

## Frank Heilesen, 91 ↓

**SANTA ROSA, CA** – Frank Heilesen was born in Harlan, the first of six children of Frank and Mabel (Berg) Heilesen. Frank grew up on a Danish-American farm during the Great Depression. He began his life as a farm kid, caring for the family plow horses among his many chores. He ended his career as a flight engineer caring for TWA's 747 aircraft. As a high school graduate in 1939 when World War II was developing in Europe, Frank and his father decided he should attend aircraft mechanics school to avoid "slogging through the mud" as his



father had done as a doughboy in World War I. He joined the Navy in 1942, but wasn't called up until 1943. He spent the interim working for North American Aviation in Kansas City, MO, test flying the B-25 Mitchell bombers as they came off the assembly line. Of all the aircraft he flew in his life, the B-25 was his favorite, but he felt he was fortunate not to have died in the effort. He spent his naval career in the Midwest as an Aviation Cadet and mechanic. He liked to say he spent three years in the Navy and never saw an ocean, or a lake.

Hired by TWA in October 1945, he was based first in Burbank, CA then San Francisco, CA where he met and married Betty, a widow with a young daughter, Nancy, in 1951. Diane and Frank were added to the family before they moved to the "Flying 'H' Ranch" in Sebastopol in 1957. Active in the Sebastopol Methodist Church, and a leader in Twin Hills 4-H Club, Frank was also responsible for building Fircrest Gardens Mobile Home Park in the mid 1960's. Frank's career as a flight engineer took him throughout the U.S., Europe and Asia, flying Constellations, Boeing 307, 707 and 747 jetliners as a flight engineer, co-pilot and international reserve officer. He flew for the U.S. government during the Vietnam War under the Military Air Command. His retirement in 1984, after 39 years of flying, saw him further exploring the world through travel. He was a member of the Pacific Coast Air Museum and helped with the annual "Wings Over Wine Country" air show. He supported the efforts of the group to preserve aviation history and aircraft. He never lost his interest in aircraft engines and operation. Frank died Palm Sunday, March 24, 2013, in Santa Rosa, CA, at age 91.

Frank was preceded in death by his wife Betty Jane in 1977, and four siblings, Donald and Richard Heilesen, Bette Sorenson and Caryl West of Harlan. He is survived by his son Frank (Alison), Santa Rosa, daughters Diane Heilesen, Forestville, Nancy Sandborn (Chip), Graton; granddaughters Mariah and Faith Sandborn, Graton, Amanda Williams (Trond), Portland, Lisa Maassen, Portland; great-grand-children Kellen and Anna Williams; sister Evelyn Plumb, Kansas City; and numerous nieces and nephews. A Celebration of Life will be held April 14, 2013 between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. at John Ash & Co Vintner's Inn Event Center, Cypress Room at 4350 Barnes Rd., Santa Rosa, CA. Memorial donations may be made to the Pacific Coast Air Museum, Santa Rosa [www.pacificcoastairmuseum.org/giving](http://www.pacificcoastairmuseum.org/giving) or Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, IA [www.danishmuseum.org](http://www.danishmuseum.org).