

AN OBITUARY- Major General Donald J Strait

We have received the following affectionate life story from the family of one of our American friends. To Don Strait Martlesham Heath was always very dear to his heart. Those young American boys learned to fly in the usually clear blue skies of Georgia only to arrive in England and our notorious maritime climate. As Don, often said, "It made men of us."

He was always a great friend of the members of Martlesham Heath Aviation society and appreciated our commitment to always remember those epic years. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Don and his comrades.

Don made several trips over here to Martlesham Heath in the autumn of his life. He would always stay with Robert and Rita Dunnett saying, "please make sure that 'gal Rita makes me an English trifle!"

Donald Jackson Strait, AKA Don, Dad, Grampy, Ace, The Tiger, and always "The General," died at home with his family on Monday, March 30, 2015. Though he passed peacefully he tried his best to postpone the event. He wanted to go to the United States Capital May 20 ceremony to receive his Congressional Gold Medal, and of course to usher in another Yankee season.

Born April 28, 1918, in East Orange, N.J., he packed his 96 years with successes and honors whether on the Verona High School baseball team, in the U.S. Air Force, Fairchild Industries, every golf course he teed up on, or in his personal life.

Don married beautiful Louise Lyon in 1945. Their marriage of 55 years, till Louise's death in 2001, produced three children, six grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. He made sure his children's education exceeded his high school degree and saw them graduate from college and graduate school. He did the same for his grandchildren and attended their graduations as well.

He mentored aspiring airmen, baseball players, golfers, builders, etc. They were good. He told them they could be better. He worked to be the best and wanted them to do the same.

Enlisting in the 119th Observation Squadron Army Air Corp in 1940, he earned his wings and commission in three years. Assigned to the 361st Fighter Squadron and 356th Fighter Group stationed at Martlesham Heath, England, Don piloted the P-47 and P-51 fighters. His drive to be the best scored him the honour of Top Ace of the Group, having downed 13 1/2 German aircraft during 122 combat missions. On one of those missions he earned the Silver Star.

After World War II Don rose to the rank of major general while serving in the New Jersey Air National Guard and became its commander. He graduated from the Air War College, and President Eisenhower appointed him deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force Reserve and ROTC. He went back to active duty for the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Berlin Crisis (flying the RF-84F Thunderstreak).

The general entered civilian life in 1968 after 38 years serving his country. As vice president of Fairchild Industries he applied his piloting experience and aviation knowledge to the development of the A-10 fighter bomber.

Finally, retirement from Fairchild freed The General to command the golf course. In 1981 he and Louise settled in Foxfire, where he joined the National Country Club, was a two-time Moore County Senior Champion, maintained a single digit handicap, and at age 95 still played a few holes now and then.

Online condolences may be made at www.bolesfuneralhome.com.

