Press Release

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Walter G. Sonneborn is Awarded the 2005 AHS Alexander A. Nikolsky Honorary Lectureship

Alexandria, VA-- AHS Executive Director M. E. Rhett Flater announced today that Walter G. Sonneborn has been selected to receive the Alexander A. Nikolsky Honorary Lectureship. The Lecture will be delivered at the 61st AHS Annual Forum and Technology Display at the Gaylord Texan Resort, Grapevine, Texas, June 1-3, 2005.

The Lectureship is awarded to "an individual who reflects the highest ideals, goals and achievements in the field of helicopter and V/STOL aircraft engineering and development." In winning the award, Sonneborn joins the ranks of previous distinguished Nikolsky recipients including Troy Gaffey, Richard M. Carlson, Howard C. Curtiss, Jr., Daniel P. Schrage, David Jenney, Evan Fradenburgh, Kenneth I. Grina, Robert R. Lynn, Rene Mouille, Alfred Gessow, Bartram Kelley, Robert Huston, Bruno Lovera and Barnes McCormick, Jr.

Walter Sonneborn has a career studded with achievements that spans forty years. He has served as a teacher and professional engineer in various levels of management in both Europe and the United States. He has held important positions in program management and has served as General Manager at Bell Helicopter, where he led the Engineering, Manufacturing, Purchasing, Program Management and Information Systems departments. During this period he introduced the concepts of cell manufacturing and continuous flow manufacturing which continue to be state-of-the-art.

He started his career in the Institute for Helicopter Aeromechanics in Stuttgart, Germany, where he trained under the renowned Professor Walter Just. During those early years he taught courses in Stability and Control, led a team to evaluate U.S. and French helicopters for the new German Army, and he conducted aeromechanics analyses on high speed rotorcraft which were being considered at that time.

Later, at Bell Helicopter, he became the Project Engineer/Designer on the U.S. Army/Bell High Speed Helicopter Program. Under his leadership and simple control system design, that research vehicle achieved the still-standing unofficial speed mark of over 275 knots. The design showed excellent handling qualities and made uneventful autorotation entries up to 260 knots. Within engineering at Bell, he held many important positions including Project Director for the Army/Bell Composite Airframe Program and later Deputy Director for the Bell/McDonald entry into the LHX. He was also one of the driving forces in introducing the soft-in-plane rotor into the strong two-bladed rotor culture. He is also a patent holder for the soft-in-plane rotor arrangement used on the very successful OH-58D. As an engineer, he specialized in flight test, design, aeromechanics, and research and development.

Walter later moved to Bell's commercial program management office where he traveled the world and developed close relationships with nearly all of the world's leading rotorcraft manufacturers. During this time he led many successful program developments and contract negotiations including Taiwan, China and South Africa. He eventually returned to Engineering as Vice President - Research and Product Definition. He initiated Bell's Modular and Affordable Product line which is expected to be the cornerstone for Bell's future commercial product line.

Walter Sonneborn's lecture will be featured in an upcoming edition of the ***Journal of the American Helicopter Society*** and he will be honored at FORUM 61 with the presentation of a certificate and a medallion.

AHS International -- ***The Vertical Flight Society*** is a technical and professional organization which promotes vertical flight technologies and their applications around the world.

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Past award recipients