

Eulogy John Fuller – February 18, 2012

John Emery Fuller was born in the Catskill Mountains in Fleischmanns, NY on December 31, 1920. He was a born and bred mountain boy and was an expert skier and woodsman.

John probably should have spent a little more time indoors studying. When he was in 5th grade his parents had to persuade his teacher to pass him. The teacher's husband worked at the same bank that John's father managed. John later learned that he had received a "conditional" acceptance into the 6th grade because his father influenced the teacher.

John demonstrated his engineering prowess while he was in junior high. He discovered a connection to the class bell under the floorboard adjacent to his school desk. He would push his heel down on the floorboard, the class bell would ring, and the teacher would dismiss the kids.

John attended Michigan State University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and earned an engineering degree, with honors, at the Bridgeport Engineering Institute.

In 1942 he married Bette Cruickshank and they adopted a son, James, who died 5 years ago.

John started his engineering career with Sikorsky Helicopter Company in Stratford, CT and worked in the aerospace industry for the next 50 years until he retired in 1991.

He and Bette moved to California in 1978 hoping that the climate would help Bette, who suffered from Multiple Sclerosis for 30 years. John's last employment was with Northrop-Grumman who recruited him as a group engineer for its B-2 Stealth Bomber Project. Testing of the B-2's avionics took place at Edwards Air Force Base during late night and early morning hours when the test airplane—a plane similar to a Boeing 737—would not be observed by Russian satellites.

The plane was located about 100 yards from the hangar. One dark and freezing winter night, John was working alone in the rear of the plane. A guard entered the plane and hollered, "Anybody here?"

As many of you know, John's hearing was not the best, so he failed to respond and the guard proceeded to lock the plane's entry door. When John finished his task he returned to the front of the plane and found the exit locked. After numerous attempts to find a way out, John went to the cockpit and used the method of last resort—he pulled the emergency escape lever and blew the door off. It landed on the tarmac with a huge clatter.

John descended the rope ladder and as he reached the tarmac, two MPs grabbed him and took him back to the hangar for interrogation.

All's well that ends well. Fortunately, John's boss was on site and John was released as soon as the MPs completed their report. It took a couple of weeks for Northrop to secure a new door assembly from one of the aircraft bone-yards and install it.

Thereafter, John was affectionately referred to as the "Door Man."

John loved innovation. In 2000, he received a letter of appreciation from the Department of the Navy for his 50 years of "dedication and hard work" during a career in aeronautical engineering.

After Bette's death, John married Kevin Mary Hannigan and they moved into Kevin's Mother's Leisure World manor in 1992. He commenced 20 years of non-stop volunteering and was selected as the Historical Society's Honoree for January, 2001. At that event Bert Posthill, the Society's Honoree for March, 2003, saluted John with these words:

"I think it was Leonardo da Vinci who was asked to decide which of several machines was the most efficient. His response was very illuminating—he chose the one that made the least noise! There you have it—John Fuller fits that bill to a tee. He is very effective and efficient and he does it without any fuss and bother. It's very deceptive—people don't realize how much he's doing since he accomplishes things without making any noise. John is so unassuming and quiet about his activities that most of us are unaware of all the things he has done."

For several years John was the head usher at the early service in this church. Gil Edler and I served under him. Some members of this congregation would arrive would have a frown on their face as we ushered them to their seat. As they sat, we would whisper, “This is National Grouch Week. Please refrain from smiling.”

It was after one of those services that John quietly said, “Bob, I could use some help at the Historical Society.” The next thing I knew, I became the editor of the Historian and president of the Society. This is just another illustration of John getting the job done.

The Sunday before John came home from the Covington, I spent two hours with him. During those two hours John told me more about his adventures in life than I had heard during the ten years of our friendship. In spite of his macular degeneration, John was a voracious reader. For the last few years, he depended on books on tape. He rarely complained in spite of the balance problems which caused him to lose his independence.

Those of us who knew John describe him as: quiet, terrific, solid, diplomatic and generous with his time.

On his last day, I held John’s hand and said, “Auf Weidersehen, good friend. We have been blessed by your presence!”

Bob Ring