



## Wayne E. Koons

1934-2022

Wayne Edwin Koons, 87, a Marine Corps pilot and NASA engineer, passed away May 29, 2022, in Overland Park, Kan. Wayne was born in Lyons, Kan. to Marvin and Fern (Christiansen) Koons, and grew up in Rice County on the family farm. After high school, he attended Ottawa University in Ottawa, Kan., where he earned bachelor's degrees in physics and mathematics.

After his 1956 graduation from college, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps and served on active duty from 1956 to 1961. After graduating flight school, he was assigned to helicopter squadron HMR(L)-262 at Marine Corps Air Station, New River, N.C. He was selected in 1959 as project officer to work with NASA's Space Task Group to develop rescue and recovery procedures for the Project Mercury. He was command pilot of the helicopter that recovered Freedom 7 on May 5, 1961, flown by Commander Alan B. Shepard, Jr., USN, America's first astronaut.

Wayne subsequently left active duty, but continued to serve in the Marine Corps Reserve. In fall 1961, he joined Space Task Group (Landing and Recovery Division) in Houston as its 87th employee. He held management positions in flight operations for Mercury, Gemini and Apollo missions, and in 1969 watched from Mission Control as Apollo 11 landed on the moon.

In 1970, he joined the Space Shuttle project as Manager, Space Shuttle Program Office in the Payloads and Operations Office, and served as Manager, Space Shuttle Orbiter Project Office in the Manufacturing and Test Office for the final four years of his NASA career. He was involved in the approach and landing test flights, and had a front-row seat in Florida for the launch of STS-1 in 1981.

Retiring from NASA in 1983, Wayne moved back to his Kansas hometown to begin a new career as a wheat farmer, returning to his roots. He retired from the Marine Corps Reserve in 1994 as a lieutenant colonel. In 2016, Wayne and his wife, Cynthia, began living full-time in Overland Park, Kan., to spend more time with their family.

Wayne received numerous awards and commendations from the Marine Corps and NASA, and in 2009 he was awarded Ottawa University's lifetime Outstanding Achievement Award. He served on the Lyons school board for eight years, including as president. Active in his church, Wayne was also a member of the Board of Ordained Ministry for the Kansas West Conference of the United Methodist Churches as well as serving in leadership roles in his local church.

A devoted father, Wayne always viewed his most important role as being a good father and role model to his five children, three from his first marriage and two from his marriage to Cynthia (Magill) Koons. He was a hands-on dad, teaching his kids to play baseball, joining them to watch Saturday morning cartoons and cook dad's special breakfasts, making up bedtime stories, and crafting one-of-a-kind birthday cakes (including a Space Shuttle-shaped cake for his small son).

Wayne was preceded in death by his parents, his brother, Fred, and his daughter, Alice. He's survived by his wife Cynthia, children Deborah, Linda, Laura Mullins, and Jeff, and grandchildren Kayla Rueffer and Henry Koons. Wayne and Cynthia would have celebrated their 49th wedding anniversary on June 3. His family plans to hold a memorial service at a later date.

Family and friends will remember this exceptional man with great love and respect. It was a privilege to know him.

For further information and photos from Wayne's life and career:

JSC Oral History / Bio & Interviews:

[https://historycollection.jsc.nasa.gov/JSCHistoryPortal/history/oral\\_histories/KoonsWE/koonswe.htm](https://historycollection.jsc.nasa.gov/JSCHistoryPortal/history/oral_histories/KoonsWE/koonswe.htm)

2016 Leatherneck Magazine article:

<https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/Spacecraft-Recovery-1.pdf>

(There is also a February 1961 article in Leatherneck's archives and a cover story in the May 12, 1961 edition of LIFE Magazine)

The "I've Got a Secret" episode that aired May 10, 1961:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JijUaMXvcL8>

The Landing & Recovery Division website:

<http://www.jonessite.net/upload/LRD/index.htm>

Daughter Deborah's Facebook page contains many public photo albums:

<https://www.facebook.com/debkoons/>