

Pilot Helped Transport Remote Patients to the Hospital

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Airplane pilot Gordon Getz Sr. transported American Indian patients from remote reservation land to the hospital.

He shuttled government leaders across New Mexico and flew photographers and topographers who helped survey the expanse of land for such tasks as road planning.

Getz had joined the Marine Corps in 1945. He was part of the manpower might that was being organized in anticipation of the invasion of Japan.

"When that didn't happen, he was discharged in '46," said Barbara Getz, a daughter. "On his discharge papers, he does say that his interest was aviation."

Gordon T. Getz Sr., who lived in Gallup and Santa Fe, retired to Mountainair, but spent the last few years in Albuquerque, died Aug. 6. He was 81.

A prayer service will take place at 10 a.m. Saturday at Daniel's Family Funeral Services, 7601 Wyoming NE.

Getz's family said he achieved his lifelong dream in 1956, when he earned his commercial pilot's license.

But he had been in the aviation field before that.

Born in Springfield, Mass., as the Great Depression came to life as well, Getz ventured West after his military stint. He worked as a station agent and manager for Frontier Airlines, first in Albuquerque. He transferred to Provo, Utah; came back to the Duke City; then went to Nogales, Ariz., Alamosa, Colo., and Gallup.

The stops made for some stories, such as the time the family lived in a home on cemetery land in Alamosa, Barbara Getz said.

"Dad would tell us stories of, when they were doing initiations for fraternities at Adams State College, he would find some of these frat initiates naked where they had dug out a grave for the next day with targets drawn around their privates," she said. "He would dress them and send them home."

Getz earned his commercial pilot's license while in Gallup and began working for a company under contract to the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. From reservation land, Getz would help transport ill patients to the Public Health Service Hospital in Gallup, Barbara Getz said.

"Sometimes he would bring children who were sick, and sometimes the weather wouldn't permit (getting) ...them out, and they would stay at our house," she said.

"There were times, too, when he would bring in people from the reservation, the Navajo from the reservation, and they would die en route. The elders would come out and collect the spirit from the plane and take it back.

"He loved the Native American culture."

In 1958, Getz and his family moved to Santa Fe, and he began working for the New Mexico Highway Department.

"He would fly the governors and the commissioners around the state, like if they had a meeting down in Lordsburg, he'd fly them down," Barbara Getz said. "He also took a lot of photographers up when they were doing road construction."

The photography and aerial survey work helped set the lines that would be highways, said Placido Borrego, an aerial photographer who worked with Getz.

"He was easygoing, cooperative, never hesitated to help anybody," Borrego said about Getz.

They and their families became personal friends.

Borrego remembered how Getz "could carry on a conversation with anybody."

Barbara Getz called her father smart and well-read. He was a "people person" who knew the lay and the history of the land based on what he saw from the sky, so "people loved flying with him," she said.

In 1971, while flying a private plane, Getz was involved in an airplane crash while heading from Moriarty to Santa Fe. He was trying to go around a thunderstorm at night over mountainous terrain when he struck land, an accident report available through the National Transportation Safety Board reads.

"Friends came over at 1:30 in the morning and said that dad was missing," Barbara Getz said.

Getz arrived at the hospital with a faint heartbeat. He suffered a traumatic brain injury and other injuries. He never flew again, but he continued to work for the state until he retired in 1985.

Getz was "the creative type" who over the years made furniture and worked on cars, among other enjoyments. He sang in the choir at the Santa Fe Cathedral for some time, was a Knights of Columbus member and was involved with Toastmasters.

Getz's survivors include his seven children, Rosemary Sutton and her husband David of Albuquerque; Gordon T. Getz, Jr. and his wife Toni of Albuquerque; Barbara Getz and her partner Bob Goldstein of Santa Fe; Martha Gallagher and her husband Mark of Littleton, Colo.; Paula Getz and her partner Wendy Foxworth of Albuquerque; Paul Getz and his wife Audrey Martinez of Albuquerque; and Carolyn Perkins of Colorado Springs; and many other family members.

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