

## Peter Wright Sr dies at 90



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Peter Wright Sr., in his time a Naval Aviator, Flying Tiger, helicopter pioneer and founder of the American Helicopter Museum, died June 1 at Bryn Mawr, Pa. He was 90 years old.

Wright was best known as the founder and chairman emeritus of Keystone Helicopter, as a highly decorated combat airman from the famed American Volunteer Group, the Flying Tigers, of World War II, and as a major figure in the development of the commercial helicopter industry.

He was deeply involved in aviation for more than 66 years. After attending Yale University for two years, he joined the Navy and graduated from the Naval Flight School at Pensacola in 1940. He embarked as a dive-bomber pilot aboard the aircraft carriers Ranger, Wasp and Yorktown prior to World War II. In 1941, he resigned from the Navy to join the American Volunteer Group, popularly known as the Flying Tigers. He served in China, flying P-40s against the Japanese, until the AVG disbanded in July 1942. He left China with the rank of major and with a large number of combat decorations.

Upon returning to the United States, he started flying for American Export Airlines, based at New York's La Guardia Airport. He flew Sikorsky VS-44 four-engine flying boats across the Atlantic, as well as Navy PBM twin-engine flying boats and Air Force C-54s. He also served as a part-time production test pilot of General Motors-built Wildcat Navy fighters – FM-2s – at Eastern Aircraft, near Trenton, N.J.

In 1946 Wright joined Helicopter Air Transport as sales manager. Based at Camden, N.J., HAT was the world's first commercial helicopter operating company. It bought the first three commercial Bell 47s, as well as the first three commercial Sikorsky S-51s. It was during his stint there that he sold the first recorded helicopter geophysical oil exploration project, carried out in the marshes of Louisiana for a major oil company.

After becoming involved in military sales for Piasecki Helicopter Co. (now Boeing Helicopters), he founded Keystone Helicopter Corp. near Philadelphia in 1953 and served as its president until 1985, when he became chairman. In 1955 he founded and became director of Helicol in Bogota, Columbia which, within five years, became the largest commercial helicopter operating company in South America. In 1958 he founded Helicopters Keystone de Guatemala, which did geophysical work in the jungles of that country. In 1993 he was one of the founders of the American Helicopter Museum and Education Center at West Chester, Pa., and was chairman of that impressive place, America's only real vertical flight museum.