

AVIATION WALL OF HONOR



Colonel Leroy "Rusty" Russell

Colonel Leroy "Rusty" Russell was born in Vernon, Michigan on February 23, 1920. In the early thirties, Rusty, his father, mother, and his younger brother Bud moved to Negaunee, Michigan. In 1937, Rusty graduated from Negaunee High School.

Coming from a poor family, he worked for a year at the family gas station and garage. After that he hitchhiked to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor with a tuition scholarship in chemical engineering. At the end of that year, he obtained appointments at both service academies and chose the United States Military Academy at West Point. After graduation from West Point in 1943, he immediately joined the Army Air Force. He underwent bomber pilot training (B-24 Liberators) in Maine before being sent to England and then to Italy. He made fifty bombing missions before missing a flight while serving as base officer of the day. On that day, his plane and crew, with a substitute pilot, was shot down and all lives were lost.

Rusty was ordered back to the United States for training in B-29 (Flying Fortresses) before being sent to Okinawa with a new plane and crew in preparation for the invasion of Japan. Fortunately the A-bomb drop on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war and the invasion was canceled.

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After World War II, Rusty's career in aviation continued. From 1947 to 1950, he was the Chief of Air Craft Maintenance at the Spokane Air Force Base, in Spokane, Washington. From 1951 to 1954, he was Chief of Air Craft Maintenance again, but this time at the Strategic Air Command, Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska. From 1954 to 1956, he attended Harvard Business School in Boston, Massachusetts where he earned his Masters Degree in Business Administration. From 1956 to 1960, he ran a Tactical Evaluation Team for fighter pilots at the US Air Bases at Nagoya and Fuchu, Japan. From 1960 to 1963, he was the Chief of Air Maintenance once again, this time at B-47 Wing, Lincoln Air Force Base in Lincoln, Nebraska. For a year after 1963, Rusty spent his time at the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama. And from 1964 until 1967, he was the Chief of Missile Maintenance at the Grand Forks Air Force Base in Grand Forks, North Dakota. This required him to install and keep 50 minute-man missiles on alert. After retiring from the Air Force in June of 1967, he immediately went to work for Autonetics, a division of Rockwell International. For eight years, he was Chief of Quality Control for the production of the minute-man II missiles. Then, in 1975, he fully retired.

Colonel Russell's citations include the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Distinguished Unit Citation with Two Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Medal with Two Oak Leaf Clusters, and Army Commendation Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters.

Rusty died on November 15, 1990 and is interred in Arlington National Cemetery. He is survived by his wife Enid, their daughter Lynn, her husband Bob, grandson Steven, and his brother Bud.

TJ Mudge, Jan. 2004