

OBITUARIES

Capt. William Stuyvesant, 69; pioneering naval helicopter pilot

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Capt. William R. Stuyvesant, a retired U.S. Navy pilot whose passion for flying earned him the nickname "Mr. Helicopter," has died of complications following surgery. He was 69.



Capt. Stuyvesant

A Coronado resident in his later years, Capt. Stuyvesant was among the first to fly helicopters for the U.S. Navy. Once rejected as too short to be a pilot, he prevailed through 4,000 flight hours aboard 59 different kinds of helicopters during a military career

that spanned three decades and led him from California to Florida, Texas, Washington, Korea and Vietnam.

"The guy was a natural, absolutely a natural," said his longtime friend and fellow Navy helicopter pilot, retired Capt. Bud Reynolds of Pensacola, Fla. "His entire life was dedicated to the improvement of the helicopter."

Capt. Stuyvesant was born on Long Island, N.Y., in 1926, just a year before Charles Lindbergh's famed trans-Atlantic flight. He dreamed of flying early on.

"My grandma said, 'Since he could talk, he always talked about flying,'" said his daughter, Patricia Crossno of San Marcos.

In 1943, when Capt. Stuyvesant first tried to enlist in the Navy's V-12 flight-training program, he was turned down because he was

only 5 feet 4 inches tall — 2 inches too short.

Undaunted, he applied to a special wartime program known as V-5 and was accepted three weeks after turning 17.

"We learned to fly in open cockpit biplanes, and I realized I had found a home — even in the dead of winter with a 70- to 80-knot slipstream ventilating the cockpit," Capt. Stuyvesant wrote in a 1994 letter to a former teacher, describing a training course in Illinois.

Graduating in 1947 as a naval aviator, he was accepted into the newly created aviation midshipman program and sent to San Diego, where he became the first "flying midshipman" assigned to a Pacific Fleet squadron.

Capt. Stuyvesant started out as a fighter pilot, flying propeller aircraft and later the early jet fighters.

In 1952, Capt. Stuyvesant volunteered for a new helicopter unit, which made its first operational flights out of Ream Field in Imperial Beach.

"He liked the helicopters because they were new and original," said Crossno, his daughter.

Capt. Stuyvesant saw combat in Korea and Vietnam. In Korea, he headed the helicopter detachment aboard two battleships. In Vietnam, he served aboard the helicopter carrier Tripoli.

He received several awards, including the Legion of Merit, the Navy Commendation Medal for combat duty and the Combat Action Ribbon.

Capt. Stuyvesant earned two degrees while in the Navy: a bachelor's in transportation management from UCLA and a master's in business from the Naval Postgraduate

School.

Capt. Stuyvesant's short stature did not affect his skills as a helicopter pilot. But he flew propped up by cushions and with the rudder pedals adjusted for his height. This became a running joke with his 6-foot friend Reynolds, who sometimes flew the same helicopter.

"He would come out with two cushions behind him, rudder pedals all the way out. And I could hardly get into the bloody thing," Reynolds recalled.

After retiring from the Navy in 1974, Capt. Stuyvesant went to work in Connecticut for Sikorsky Aircraft, the helicopter manufacturer, spending 16 years with the company.

The company transferred him to Coronado in 1984, naming him West Coast marketing manager.

He lived there with his wife of 48 years, Betty, until shortly before his death. Their house is filled with plaques, helmets, patches, helicop-

ter blades and other mementos of his love for flying.

Capt. Stuyvesant remained active in the Naval Helicopter Association, which he helped found and at one time headed. He also was a member of the Tailhook Association, the Association of Naval Aviation, and the Marine Corps Aviation Association.

Besides his wife, Betty, and daughter Patricia, Capt. Stuyvesant is survived by two daughters, Susan Jamison of Pensacola, Fla., and Mary Stuyvesant of Los Angeles, a son, Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Stuyvesant of Alexandria, Va., and seven grandchildren.

Capt. Stuyvesant will be buried at sea. A memorial service is scheduled for 3 p.m. Wednesday at the North Island Naval Air Station Chapel. Donations may be made to the NHA Scholarship fund, Coronado, or the Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, NAS, Pensacola, Fla.