective community and civic leader, volunteering his time as Chairman of the Civic Center Site Development Committee for the City of Lancaster, Chairman of the Tourism Bureau, Vice Chairman, Antelope Valley Political Action Committee, Chairman of the Superintendent;s Budget Advisory Committee for the Keppel Union School District, President and Co-Founder of the Keppel Education Foundation, a Member of the Greater Antelope Valley Economic Alliance and served on the Board of Managers for the YMCA, Antelope Valley Chapter.

Jens is married to Monica Neelsen and has two daughters, Nina and Jennifer and a step son Andrew, who is presently serving in the U.S. Army 1st Armored Division in Iraq.

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Robert J. "Bob" Gilliland

Bob Gilliland was born in Memphis, TN in 1926. He joined the Navy and fought in World War II as a fire control operator in gun turrets aboard the USS North Carolina. After the war, he entered the U.S. Naval Academy and graduated in 1949, choosing the Air Force as his new service branch.

After flight training in the T-6 trainers and the F-80, Gilliland was assigned to Europe, where he flew P-47's. During the Korean War, Bob flew combat missions in F-84s and was later stationed in Germany where he flew F-86s.

In 1954, Gilliland left the Air Force and returned to his hometown of Memphis, where he joined the Tennessee Air Guard. There, he flew many aircraft, including the F-104. He was hired by Lockheed in 1960 on the F-104G program and moved to Italy in 1962 as the resident Lockheed test pilot at the Fiat Company. He returned to the Advanced Development Projects (Skunk Works) in 1963 as a test pilot of the A-11 (YF-12A).

Personally selected by Skunk Works President, Kelly Johnson to serve as the Project Test Pilot on the SR-71 "Blackbird", Gilliland made its first flight on December 22, 1964. Departing from Lockheed's Palmdale facility, the SR-71 flew that day for over an hour, reaching speed in excess of 1,000 miles per hour. Bob remained with the SR-71 development program, testing virtually all of the aircraft's systems, until its conclusion. Gilliland was the only pilot to fly all models of the YF-12A and the SR-71. He flew the first flights not only on the SR-71A, but also the SR-71B and the SR-71C. Bob has logged more than 6,500 flying hours and has more time at Mach 2 and Mach 3 than any other man in the world.

On October 24, 1978, Bob along with fellow Lockheed test pilot Darryl Greenmayer, broke the FAI World Restricted Altitude Speed Record at 988.26 miles per hour in a highly modified F-104RB.

For his distinguished aviation career, Bob has been awarded the Kincheloe Award in 1964 by the Society of Experimental Test Pilots and is a Fellow in the Society. He has been named an "Eagle" and a recipient of the Blackbird Laurels Award by the Flight Test Historical Foundation in 1998, has been inducted into the City of Lancaster's Aerospace Walk of Honor, was awarded the 2001 Godfrey L. Cabot by the Aero Club of New England and inducted into the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame in 2010.

Retired from Lockheed, Bob is now involved in various financial ventures including serving as General Manager of DeSoto Oil and Gas Trust of Memphis, Tennessee. He also serves as a Trustee of the Flight Test Historical Foundation and the Association of Naval Aviation.

Because of the highly classified nature of Gilliland's flight test research, fame and recognition came late in his career. Bob's many significant contributions to flight test research helped span the bridge between winged flight and space shuttle launches.

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Frank Robinson

Frank Robinson was born in Carbonado, Washington in 1930. The youngest of four children, he grew up during the Depression. In 1957, he earned a BSME degree from the University of Washington and later attended graduate school at the University of Wichita.

Robinson began his career in 1957 at the Cessna Aircraft Company working on the CH-1 Skyhook helicopter. After 3 1/2 years at Cessna, he spent a year at Umbaugh working on the certification of its gyroplane and then 4 1/2 years at McCulloch Motor Company doing design studies on inexpensive rotorcraft. He spent a year at Kaman Aircraft working on gyrodyne-type rotorcraft, followed by 2 years at Bell Helicopter where he earned a reputation as a tail rotor expert. In 1969, he moved to Hughes Helicopter Company to work on a variety of R&D projects, including a new tail rotor for the Hughes 500 helicopter and the quiet helicopter program.

Unable to interest any of his employers in his concept for a small, low-cost helicopter, Robinson resigned from Hughes and in June of 1973 founded Robinson Helicopter Company (RHC) in his Palos Verdes home. The first R22 prototype was built in a tin hangar at the nearby Torrance Airport and in August of 1975, Robinson flew the R22 on its first flight. In 1979, after 3 1/2 years of testing and technical analysis, the R22 received its FAA Type Certificate. The first R22 was delivered in late 1979 and soon became the world's top selling civil helicopter. The R22 holds the most world records in its weight class including speed and altitude.

In the mid-1980's, Robinson began to develop the four-seat R44 helicopter, which took its first flight in March of 1990. FAA certification was received in late 1992, and deliveries began in 1993. As popularity of the R44 grew, Robinson expanded the R44 product line to include the Newscopter, and the specially equipped Police helicopter. In 2002, the Raven II, an R44 with a fuel injected engine was introduced and the R44 quickly became the company's best-selling helicopter. By the end of 2010, more than 5,000 R44 helicopters had been delivered worldwide.

Preliminary designs for a five-place Turbine helicopter began in 2001, but it was in 2005 that engineering began in earnest after Robinson reached an agreement with Rolls Royce to develop the RR300 turbine engine. Five years later, on October 25, 2010, Robinson's R66 Turbine received FAA certification. The first R66 was delivered in November of 2010 and by December 31, 2010, the company had accumulated a backlog of more than 100 orders.

Robinson has logged many hours in the R22 and R44 helicopters. He is a Member of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots and a Fellow of the American Helicopter Society. His accomplishments have been recognized on magazine covers and with numerous awards and honors.

Robinson's honors include the Igor I. Sikorsky International Trophy in both 1990 and 1991, The Laurels Awards from Aviation Week in 1992, the Dr. Alexander Klemin Award by the American Helicopter Society in 1993, the James H. Doolittle Award from the Society of Experimental Test Pilots in 1997 for Outstanding Professional Accomplishment in Aerospace Technical Management and Engineering, Entrepreneur of the Year in 1998 from Ernst and Young, and the Laurels Hall of Fame "Legend" from Aviation Week in 2000.

In August 2010, with FAA certification of the R66 eminent, Robinson announced his retirement as President and Chairman of Robinson Helicopter. Since 1988 Robinson Helicopter Company has manufactured more helicopters than any other helicopter manufacturer in the world.