



Al Ciurczak

It is with a sad heart we include the following obituary. Our Founder, President Emeritus, and Friend, Al Ciurczak, passed away yesterday, February 7, 2006.

Born: March 9, 1921 in Elizabeth, New Jersey

Died: February 7, 2006 in Capistrano Beach, California

Alexander Daniel Ciurczak was the second son of Anna Potts and John Ciurczak, having been born in Elizabeth, New Jersey on March 9, 1921. He died a month before his 85th birthday, on February 7, 2006 in Capistrano

Beach, CA. His older brother, Leonard, preceded him in death in 2002, and his younger brother, Daniel, died in childhood.

Alexander enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps as a private in 1938 when he was seventeen and retired years later as a Captain. He was stationed at Mitchel Field in Long Island, NY and met his wife of nearly 60 years, Catherine Anne Frangipane, while they were both working at the base photo lab. Catherine passed away in February 2001.

He saw action during World War II as an aerial gunner and combat cameraman flying in B-24's with the 11th Air Force in the Aleutian Islands. He flew 36 combat missions and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross on two occasions for heroism in aerial flight. He was also awarded the Air Medal and numerous other service awards.

After his tour of duty in the Aleutians, he was stationed in England with a P-38 Photo Recon Squadron. From England, the squadron was shipped to France, then Holland and Belgium, finally ending up in Weisbaden, Germany when the war in Europe ended.

He continued on active duty and received a direct commission during the Korean War. In 1960 he retired after 22 years of US Air Force photographic service, the last ten of which were spent as a Producer/Director stationed at Lookout Mountain in Hollywood. He then continued as a civilian Producer/Director for the USAF and was involved in the production of training and classified report films covering everything from atomic tests, action in Vietnam, to the early missile program at Cape Canaveral. When the motion picture program transferred to Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino, he became the Executive Producer for all films produced for Air Force use.

One of the films he produced and directed, "The Year of 53 Weeks," was nominated to represent the Air Force at the Academy Awards. In addition, he received the "Chris" award from the Film Council of Greater Columbus, several "Cindy" awards from the American Film Producers Association, as well as awards from the San Francisco Film Festival, The American Film Festival, the National Committee of Films for Safety, and the International D'Arte Cinematographics Festival. He was the creator and producer of the first series of "Air Force Now" films, a monthly USAF activities report. Another of his films, entitled "Crossover", documenting a South American tour of the USAF Thunderbirds, was also considered for Air Force representation at the Academy Awards.

Al was extremely talented in woodworking and furniture making and in 1979, he retired for the second time and nearly single-handedly built his home in Capistrano Beach. He continued to make furniture, restor boat interiors and was always busy with numerous projects.

On the 50th Anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 1994, he founded The Distinguished Flying Cross Society (www.dfcsociety.org) a non-profit organization which honors the men and women from all military services who received the DFC as a result of deeds accomplished during aerial flight. The Society now boasts over 4,000 members nationwide. There is a monument commemorating the founding of the DFC Society located in Pines Park, Capistrano Beach, CA.

He is survived by his daughter, Alexis Kathleen, who is a Professor at Palomar College in San Marcos, CA and who recently served as a Fulbright Fellow at the 2nd Air Division USAAF Memorial Library in Norwich, England. She would like to thank all his caregivers and the team from St. Joseph's Hospice and acknowledge the special support received from Jose Rangel. Al was loved and respected by his numerous nieces and nephews, friends and colleagues, and he will be greatly missed.

Rosary and viewing are scheduled for Thursday, February 16, 2006 from 5:00pm-8:00pm at Lesneski Mortuary, 640 S. El Camino Real, San Clemente, CA 92672, (949) 492-1717.

Services will be held at the Mission Basilica, 31522 Camino Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano, CA, 92675, (949) 234-1360 at 11:00am on Friday, February 17. Interment will follow at El Toro Memorial Park, 25751 Trabuco Road, Lake Forest, CA, (949)951-8244.

Donations may be made in his memory to the Ward Macauley Scholarship Fund, The Distinguished Flying Cross Society, P.O. Box 530250, San Diego, CA, 92153 or to a charity of one's choice.