

Obituary for Major Robert A. Wyckoff



With great sadness, the family shares that Major Robert Appleby Wyckoff passed away in Santa Barbara County, California, the morning of December 2, 2023, at age 83.

Bob would consider us remiss if we did not start this writing with some irony and close it with a sense of pride. The trajectory of his life was changed by a typo. As a graduate from Colgate University with a degree in English Literature, and as the cold war was heating up, he chose to enlist in the United States Air Force. He abbreviated his degree as “Eng,” which was misinterpreted as “Engr” by the Air Force, and he was assigned to an engineering position in ballistic missiles. He was dispatched to Malmstrom Air Force Base, MT, to defend our great nation as a combat crew commander, missileer. While at Malmstrom, he earned a master’s degree in Systems Management from USC. He continued his missileer career at Randolph AFB, TX, and Vandenberg AFB, CA. To his credit, Bob was smart enough to learn engineering, engaging enough to become a leader, and loving enough to be the quintessential family man until his last breath.

After retiring from the Air Force as a Major in 1982, Bob had a second career working for base contractors at Vandenberg. He was especially proud of being a liaison between the contractors and the military, contributing to the space shuttle program, and being an honorary squadron commander for the 532nd strategic missile training squadron. He wrote over 100 poems that blended technical knowledge with emotional insight into the demands of military life. His most well-known poem, “Missileer,” was written to become the missileer’s “High Flight” and is still used today in training classes at Vandenberg Space Force Base.

Bob became an avid private pilot, inspiring his wife, Eileen, and their son, Steve, to become pilots so they could all fly their 1948 Chiquita Bonanza. Bob and Eileen were staunch voices in protecting the Lompoc Airport from encroachment, inspiring their daughter to embark on a career in airport planning.

Through the years, he purposefully remained active in the local communities, both civilian and military. He served as an Airport Commissioner for Lompoc Airport and as a member of the Board of Directors for the Vandenberg Village Community Services District for 20 years. He was named Man of the Year for Lompoc Valley Chamber of Commerce in 2007. He also served as the Chairman of the Vandenberg chapter of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) and was a volunteer and Commander of the Santa Barbara County Aerosquadron.

Dad would say that he did all of these things “For duty, honor, country, family, and a matter of self-pride.” And that he did them with Eileen at his side.

Bob was born to Richard Hunt and Alberta Appleby Wyckoff in Newark, NJ, on November 4, 1940. Bob was married to his high school sweetheart, Eileen Hansen Wyckoff, for “sixty one-derful” years. He is survived by Eileen and their two children, Steven Hansen Wyckoff and Lynne Wyckoff Madera; two grandchildren, Skyler Taina Esther Madera and Sixto Robert Madera; Lynne’s husband (Jose) Israel Madera, and Steve’s girlfriend Sarah Quady. Bob was predeceased by his parents and his brother, Richard Hunt Wyckoff, Jr.

A funeral service was arranged for December 12, 2023, at 3pm, at Starbuck-Lind Mortuary Chapel, Lompoc, CA, with military honors. In lieu of flowers, please provide donations to the Central Coast of California American Institute to Aeronautics & Astronautics (AIAA), P.O. Box 5302, Vandenberg SFB, CA 93437, or the section's Pay Pal account at aiaa.centralcoastca@gmail.com. The AIAA, <https://www.aiaa.org/>, is the premier aerospace industry professional 501(c)(3) organization for which Bob was a former chairperson and involved for decades volunteering his time to support its local Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs and Science Fair.