

A Tribute to John Masumi Kuramoto



From his friends and coworkers at Edwards AFB

John Masumi Kuramoto passed into eternity on November 21, 2022 at 84 years of age after a battle with cancer. He was born in Watsonville, California on May 18, 1938 to father Toyoso Kuramoto and mother Chiyo Kuramoto. His parents emigrated from Japan. After immigration, John's parents worked first in Fowler and later in San Juan Bautista as share croppers. They were not allowed to buy land as they were foreigners from Asia. In May 1942 when John was just four years old, he and his entire family were forcibly uprooted from their farm by the US government after being identified as persons of Japanese descent. They were involuntarily interned in the Poston Detention Camp in Poston, Arizona. John, his father, mother, two brothers and his sister were interned in the camp until July 1945 when Japan was defeated in World War II. After the war, John's parents returned to the Fowler area to continue share cropping. In 1950 they had saved enough money and the laws had changed so that they could buy land in Fowler and have their own farm. In later years John told friends that he was so young when he was interred in Poston with his family that the internment camp was his whole world and the only world he knew at that young age. He had nothing to compare it to in his life, so as a result he had little bitterness about his internment.

John attended elementary school in Poston and Fowler and high school in Fowler where he met his future wife Kay Wilkins. After graduating from high school, he attended California State University, Fresno (aka Fresno State). He majored in electrical engineering and graduated in 1961 alongside future Edwards Air Force Base co-workers Ken Martin and Dick Hildebrand. After graduating together from Fresno State, John, Ken, and Dick spent their entire careers working at the Air Force Flight Test Center (AFFTC) in various technical and management positions. They all reached senior executive levels at the AFFTC before retiring from government service.

John's electrical engineering degree served him well during numerous early assignments in the AFFTC Aircraft Instrumentation Division. He was a key player in designing, installing, and managing flight test instrumentation in B-52H, X-20, XC-142, and C-5A flight test projects. In April 1963, just two years after arriving at Edwards AFB, John presented a technical paper titled "Biomedical Results from X-20 Dynamic Simulation Program" at a technical symposium held in Los Angeles. He had quickly demonstrated his mastery in developing and operating aircraft instrumentation systems, a skill which would be demonstrated numerous times throughout his distinguished career.

A very significant event for John occurred on May 26, 1974 when he married Kay Wilkins. John would spend the rest of his life as Kay's partner in life. Whenever John and Kay were together at work functions, his coworkers noticed they always seemed to be smiling, as evidenced by the

photo of them together on the cover of this tribute. Kay and John brought love, humor, and joy into each other's lives.

In 1976 John was promoted to Chief, Instrumentation Branch, Technical Support Division. In 1982 he was promoted to Chief, Instrumentation Division, 6520 Test Group where he was responsible for the design, assembly, operation, and technical support for aircraft instrumentation systems at the AFFTC. In 1990 John was assigned as the Assistant to the Commander of the 6521 Range Squadron where he was responsible for providing real-time and post-flight data processing support to numerous flight test programs. The instrumentation systems he designed and operated earlier in his career provided the data that was displayed in the mission control rooms he managed in the Range Squadron, and provided the input data that was processed through the Range Squadron mainframe computers he managed.

In 1991 John was assigned as Director, Technical Support in the Deputy Commander for Technical Support organization. In this position he was responsible for managing a full range of technical support to a multitude of aircraft flight test projects, ranging from instrumentation, to real-time and post-flight data processing, to avionics ground test facilities. In his last assignment at the AFFTC John was Chief of the Acquisition and Development Division. He revitalized the systems engineering and acquisition management processes and institutionalized methodologies that allowed the AFFTC to be prepared to meet the test infrastructure challenges of the future.

John was a member of the Society of Flight Test Engineers (SFTE) for much of his career and served in several SFTE executive positions. He was SFTE Vice President from 1974 to 1976, and SFTE Secretary from 1978 to 1980. His participation in SFTE helped to spread knowledge of advanced flight test techniques and processes to multiple organizations across the free world.

John retired from civil service on July 3, 1993. After many years of enjoying their retirement while living in their home in Lancaster, California, John and his wife Kay moved to a retirement village in Portland, Oregon in April 2009 where John spent his remaining years. Kay said moving to the retirement village in Portland was a great decision for her and John. Living in the lush environment of the Pacific Northwest was a welcome change from living in the wind and heat of the Mojave Desert.

John's coworkers all have a common remembrance of John – he seemed to always be happy and smiling. He was a widely acknowledged expert in his chosen profession, and he was about as nice a person as you could hope to work with or for. Kenita Bushee worked with John during

several of his assignments at Edwards AFB and she provided the following words about working with John:

“When I arrived at Edwards in 1989, John was the TSI Chief. He was one of the nicest and funniest people and I loved just to go to his office and chat. Eventually, he became our Deputy Director in the Engineering Directorate where we really had daily contact. John is what made coming to work fun! We worked hard but laughed too. One morning, he came in the front office door with his normal coffee cup in hand and had coffee all down the front of his shirt. I asked him what happened and he said “hit a damn coyote on my way in”. After I quit laughing, I walked out to look at the front of his car and sure enough, parts of Wiley the Coyote was smack on the front of his car! As the years passed on, he came in one day and said he was retiring. Keeping in mind I was years away from that and loved my job, I said “I can’t imagine someone not wanting to work”. Now he had the good laugh and said ‘just you wait’ He was right! I was fortunate enough to talk to him several times after moving to Florida and it was just like time had never passed. There are what I call “one of the good guys” from Edwards and John was certainly one! He was truly just an awesome, smart and caring person that I was honored to call a friend as well as boss.”

Alfred “Fritz” Miller provided the following memories of John (edited by author):

“When I was chief of the Technical Support Division, I selected John as chief of the Instrumentation Branch. I don’t recall when he arrived at Edwards, or where he was assigned at the time, but he made his mark. John was a very likable and congenial person and I enjoyed working with him. As the Instrumentation Branch Chief, John was involved in the very controversial issue of transitioning from photo panels and oscillographs to magnetic tape. John was instrumental in implementing the standard ATIS instrumentation system very successfully. John had a very tough job employing his instrumentation technicians, engineers, and associated staff to install all of the Class II modifications on all kinds of different aircraft, spaces and places. All of the instrumentation was subject to shake, rattle, and roll testing, and working with maintenance to ensure the job got done properly. Since John was in charge, he was involved in all of the aircraft that required test instrumentation during his tenure, similar to my involvement as a branch chief, and as a division chief, and Director of the Edwards Flight Test Range. I was assigned at the right place at the right time during the Golden years of flight testing for the last half of the 20th century.”

John Kuramoto led an exemplary life full of humor and commitment to excellence. He made many friends over his distinguished career at Edwards AFB where he made many significant contributions to the defense of our nation. May he rest in eternal peace.



John Kuramoto and Ed Seto share a laugh at a work-related event