

# The New York Times

## Donald Engen Dies at 75; Led Space Museum

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**WASHINGTON, July 14**— Donald D. Engen, the head of the National Air and Space Museum at the Smithsonian Institution and a former administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, was killed on Tuesday when the glider he was in broke apart over Nevada and plunged to the ground. He was 75 and lived in Alexandria, Va.

The glider was being flown by William S. Ivans of San Diego, who was also killed. Sgt. Lance Modispacher of the Douglas County, Nev., sheriff's office said witnesses told of seeing the glider break up and fall around noon near Minden, about 15 miles east of Lake Tahoe.

Both Mr. Engen, a retired Navy vice admiral and former test pilot, and Mr. Ivans, 79, were officers in the Soaring Society of America, an organization of gliding enthusiasts. Mr. Engen had been vacationing in Nevada with his wife, Mary.

Since 1996, Mr. Engen had headed the Air and Space Museum, which draws about nine million visitors a year and is the most popular tourist attraction in Washington.

His appointment to the museum was greeted warmly by World War II veterans, many of whom had become enraged at his predecessor, Martin Harwit, over plans for exhibiting the Enola Gay, the B-29 bomber that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Many veterans thought the original text accompanying the exhibit was too sympathetic to the Japanese. Efforts to rewrite the text failed to satisfy some veterans, members of Congress and historians, and Dr. Harwit resigned in 1995.

Mr. Engen headed the F.A.A. from 1984 to 1987 after serving on the National Transportation Safety Board. In his three years at the aviation agency he concentrated on trying to improve the nation's air traffic control system while managing a boom in airline traffic.

As head of the Air and Space Museum, Mr. Engen had not only a historian's interest, but also an affection for the various aircraft and missiles entrusted to his care.

"We arrest the corrosion and put old hydraulic lines back into them," he said in an interview last year. "A hundred years from now, people can come back and see the technology of the time."

Ultimately, Mr. Engen was responsible for treasures like the Spirit of St. Louis, which Charles Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic in 1927, and capsules that returned astronauts to Earth from the Moon.

One exhibit was a somber reminder of a personal tragedy: a surface-to-air missile captured by the Israelis from the Egyptians in 1967 was virtually identical to the one that killed his son-in-law over Vietnam, Mr. Engen said in the 1998 interview.

Born in Pomona, Calif., on May 28, 1924, Mr. Engen left Pasadena Junior College to enter the Navy early in World War II. He was a dive bomber pilot on the aircraft carrier Lexington and saw combat in the Battle of Leyte Gulf in 1944 and in the campaigns to capture Iwo Jima and Okinawa in 1945. He was awarded the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal. After the war, he was commander of the carrier America in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

Mr. Engen attained the rank of rear admiral in 1969 and served in a variety of posts at sea and in Washington. He retired as a vice admiral in 1978 and became an aircraft manufacturing executive. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan appointed him to the National Transportation Safety Board, the agency that is investigating the accident that killed him.

Besides his wife, Mr. Engen is survived by three sons, Travis, Charles and Christopher; a daughter, Candace Ellis, and several grandchildren.

In his book "Wings and Warriors: My Life as a Naval Aviator" (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), Mr. Engen recalled an incident in Washington in 1986, when he met a Japanese airline executive who had been a pilot in World War II. The talk turned to wartime experiences, and Mr. Engen said he had helped sink the Japanese aircraft carrier Zuikaku in 1944.

"That was my ship!" the executive said through an interpreter.

"How long were you in the water?" Mr. Engen asked.

"Five days," the executive replied.

Both men laughed, and the executive said he held no grudge. After all, the sinking of the carrier had canceled his kamikaze mission.

Photo: Donald Engen, director of the National Air and Space Museum, in the transportation section of the museum. (Associated Press)