

Ronald Knecht Obituary

Ronald J. Knecht, Colonel USAF (Ret.) died at home in Nokesville, Virginia, in the early morning of Wednesday, July 9, 2025. He was predeceased by his wife Donna (nee Gaudreau AKS Shirk). He is survived by his daughter, Sonja Knecht-Hoshi, brother, Bernath Knecht, and sister, Rita Knecht.

Ron was born July 17, 1937 at Cadillac, Michigan. He was the son of the late Bernath and Elsie Knecht. His family moved to Worthington, Ohio in 1940. After attending school, including 3 years at the Ohio State University school of engineering, and working in the research department of a tire company he received his draft notice. With his draft board's concurrence Ron enlisted in the Air Force 30 June 1960 and subsequently was selected for the Aviation Cadet program at Harlingen AFB, Texas. He received his navigator wings and was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant 21 September 1961. After completing Electronic Warfare Officer training at Biloxi, Mississippi he was assigned to the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Forbes AFB, Topeka, Kansas, as a crew member flying RB-47H aircraft. He had crew assignments in both the 343rd and 38th squadrons. As part of the unit move and transition to RC-135C aircraft he moved to Offutt AFB, Nebraska in July 1966. He was a QRC operator and instructor and also was a DoD test flight officer for the QRC-259, the first digitally controlled intercept receiver. In February 1970 he transferred to the 6th SW, Eielson AFB, Alaska as a crew member on the RC-135D. In 1972 he was assigned to electronic intelligence (ELINT) data processing and as a project officer to prepare for the bed down of the Cobra Ball II aircraft. In August 1972 he transferred to the 9th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron, 9th SW, Beale AFB, California with responsibility for all computer operations and ELINT processing for the SR-71 program. He also contributed to the design and fielding of a new ELINT system for the SR-71 aircraft.

In July 1975 he was assigned as a staff officer and subsequently led the Reconnaissance Division, Directorate of Plans, Headquarters Strategic Air Command, Offutt AFB, Omaha, Nebraska. This office provided budgetary and planning support for all SAC reconnaissance aircraft and drones. During this assignment he represented SAC in an Air Force-NSA SIGINT study and in the Army-Air Force Reconnaissance Force Mix study and led a follow-on SAC reconnaissance study that examined SAC airborne reconnaissance operations in both nuclear and non-nuclear scenarios. While at Omaha Ron attended Bootstrap at the University of Nebraska graduating with a major in mathematics.

His participation in these studies led to his assignment in July 1978 to the new, congressionally mandated, TENCAP office (Tactical Exploitation of National Space Program Capabilities) at Headquarters United States Air Force, the Pentagon. He subsequently was the chief of this office and then as Chief of Space Operations in the Directorate of Space, Plans and Operations was a key participant in the formation of Space Command. From July 1984 until retirement he was assigned to the Joint Staff with duties as Director, Systems Management Office in the JCS Joint Special Studies Group, Chief, K3, National Security Agency and as a Secretary of Defense chartered

program manager with responsibility for the development and successful fielding of a major joint command and control system.

Ron retired from the Air Force on January 31, 1990 to accept an appointment under President Bush (41) as a non-career member of the Senior Executive Service in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He served as a special assistant to the assistant secretary of defense for command, control, communications and intelligence. He played a key role in the analysis of and subsequent restructuring of defense intelligence, in the formation of the Defense Information Infrastructure initiative and ensured full compliance with the "Truth Bill" pertaining to the release of Vietnam War POW/MIA documentation as set forth by the Senate Select Committee on Prisoners of War/Missing in Action Affairs.

Subsequent to his government service he worked for fifteen years at SAIC, a government contractor, until his retirement.

Ron was awarded numerous awards and decorations during his service to the country to include the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service, the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with six oak leaf Clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters and Vietnam Service Medal with three bronze stars.

Ron was a loving husband and father and following the 2009 loss of his beloved wife of 41 years he moved to Nokesville, Virginia to be near his daughter, Sonja, and son-in-law, Yasumoto Hoshi. He designed and had built an award-winning universal design green home and stayed active with pasture maintenance, hay making, fencing and serving on the board of Rainbow Therapeutic Riding Center, located in Haymarket, Virginia.