

# Gray Eagle Award

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The Gray Eagle Trophy made its first appearance in 1961 during the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Naval Aviation.

In 1959, while serving as Commander in Chief, Allied Forces, Southern Europe, Admiral Charles R. Brown, USN, wrote to the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air), Vice Admiral Robert B. Pirie, USN, telling of certain discussions he had with Vice Admiral George W. Anderson, then serving as Commander, Sixth Fleet. "We suggest that it be determined from official records who, at all times, is the senior aviator in point of service in flying; that a baton or similar token be awarded him, and that, with due ceremony, this symbol be handed on down to the next man with the passing years."

Admiral Pirie took the matter from there. For a time the title "Bull Naval Aviator" was a leading contender for the choice of names for the senior aviator's title. Various cups, statuettes, plaques and medals were proposed. Finally, a competition was conducted between aircraft companies desiring to sponsor the award. The Chance Vought Aircraft Company's (later LTV Corporation, Ling Temco Vought) design was selected and the Gray Eagle Award was brought into reality.

On 5 January 1961, at Naval Aviation's Fiftieth Anniversary Ball, Sheraton Park Hotel, Washington, D.C., Admiral Charles R. Brown received the Gray Eagle Trophy from Admiral James S. Russell, then serving as Vice Chief of Naval Operations.

While Admiral Brown was the first "active" aviator to receive the Trophy, replicas of the award were presented to all previous holders of the distinction, or their representative, during the ceremony. The recipients included Mrs. T. G. Ellyson, widow of Naval

Aviator Number One, Commander Theodore G. Ellyson. Commander Ellyson would have held the Gray Eagle title from 1911 to 1928, if the award had been in existence.

The Trophy, donated by Chance Vought Aircraft (now Ling Temco Vought) depicts a silver eagle landing into the arresting gear of the Navy's first aircraft carrier, *Langley*. The inscription reads: "The Venerable Order of the Gray Eagle. The Most Ancient Naval Aviator on Active Duty. In recognition of a clear eye, a stout heart, a steady hand, and a daring defiance of gravity and the law of averages." Names of those who have held the title, either actively or prior to the 1961 ceremony, are inscribed on the trophy's plaque.

Eligibility for the Gray Eagle Award is determined by the official active duty precedence list for Naval Aviators, on continuous service, not recalled, who has held that designation for the longest period of time. The date of designation as a Naval Aviator is the governing factor for determining who will receive the award from the list of active duty officers. In the event that two or more aviators on active duty have been designated on the same date, the senior one qualified as the Gray Eagle. The award is passed down from the previous holder of the award on his or her retirement, or in case of death. A miniature replica is presented to each incumbent as a personal memento. The Gray Eagle Trophy may be kept in possession of and displayed by the command to which the Gray Eagle is assigned. Otherwise, it may be placed in the custody of the National Museum of Naval Aviation on a temporary basis until required for presentation to the successor. It should be noted that the ceremony date for the presentation of the Gray Eagle Award and the retirement date are not always the same.

## *List of Gray Eagle Award Recipients*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank Upon Retirement or Death</i>	<i>Naval Aviator Number</i>	<i>Date Designated Naval Aviator</i>	<i>Dates as Gray Eagle</i>
Theodore G. Ellyson	CDR	1	2 Jun 1911*	2 Jun 1911–27 Feb 1928
John H. Towers	ADM	3	14 Sep 1911*	27 Feb 1928–1 Dec 1947
George D. Murray	VADM	22	20 Sep 1915	1 Dec 1947–1 Aug 1951
DeWitt C. Ramsey	ADM	45	31 May 1917	1 Dec 1947–1 May 1949
Henry T. Stanley	CAPT	186	17 Dec 1917	1 May 1949–1 Sep 1950
William W. Townsley	CAPT	320	13 Feb 1918	1 Aug 1951–1 Jul 1955
Alvin O. Preil	CAPT	538	11 Mar 1918	1 Jul 1955–1 Jan 1959
Irving M. McQuiston	RADM	905	12 Jun 1918	1 Jan 1959–1 Jul 1959
Alfred M. Pride	VADM	1119	17 Sep 1918	1 Jul 1959–1 Oct 1959
Thomas S. Combs	VADM	3064	21 Dec 1922	1 Oct 1959–1 Apr 1960

The above list of Naval Aviators were designated retroactively following the establishment of the award in 1961.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank Upon Retirement or Death</i>	<i>Naval Aviator Number</i>	<i>Date Designated Naval Aviator</i>	<i>Dates as Gray Eagle</i>
Charles R. Brown	ADM	3159	15 Aug 1924	1 Apr 1960–2 Jan 1962
Frank Akers	RADM	3228	11 Sep 1925	2 Jan 1962–1 Apr 1963
Wallace M. Beakley	RADM	3312	24 Nov 1926	1 Apr 1963–31 Dec 1963
Robert Goldthwaite	RADM	3364	20 May 1927	31 Dec 1963–1 Oct 1965
Richard C. Mangrum	LGEN(MC)	4447	20 May 1929	1 Oct 1965–30 Jun 1967
Fitzhugh Lee	VADM	3512	16 Sep 1929	30 Jun 1967–31 July 1967
Chalres D. Griffin	ADM	3647	6 Jun 1930	31 Jul 1967–1 Feb 1968
Alexander S. Heyward, Jr.	VADM	3867	23 Nov 1931	1 Feb 1968–1 Aug 1968
Robert J. Stroh	RADM	3888	25 Jan 1932	1 Aug 1968–28 Nov 1969
George P. Koch	RADM	4085	2 Jan 1935	28 Nov 1969–31 Jul 1971
Alfred R. Matter	RADM	4164	30 Oct 1935	31 Jul 1971–29 Feb 1972
Francis D. Foley	RADM	4178	1 Feb 1936	29 Feb 1972–29 Jun 1972
Thomas H. Moorer	ADM	4255	12 Jun 1936	29 Jun 1972–30 Jun 1974

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank Upon Retirement or Death</i>	<i>Naval Aviator Number</i>	<i>Date Designated Naval Aviator</i>	<i>Dates as Gray Eagle</i>
Leroy V. Swanson	RADM	5921	9 Dec 1938	30 Jun 1974–29 Aug 1975
Noel A. M. Gayler	ADM	6879	14 Nov 1940	29 Aug 1975–31 Aug 1976
Martin D. Carmody	RADM	10911	22 Jan 1942	31 Aug 1976–27 May 1977
George L. Cassel	RADM	11262	3 Feb 1942	27 May 1977–31 Aug 1977
Henry Wildfang	CWO4(MC)	12766	16 Apr 1942	31 Aug 1977–31 May 1978
Frank C. Lang	MGEN(MC)		12 Mar 1943	31 May 1978–30 Jun 1978
Thomas H. Miller, Jr.	LGEN(MC)		24 Apr 1943	30 Jun 1978–28 Jun 1979
Maurice F. Weisner	ADM		May 1943	28 Jun 1979–31 Oct 1979
Andrew W. O'Donnell	LGEN(MC)		8 Jul 1944	31 Oct 1979–26 Jun 1981
Robert F. Schoultz	VADM			26 Jun 1981–17 Feb 1987
Cecil J. Kempf	VADM			25 Feb 1987–6 June 1987
James E. Service	VADM			6 Jun 1987–21 Aug 1987
Frank E. Peterson, Jr.	LGEN(MC)			21 Aug 1987–15 Jun 1988
Ronald J. Hays	ADM			15 Jun 1988–15 Sep 1988
Robert F. Dunn	VADM			15 Sep 1988–25 May 1989
Huntington Hardisty	ADM			25 May 1989–1 Mar 1991
Jerome L. Johnson	ADM			1 Mar 1991–26 Jul 1992
Edwin R. Kohn	VADM		Jun 1956	26 Jul 1992–1 Jul 1993
Jerry O. Tuttle	VADM			1 Jul 1993–19 Nov 1993
Stanley R. Arthur	ADM			19 Nov 1993–21 Mar 1995
David R. Morris	RADM			21 Mar 1995–

\*Dates qualified for Pilot Certificate under Aero Club of America; Navy Air Pilot numbers were first assigned in January 1915 and Naval Aviator numbers were assigned in January 1918.



*Pilots involved in an encounter with four enemy MiGs while on a mission over North Vietnam in October 1966. Left to right: LCDR C. L. Cook, LTJG W. T. Patton, LT P. F. Russell, LTJG J. W. Wiley and the commanding officer of VA-176, CDR A. R. Ashworth. LTJG Patton was credited with the shoot down of a MiG-17 in his A-1H Skyraider.*