

Remember Chuck Yeager

I was saddened to learn of the death of Gen. Chuck Yeager yesterday, at the age of 97. His was a long life well lived.

At the end of January 1968, Yeager and his squadron deployed to Osan AFB Korea, where I was stationed. This was a decade before Tom Wolfe made his name a household word, but everyone in the Air Force knew who he was, and what he had accomplished. I can't say that I knew him (he certainly didn't know me), but I saw him swagger around base, brash, crude, and irreverent.

Despite his ego and attitude, his men loved him. He was a true leader, who commanded from in front, not behind. He would never send anyone on a mission he wouldn't fly himself. He was not much taller than I, but towered over me, larger than life.

A dozen years later, I ran into him at the Watsonville CA Fly-In. I was flying my beloved Beechcraft, and he an ultralight. When questioned about it, he said it was the only plane of his that he ever actually owned.

He was once the airshow announcer when Bob Hoover performed his famous energy management routine in the Shrike Commander. As usual Hoover, with both engines caged and both props feathered, glided into a low pass, a go-around, a touchdown on first one main, then the other, a proper landing, rolled to a stop in front of the reviewing stand, got out, and waved his straw hat to the crowd. Cocky as ever, Yeager said over the loudspeaker "Ladies and gentlemen, let's hear it for the world's second greatest pilot!"

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Submitted via Virtual Newsroom