

Gunnar Nielsen, 91

July 14, 1925 - Sept. 5, 2016

HARLAN — Gunnar Arne Nielsen was born July 14, 1925 to Kirstine N. (Nielsen) and Mads Ingvard Nielsen in Audubon, and he lived on a farm northwest of Audubon until he was about ten years old. A house fire claimed the family's home and belongs and after living in Audubon for a short time, the family moved to Minden. His father owned a butcher shop in Minden where he worked until his entry in to the service.

July 10, 1943, Gunnar entered the United States Army Air Corp and after basic training he attended schools in different states including Ohio, California and Florida and was eventually trained in aircraft armament and assigned to the 20th Combat Mapping Squadron of the 417th Bombardment Group. He was assigned to Europe but at the last minute was reassigned to the Western Pacific and served in China, Southern Philippines, Luzon and Japan after the Japanese surrender. He served his country honorably and was awarded the Philippines Liberation Ribbon with One Bronze Star and the Good Conduct Medal. Gunnar was honorably discharged on January 23, 1946 as a Staff Sergeant at Ft. Leavenworth, KS. He then enlisted in the United States Air Force Reserves the same day, serving until November 1, 1952.

Gunnar attended trade school at CAL-AERO Technical Institute in Glendale, CA, earning an Airframe/Powerplant Maintenance Certificate, later he also earned his Inspection Authorization Certificate. Gunnar also became a pilot, earning his private pilot's license and in 1955, this earned him his commercial pilot rating. In the 1950's he worked for a period of time at Boeing in Wichita, KS and he also worked for Zekan-Robbins, a company in Harlan, taking aerial farm photographs for a newspaper promotion called "Mystery Farm Photos." He took thousands of photographs and enjoyed his travels with pilots Lawrence and Alvin Rushenberg and became lifelong friends with them. In the early 60's, Gunnar became manager of the Harlan airport and in that same time period met and married Faye Muller and to this union Jeff was born, Gunnar adopted and embraced Pam as his own child. The family relocated to Sioux City, then Storm Lake and eventually returning to the Harlan area after a plane crash near Storm Lake took the life of his employer there. He worked at the airport in Harlan and eventually became manager for a second time in 1983. Later he went to the Atlantic airport and was Director of Maintenance for Trojan Flying Service with Bob Pettis. Gunnar really thought a lot of "Mr. Bob" and his wife Pat and worked with them for several years.

Gunnar retired but continued to visit the airport daily and did maintenance on aircraft occasionally up until the time he was not physically able to do so. Gunnar was recently awarded the Charles Taylor Master Mechanic Award from the FAA, an award which recognizes the lifetime accomplishments of senior mechanics. Over his lifetime he rebuilt many airplanes and those in the aviation world knew his commitment to doing things correctly and his love of aviation.

Gunnar enjoyed the yearly flight breakfasts and also attending the Carstens Farm Days and reminiscing about the days gone by. Although Faye and Gunnar had gone their separate ways their friendship continued, one thing they especially enjoyed was their restaurant visits Saturday evenings. Gunnar died on September 5, 2016 attaining the age of ninety-one years, one month, and twenty-two days.

Gunnar is preceded in death by his parents; sisters Dagny Nielsen, Gudrun Mucha, Edith Allen, Betty Lund; granddaughter Tonia Geary. He is survived by his son Jeff Nielsen of Harlan; grandsons Jason Nielsen of Harlan; Jacob Nielsen of Irwin; daughter Pam (Hulsebus) Marchant of Mountain Home, ID; grandsons Darcy Geary and his wife Norine of Homedale, ID; Brandon Hildebrand and his wife Leslie of Rexburg, ID; ten great-grandchildren; one great-great grandchild; former wife Faye Nielsen of Harlan; nieces and nephews; and many friends.



Pauley Jones
FUNERAL HOME & CREMATION

(712) 755-3135 • (800) 831-6805

www.pauleyjones.com

Baldwin at 9th, Harlan, IA
1304 N. Sawmill Rd., Avoca, IA