

## **OBITUARY – PETE T CENARRUSA**

Pete T. Cenarrusa was born in Carey, Idaho on December 16, 1917. He passed away at the age of 95 today , September 29, 2013 , at his home in Boise after a 3 year battle with cancer.

His parents were Joe Cenarrusa and Ramona Gardoqui, who immigrated to the United States from the Province of Bizkaia in the Basque Country of Spain. Pete's father was from Munitibar and his mother from the Basque symbolic capital city of Gernika. Although the two cities were only eight miles apart, his parents did not meet until 1914 in Shoshone, Idaho, where they later were married. Pete's mother's sixth generational grandfather was Diego Gardoqui, who was the first Spanish Ambassador to the United States. Ambassador Gardoqui was an ocean shipping magnate who furnished George Washington with munitions during the Revolutionary War against Great Britain. He also furnished a boat-load of clothing for Washington's army at Valley Forge during the freezing winter.

Joe Cenarrusa worked as both a shepherd and sheep foreman for several years before purchasing his own sheep business along with range land north of Carey. He added a home in Bellevue, where this wonderful couple reared a family of five children. Pete was the second child born and the last to die as his younger brother and three sisters predeceased him. All five children learned the Basque language at home prior to entering primary school in Bellevue, where they learned English. Pete's love and promotion of the Basque language was lifelong.

Pete graduated from Bellevue High School in 1936 and from University of Idaho in 1940, with degrees in agriculture and animal husbandry. He was a National Collegiate Boxing Champion at the University. After college, he was a high school teacher in Cambridge, Carey and Glens Ferry, Idaho. Pete taught both agriculture and chemistry and served as the football coach. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1942. As an officer in the V-5 Naval Aviation Corps he received flight training in Seattle and Pasco, Washington and subsequently Corpus Christi, Texas, where he received his basic and advanced training. In 1942, he received his Navy Wings of Gold and was commissioned a 2nd

Lieutenant in the Marines. Pete was an instructor in Naval Aviation in Corpus Christi – known as the University of the Air – for 18 months. He finally received his long anticipated orders to go to the Fleet. After completing the required aircraft carrier landings in an F4U fighter on the aircraft carrier Wolverine in Lake Michigan, he was ordered to El Toro Marine Base in Santa Ana, California, where he was attached to Marine Aircraft Fighter Squadron 462. That is where he learned that President Roosevelt had died, which he recorded in his flight logbook on April 12, 1945. He was then ordered to Cherry Point, North Carolina to train in an SB2C-4 “Helldiver” dive bomber in preparation for the invasion of Japan. President Truman ordered the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, thus ending the war. Pete himself saw an atomic bomb explosion in 1955, where he witnessed a 30-kiloton detonation of a bomb at Yucca Flats, Nevada. He then went into the inactive reserve, where he flew with VMF 216 Squadron in Spokane, Washington until his retirement in July, 1963 with the rank of Major. Pete followed as a private pilot who flew for 59 years without an accident. He logged over 15,000 hours of flight time, most of which were in the operation of his family business.

In 1946, Pete was hired to teach institutional on-farm training in Blaine County to veterans of the war who had subsequently gone into farming and livestock operations. In 1947, he married the love of his life, a sheep man’s daughter, Freda Coates. Their marriage produced a son, Joe Cenarrusa, a graduate of the University of Idaho in 1970, husband, father, and a successful Boise businessman and avid pilot. Joe and his wife, Jean, added two grandsons to the Cenarrusa family, Andrew and Tyler. Joe died in a tragic aircraft accident in 1997.

Pete and Freda owned and managed a successful sheep operation from 1954 until 2000, operating in Idaho, Nevada, Arizona and California. In 2000, they left the sheep business when they sold their entire operation to Lava Lake Land and Livestock.

Pete was encouraged to enter politics in 1950 and was elected as a Representative to the Idaho House of Representatives. He served nine terms, three of which he was selected as Speaker of the House. On May 1, 1967, he was appointed as the Idaho Secretary of State by Governor Don Samuelson

to fill the vacancy created when incumbent Secretary Edson Deal died. Pete was elected and served as Secretary of State for almost 36 years. Upon his retirement he was the longest serving State official in the history of the Idaho. His last election was in 1998, retiring on January 6, 2003 at age 85. He was succeeded by his longtime Chief Deputy and current Secretary of State, fellow Basque Ben Ysursa.

As Secretary of State, Pete published the first edition of the *Idaho Government Blue Book*, which has been published every two years through to the present Secretary Ben Ysursa's publications after Pete's retirement. A quote from Secretary Ysursa in his dedication to Pete in an edition of the book reads, "Pete is the epitome of a true public servant, and is respected and admired by all Idahoans for his integrity and passionate devotion to making government more accessible and responsive to citizens' needs." At the time of his death, Pete was the longest serving Secretary of State in the history of the entire United States.

He was inducted into seven Halls of Fame – Agriculture, Athletic, Republican, Basque of the World, Idaho Hall of Fame, U of I Alumni Hall of Fame, and in 2010 awarded the illustrious recognition *Light of Bizkaia*, Basque Country Hall of Fame by the Government of Bizkaia. He was appointed to the first Idaho Human Rights Commission in 1971. He is listed in *Who's Who in America* and *Who's Who in the West*. Pete served as Chairman of the first Idaho Legislative Council and as President of the Idaho Flying Legislators. The state's largest government building was named after him in thanks by Governor Phil Batt in 1998. Pete also volunteered for Republican Party service and was selected as the Chairman of the Idaho Ronald Reagan Committee of Idaho in 1968 and again in 1984.

Pete is survived by his wife Freda, his daughter-in-law Jean Cenarrusa-Jacobson and her husband Greg. He has two grandsons, Andrew, and great grandson Joey, and Tyler, his wife Lindsay and new baby great grandson, all of Boise, and numerous nephews and nieces in Idaho, California and Washington.

He was preceded in death by his parents, his four siblings and his son Joe.