

Obituary: On the ice or in the air, James Magnus always a champ

By [Paul Walsh](#) Star Tribune

March 15, 2012 — 9:25am



– Star Tribune – James Magnus.

James Magnus was a champion on the ice and in the air for the University of Minnesota.

“His goal was to live to be 95,” Kelly Carlson, a Twin Cities native and television and movie actress, said of her aviator grandfather. “He would say, ‘I’m just making it to 95, and I’m out of here. In his final two years it was ‘I’m on final approach and my landing gear is down.’ ”

Good to his word, Magnus died March 3 on his 95th birthday at his winter home in Arizona following kidney complications.

“He was super positive,” Carlson said. “You never, ever once in his life heard anything negative about anything or anyone.”

Magnus became a flight instructor in the Navy and flew while in the Marines in the Pacific during World War II and the Korean War. Upon return to civilian life, he was director of aviation for the University of Minnesota and created the U’s Flight School at Anoka County Airport. The flight program ceased operating in 1989.

After military service, Magnus began flying for Honeywell Corp. in 1954, ending his career 23 years later as the company's chief pilot.

Carlson said her grandfather's influence permeated multiple generations of the family, not only passing on his upbeat personality but his can-do attitude and his passion for flying.

"His motto was 'show up and do your job,' " she said. "Our family has the hardest work ethic you've ever seen. My aunts and my mother [Magnus' daughters] are like machines. I'm in my 30s and I can't keep up with them."

Carlson added that her family has many other pilots in its ranks. "The aviation bug rubbed off because of him," she said.

Magnus, who helped found the Minnesota Business Aircraft Association in the 1950s, was inducted in the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame in 1996.

"It is an honor to be included with the likes of Charles Lindbergh, Speed Holman and Walt Bullock, previous Minnesota inductees," Magnus wrote in a personal narrative he compiled.

Magnus played high school hockey for St. Paul Mechanics Art and then was a varsity wing for two seasons for the Gophers. In his first season, the U won the AAU national championship in 1939-40 with an 18-0-0 record, the only time Minnesota has ever won every game in a season.

It was on March 3, 1940, Magnus' birthday, that the legendary John Mariucci and the rest of the Gophers captured the title with a 9-1 victory over Brock Hall.

In retirement, he and wife Geraldine spent winters in the Phoenix area and the warmer months in Minnesota. She died in 2008.

Along with being preceded in death by his wife, Magnus' son, James Magnus Jr., was murdered in 1995 during a robbery while working at a south Minneapolis gas station and convenience store.

His death led to the city passing the Magnus Amendment, requiring stores to have surveillance cameras in working order.

Magnus is survived by daughters Diana Thompson, Judy Grote, Mary Jo Carlson, Nancy Jacobs and Gerry Sjoblom. Services have been scheduled for 10 a.m. March 30 at Friendship Village, 8100 Highwood Dr., Bloomington, with burial with military honors to follow at Fort Snelling National Cemetery.