

Merle Eugene Guenther

Mesa - Merle Eugene Guenther passed away December 5th, at age 95. Merle was one of the last veterans from the 4th Marine Division from WW II who served in the south Pacific, mostly seeing action on Iwo Jima where he witnessed the raising of the American flag on Mt. Suribachi.

Merle was born in Hartley, Iowa, in 1923, to Fred and Lavena "Beanie" (nee Jessen, later Erickson) Guenther. Following the War he returned to Iowa before deciding on attending University of California at Berkeley, acquiring a degree in Mechanical Engineering.

He married Evelyn Elizabeth (Allen) on April 3, 1947 in Kansas City, KS. While at Berkeley their first son, Gregg Charles was born in 1950, followed by son Merle Eric born in Glendale, California (1952). Merle's career with NASA projects started in 1952 with his employment at Cal Tech's Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, Calif.

While residing in Tujunga, CA , Merle and Evelyn increased their family with a third son, Cary Kent (1957) and a daughter, Marla Linn (1958).

In 1960 the family relocated to Lancaster, CA, closer to JPL's rocket testing station at Edwards Air Force Base. From 1952 until his retirement in 1983, his duties with JPL (NASA's unmanned space program) were primarily propulsion development and testing for the unmanned space program. Projects included Mariner to Mars, Venus and Mercury (1962-1973), and Surveyor for unmanned soft landings on the moon (1966-68) in preparation for the Apollo missions. Two of Merle's final projects were Voyager 1 & 2, launched in 1977, to study Jupiter and Saturn, and then extended to include Uranus and Neptune. Voyager 2 just recently passed into interstellar space.

While residing in Lancaster, Merle took an active role in Little League baseball, coaching and managing winning Little League and Pony League teams. He received many recognitions for his service to Little League Baseball and as Director of District 51 for many years.

Merle was an avid golfer well into his 80s and recorded some of his best scores competing with his sons. He was still making putts at 95.

Merle and Evelyn have resided in Mesa, AZ since 2000 and most recently had moved to Fellowship Square Independent Living.

Merle was preceded in death by his brother, Gordon and sister, Gwendolyn.

In addition to his wife of 71 years, Evelyn, and his four children, Gregg (Jeanne), Santee, CA; Eric (Sarah), Gig Harbor, WA; Cary (Margarete), Flagstaff, AZ; and Marla (Randy Smith), Poway, CA; he leaves eight grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren, one niece and five nephews.