



Veteran of the Month April 2003

Congratulations to John Welch!

John F. Welch was born near Baileyville, Kansas in 1920, the eldest of twelve children. He attended one room country schools, graduated from high school in 1937, went through a normal training course and taught school in 1939-40. In 1941, John enrolled in Kansas State College to major in mechanical engineering. Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, John volunteered for pilot training and was called to active duty for training in March, 1943.

John graduated as an Army Air Force 2nd Lieutenant, Pilot in February, 1944. He joined the Eight Air Force and flew thirty-five bombing missions in B-17's over Germany, earning the Air Medal with seven Oak Leaf Clusters and other decorations. John returned stateside and joined the Air Transport Command, where he ferried airplanes, attended Instrument Instructor's School and instructed other Air Force pilots in instrument flying. John was placed in the active reserve in November of 1946 and returned to Kansas State College. He married Alberta Doege on September 7, 1948 and they graduated together in May, 1950.

John earned degrees in Mechanical Engineering and Business Administration. He was employed by Beech Aircraft for eight months before being recalled to Active Duty in the Air Force. He was assigned to the Rapid City Air Base where his duties included serving as a Maintenance Officer and a C-47, RB-36 and B-52 pilot. John spent nearly nine years in Rapid City before being sent with his B-52 crew to Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas in January, 1960.

John earned his Masters Degree in Aeronautical Engineering from the Air Force Institute of Technology at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. He was then assigned to the B-58 System Program Office for four years as a Research & Development Engineer. In the spring of 1966, Lt. Col. John Welch was sent to Viet Nam to serve a year as the Air Liaison Officer with the 22nd Division of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam. He commanded Forward Air Controllers, and also flew aerial reconnaissance and directed air strikes. During this year, John flew the O-1 Bird Dog nearly 1,000 hours and added 15 Oak Leaf Clusters to his Air Medal. He earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Legion of Merit as well as a number of Vietnamese decorations.

Upon return from Viet Nam, John returned to the Aeronautical Systems Division of the Air Force Systems Command at Wright-Patterson, where he continued as a Research & Development Engineer in the Short Range Attack Missile Systems Program. He retired in the rank of Colonel on April 30, 1970 and moved his family back to Rapid City. He founded Silver Wings Aviation, Inc. and operated a flying school, air taxi and air ambulance service in addition to professional pilot service in 1987 at the Rapid City Regional Airport. John has the Flight Ratings and more than 15,500 hours of flying time.

John Welch is a registered professional engineer in Ohio and South Dakota. He is a member of the South Dakota and the National Society of Professional Engineers, a member of the Aircraft Owners & Pilots Association and other professional organizations. John is a Charter and Life Member of the Air Force Association, a life member of the DAV, Knights of Columbus, Retired Officers Association, Daedalians and Eighth Air Force Historical Society, the 457th Bomb Group Association, in addition to being a long time member of the 28th Wing Association and the Rapid City Rotary Club.

John accompanied his wife Alberta, a USAF Civil Service employee, to Germany for a three-year tour at Geilenkirchen NATO Air Base for the Air Force. He taught courses for Embry-Riddle Air University, both at Geilenkirchen and at Ellsworth AFB. He also was one of the original authors of Van Sickle's Modern Airmanship, and edited its Fifth through Seventh Editions. John is editor, publisher, writer of Dead Engine Kids, a diary of his B-17 crew's combat tour, and RB-36 Days at Rapid City, Flight Instructor's Pocket Companion and several magazine articles.