

# NAA NEWS

National Aeronautic Association



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## **SEVEN PEOPLE CAPTURE NAA ELDER STATESMAN AWARD**

Five men and two women have been added to the roster of distinguished Americans named by the National Aeronautic Association (NAA) as Elder Statesmen of Aviation for the year 2001. They were selected for their outstanding contributions to the art, sport and science of aviation and space flight and will be honored in a special ceremony in Crystal City, Virginia, on November 5, 2001.

The 2001 recipients are: Arthur E. Abney of Springfield, Illinois; Robert A. Champine of Newport News, Virginia; Jerrie Cobb of Sun City Center, Florida; R. Richard Heppe of Solvang, California; Raymond J. Johnson of Prescott, Arizona; Elinor Smith of Santa Cruz, California; and Mr. Albert L. Ueltschi of Flushing, New York.

The winners were chosen by a select panel of NAA members and represent a broad cross section of disciplines within the aerospace industry. Each person has a unique story to tell, but all have one thing in common: the world of flying machines has been both their profession and the consuming passion of their lives--in some cases from youth. Six of the seven are experienced pilots.

NAA established the award in 1954 "to honor outstanding Americans who by their efforts over a period of years have made contributions of significant value to aeronautics." Over the past 47 years, NAA has recognized and honored more than 200 men and women for their contributions to America's aerospace leadership. Past Elder Statesmen include such notables as Igor Sikorsky, James H. Doolittle, Dr. Paul Garber, Olive Ann Beech, Sen. Barry Goldwater, Clarence L. "Kelly" Johnson, Marjorie C. Stinson, Paul H. Poberezny and Charles L. "Chip" Collins. Candidates for Elder Statesman must be U.S. citizens at least 60 years old who have been actively identified with aerospace activities for at least 15 years.

The 2001 honorees are:

1. Arthur E. Abney of Springfield, Illinois. Director of Public Affairs for American Airlines for 21 years (1961-1982), Mr. Abney is a former Navy pilot who went to work for the Illinois Department of Aeronautics after World War II while attending law school at night. During the 1950s, when Illinois experienced an unusually high number of general aviation accidents, Mr. Abney established or contributed to a variety of state programs aimed at improving air safety. These included refresher courses for registered pilots, educational films, training for pilots in how to turn away from unexpected bad weather, support of the Civil Air Patrol, classes on instrument flying, and a program for passengers in small planes on how to land an aircraft if the pilot becomes incapacitated. Mr. Abney also promoted development of local airports; when he left state employment in 1961, no pilot flying over Illinois was more than 30 miles from a hard-surfaced, lighted runway. Since his retirement from American Airlines, Mr. Abney has taught aviation law at Southern Illinois University.

2. Robert A. Champine of Newport News, Virginia. Another Navy pilot who served during World War II, Mr. Champine claims the distinction of having flown 11,300 hours in at least 155 different aircraft, helicopters, gliders, and other devices during 56 years as a private, professional, and military aviator. For over half of that time he worked as a test pilot for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) and its successor agency, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). In 1948, he became the 6th man to break the sound barrier in NACA's XS-1 research vehicle. Subsequently, he tested fighter aircraft sent for evaluation to NACA's Langley facility in Virginia by the Air Force and Navy. Beginning in 1958, when NACA became NASA, Mr. Champine helped develop the selection process for astronauts during the early days of the space program. He himself qualified as an astronaut, except he was too tall to fit in the Mercury capsule. Instead of going into space, he flew simulated landing missions of the Lunar Excursion Module. He also participated in research on vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) systems. He retired in 1979 but continued flying as a private pilot until 1995.

3. Jerrie Cobb of Sun City Center, Florida. A lady who grew up with airplanes, Ms. Cobb learned to fly at age 12 in a Waco bi-wing, was barnstorming around the Midwest four years later, and went on to such jobs as pipeline patrol, charter flying, crop dusting, flight instruction, and ferry piloting. Qualified in 1959 by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as America's first female astronaut, Ms. Cobb never made it into space due to the agency's decision the following year to suspend astronaut training for women. Ms. Cobb then said goodbye to Uncle Sam and departed for South America, where she flew humanitarian missions in the Amazon basin for a remarkable 38 years, earning numerous honors in the process, including the Harmon Trophy in 1973, the Bishop Wright Air Award in 1979, and nomination for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1981. Still ready to climb into a spacecraft today if NASA will sign her up, Ms. Cobb has been touted by news media in recent years as the logical candidate to duplicate John Glenn's "senior citizen" trip on the Space Shuttle.

4. R. Richard Heppe of Solvang, California. With two undergraduate degrees (mechanical engineering and aeronautics) and one masters degree (aeronautical engineering) on his resume, Mr. Heppe can truthfully say there isn't much about airplanes he doesn't know. It also helps that he was employed by Lockheed Aircraft Corporation for 41 years (1947-1988). There, he did pioneering work in supersonic flight as a technician on the world's first Mach 2 aircraft, the F-104, which debuted in 1954. He later did work in antisubmarine warfare as leader of the team that designed the S-3A Viking aircraft during the early 1970s. In 1974, he was elected a vice president of Lockheed. In the early 1980s, as a key player at Lockheed's "Skunk Works," he helped put the F-117A Nighthawk into production. Following his promotion to president of the company in 1984, he led the Lockheed team that performed preliminary design of the F-22 Advanced Tactical Fighter, a program to which he continued contributing as a consultant after retiring in 1988. Among other projects in which he participated at Lockheed are the XF-90, YC-130, P-3A Orion, L-1011 Tristar, CP-140 Aurora, and various helicopters.

5. Raymond J. Johnson of Prescott, Arizona. If any one word characterizes Mr. Johnson's involvement in aviation over the years, that word is education. Currently serving as chairman of NAA's Aviation Education Committee and as president of the Education Commission of the Federation Aéronautique Internationale (FAI), Mr. Johnson has devoted himself to promoting aviation through numerous organizations both in the United States and elsewhere. After serving in the Army Air Corps during World War II, he took up a 34-year career (1960-1994) in Chicago as manager of the local office of the Illinois Division of Aeronautics. In that capacity, he worked with the Illinois Wing of the Civil Air Patrol and developed a plan to help teachers introduce aviation in public schools. In 1965, he organized the first CAP Cadet Flight Encampment, which has continued annually ever since and is now named the Raymond J. Johnson Flight Encampment. To date, this project has enabled over 1,800 cadets to complete their solo flight. Mr. Johnson is an active pilot, with airplane, glider, and balloon ratings. Among the many volunteer positions he has held related to flying was president of the Balloon Federation of America, where he designed a Pilot Achievement program to encourage members to upgrade their piloting skills. He presently sits on the board of the Soaring Society of America. He has also written extensively about aviation, serving as general editor of the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Aviation & Space* and as aerospace editor of the *Young People's Science Encyclopedia*.

6. Elinor Smith of Santa Cruz, California. Ms. Smith took to the air as a teenager and has remained in the cockpit, at least figuratively speaking, to the present day. She soloed in 1926 at the age of 15 and three months later set an altitude record of 11,889 feet in a Waco 9. The following year, she became the youngest licensed pilot on record at age 16. In 1928, she made headlines by flying under New York City's four East River bridges. In 1929, the Irving Chute Company hired her to fly a Bellanca Pacemaker on a 6,000-mile tour of the United States. During that trip, she performed the first mass parachute drop of its kind (seven men). The following year, while still 18, she became the youngest pilot ever granted a Transport License by the U.S. Department of Commerce. That same year, she was chosen by her fellow pilots as the "Best Woman Pilot in America" (Jimmy Doolittle was chosen as the best male pilot). During the Depression, she flew as a stunt pilot for motion pictures, air shows, and charity events. Through her connections with the Air Force Association she had the opportunity to fly T-33 trainers and C-119 transports. Earlier this year, at age 89, she was invited by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to fly Raytheon's experimental Beechcraft Bonanza for a documentary film on "Flight Control Breakthroughs." Ms. Smith has also been featured in a PBS program on "Daredevils and Dreamers."

7. Albert L. Ueltschi of Flushing, New York. Another teenager who fell in love with flying, Mr. Ueltschi soloed at age 16 and managed to save up enough money (\$3,500) to buy an open-cockpit airplane to set himself up in business as a flight instructor and barnstormer before heading off for college. In 1941, he joined Pan American Airways as a pilot, and eventually won the job of flying Pan Am's founder, the late Juan Trippe, in a company plane on business trips. While working for Trippe, he discovered that executive pilots did not have access to the same caliber of training that airline pilots received, so Mr. Ueltschi started his own training company, Flight Safety, at LaGuardia Airport in 1951. For the next 17 years, while still flying for Pan Am, he built up the company to the point where he was able to take it public in 1968. Today, Flight Safety International is the largest aviation training firm in the world. The company celebrated its 50th birthday this year by opening a site in Texas with 16 flight simulators. Another undertaking close to Mr. Ueltschi's heart is Project ORBIS, a nonprofit airborne hospital that travels around the world to teach eye doctors in underdeveloped countries. Thus far, more than 10,000 physicians have benefited from instruction by ORBIS personnel. Mr. Ueltschi has assisted the Project with numerous tasks, including the conversion of a DC-10 into a clinic and training facility. In 1994, NAA awarded Mr. Ueltschi its Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy.

NAA is a non-profit, membership organization devoted to promoting public understanding of the importance of aviation and space flight within the United States. As the nation's record keeper, NAA sanctions national and international flights and recognizes the men and women responsible for these accomplishments. In addition to the Elder Statesman of Aviation Award, NAA is also the caretaker for some of the most prestigious awards within the aerospace community, including the Collier and Wright Brothers trophies, both of which reside in the National Air & Space Museum.

For more information about NAA and its mission, visit our website at [www.naa-usa.org](http://www.naa-usa.org).