

John Virgil Dirksen



Captain John V. Dirksen, USNR (Ret.), 85, died 13 August 2023 after a long struggle with COPD. John was born in Salem, OR, on 26 October 1937, to Virgil C. and R. Irene (Higginbotham) Dirksen. Following a vagabond childhood, the family settled on a farm in Springdale, OR, where he attended Gresham Union High School, graduating in 1955. He completed a year of prep school and received a Congressional appointment to the Naval Academy, graduating with the Class of 1960. The 13th Company was the Color Company that year and as commander, John chose his fiancée, Marilyn June Moen, as Color Girl. (Their granddaughter, Kaitlyn, wore the Color Girl gown in her 2011 wedding and wears Marilyn's USNA miniature.)

After graduation, John served aboard RADFORD (DDE-446), homeported in Pearl Harbor until 1963. His sons, David Martin (Martin B-26 Marauder) and Douglas Mitchell (B-25 Mitchell), were born in Honolulu, HI.

He served as XO aboard INFLICT (MSO-456) until 1964, and moved to Sasebo, Japan, in 1965 as CO of WARBLER (MSC-206), engaging in Market Time patrols in the South China Sea. The family moved to Malta in 1966, then to London, where he was aide to CinCUSNavEur, Rear Admiral Joe Tibbetts.

John resigned from active duty in 1970, returning to Portland. He served in the Navy Ready Reserve in various assignments for the next 20 years, including Reserve XO and Reserve CO of ROGERS (DD-876), homeported at Swan Island. He retired from the Naval Reserve in 1991. He held executive positions with First Interstate Bank of Oregon, N.A. to coincide with his Reserve duty. John enjoyed volunteering with the Portland Rose Festival Association, holding several leadership positions.

John married Martha in 1985. He retired from Wells Fargo Bank in 1997 when they acquired First Interstate; he enjoyed golf, fishing, antiques, vintage airplanes and reading about military history. They traveled the U.S. and Europe (New York and Paris were favorites). He carried a compass whenever they were abroad, and his sense of direction was impeccable (except for that one time in Venice). In recent years, their travel was limited to Central and Coastal Oregon.

John is survived by Martha, his wife of 37 years; brother, Dave; two sons; five grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren, the youngest of whom he met for the first time the day before he "slipped the surly bonds of earth..."

November-December 2023 Shipmate