

George J. Canelos
Biography
November 2024

Raised in Vancouver, Washington and educated in the liberal arts, George graduated from Lewis & Clark College in 1969 with a BA in Economics. With a low draft number, he applied to the Navy's flight program. Earning his Naval Flight Officer Wings, he was assigned to the RA-5C *Vigilante*, a supersonic carrier-based photo reconnaissance jet. He flew more than 70 unarmed missions over Laos, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam in 1972.

He earned a Masters Degree in Regional Planning from the University of Pennsylvania in 1975, moving to Alaska. Over the next 37 years, he worked in over 100 remote villages in the public and private sectors. He helped plan Alaska's proposed new capital city in the wilderness. George led the Denali Commission, a fast-moving independent federal agency, partnering with Alaska Native organizations to bring basic infrastructure to rural communities.

George spoke to UN conferences in France and Morocco about the Denali Commission as a model for regional rural development. In China, he spoke to 150 mayors about how city governments can combat terrorism. In Russia, he introduced mayors to the concepts of public engagement and focus groups (while being monitored by a federal official from Moscow). During the Covid pandemic, he spoke to four high school graduations via Zoom.

He transferred from the Navy to the Air Force, flying over 3,500 hours as a navigator aboard C-130 *Hercules* transport aircraft in the Alaska Air National Guard. Learning celestial navigation, he earned a rare FAA Flight Navigator License. In 1992, he led a contingent of Alaska Air Guardsmen flying over the North Pole to Mombasa, joining an international coalition flying food into the famine zones of Somalia. While commanding the Alaska Air Guard, he promoted diversity and achieved almost 25% female membership. In 2001, he participated in joint exercises with Russian forces on how to rescue a Soyuz crew that landed hundreds of miles off course. He retired after 32 years of service as a Brigadier General.

He and his wife Mary Lu met in the checkout line at Costco in Alaska. They raised five children and adopted one of their grandchildren. They moved to Arizona 12 years ago.

As a Scout leader, he served as the Director for Camp Raymond near Flagstaff. He & Mary Lu served as commissioners for Camp Big Horn in California. In costume, he

reprises Lord Baden-Powell at campfire and has been asked by many young Scouts if he really formed the Boy Scouts. He gives constellation tours for the local astronomy club, and proudly wears his military uniform when speaking at veterans events.

Honoring his Greek heritage, the government of Greece recently declared him a Greek citizen, along with his son Jason, nephew Jesse, & granddaughters Sophia & Luka.

Here's some of his publications and articles:

- Contributions to: Counts, Stephen & Tillman Barrett, *Dragon's Jaw, An Epic Story of Courage and Tenacity in Vietnam*, New York, Da Capo Press, 2019.
- Contributions to: Powell, Robert, *Vigilante! 1,200 Hours Flying the Ultimate US Navy Reconnaissance Aircraft*, Forest Lake, MN, Specialty Press, 2019.
- Canelos, George, "Ungebautes Alaska, Die neue Hauptstadt (Unbuilt Alaska, The New Capitol City)", in the German architecture magazine *Stadt Bauwelt*, pp. 22-27, Berlin, Germany, June 2015.
- Canelos, George "The Future of Alaska's Villages", in *Alaska at 50, The Past, Present and Next Fifty Years of Alaska Statehood*, edited by G. W. Kimura, pp. 209-220, Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press, 2009.
- Canelos, George, "Joint Operations in Somalia: An Operator's Perspective", in *Proceedings, the Journal of the US Naval Institute*, pp. 12-13, Annapolis, MD, July 1993.

He has an unpublished memoir capturing his trials in Vietnam and redemption in Somalia.