



MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

Lieutenant General Frank E. Petersen Jr.

Born in Topeka, Kansas, on 2 March 1932, Lieutenant General Frank E. Petersen Jr. was a pathbreaker in the Marine Corps. Petersen broke down racial barriers when he became the first African American Marine aviator in October 1952 and then the first African American to command a Marine Corps tactical air squadron during the Vietnam War. In 1979, he broke down another barrier when he became the first African American general officer in the Marine Corps.

Petersen had a storied career as a Marine Corps aviator. He flew 64 combat missions in Korea with Marine Attack Squadron 212, where he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross. In Vietnam, he flew 250 combat missions and commanded Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314, which won the Hanson Award for best Marine Corps squadron in 1968.

Following promotion to lieutenant general, Petersen commanded the Marine Corps Combat Development Command at Quantico, Virginia, before retiring in 1988. At the close of his career, Petersen earned the distinction of “Silver Hawk” and “Gray Eagle,” denoting him as the most senior naval aviator in both the Marine Corps and the Navy.

Lieutenant General Frank E. Petersen Jr. passed away on 25 August 2015 at 83. His life, career, and legacy exemplify the Corps’ values of honor, courage, and commitment.



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