



Autobiography of
MERLE N. FISTER
Colonel, USAF (Retired)
1921 - 2019

- 1921** Born on a farm in Guide Rock, Nebraska. I led the outdoor life of a poor dirt farmer until I was 16. I either rode a horse to school or walked the 2 miles. Dad would get me and my two brothers up at before first light to milk the cows, slop the pigs, and gather the eggs before we could go to school. Our school was a one room, one size fits all. We had one teacher who taught all 8 grades. I also rode a horse to High School which was 5 miles away and ate lunch with him in a rented garage. As soon as school was out, I had to hurry home and milk the cows, slop the pigs, gather the eggs, feed the chickens and then run the cream separator.
- 1937** I was 16 when we migrated to California in 1937. We were poorer than a church mouse. We drove a 1928 Chevy and pulled a small crank-up trailer. We slept in both the car and in the trailer (five of us). We drove north from Nebr. Up into Idaho, then into Wash. And down into northern Calif. Where we ran out of gas and food money. We picked grapes, tomatoes and walnuts to make enough money to buy food and to drive on into Los Angeles. My older brother and Sister Jeanette who went to Calif. In 1935 found jobs immediately. We all (7 of us) moved in together. In 1939, I graduated from High School and went to work. I knew that I had to make some money to help support the family, first as a ice cream sales boy on a bicycle cart and made \$2/per day), then as a Western Union kid on a bicycle (\$2.25 per/day), next as a wood boring machine operator at 3.50 \$ /per/day), Roller skater for a Sears/Roebuck Warehouse at \$3.75 per day then as a magnetic machine operator Northrup Aircraft (3rd shift \$5.50 per/day/7 days/week). I gave most of my earnings to my mother.
- 1942** Enlisted in the Army Air Corp and became a security guard in Atlantic City, NJ. I soon tired of that kind of duty and applied for aviation cadets, Eastern Flying Training Command. Pre-flight at Maxwell AAF, Montgomery, Ala., Primary at Lafayette, LA, Basic at Greenville, Miss. and Advanced at Columbus, Miss.
- 1944** In January, graduated from Cadets, commissioned a 2nd Lt. and joined a B-24 crew in Colorado Springs. We flew a new B-24 to Cerignola, Italy Landed on the 29th and immediately lost our new airplane to senior crews. Our seniors then said you are now members of the 738th Bomb Squadron, 454th Bomb Group. Now go get your combat gear from supply and get ready to fly 2 missions tomorrow. We took off in # 3 position in a 7 ship box and found out later that each of the four Squadrons in our Group also put up 7 ships all going to the same target. We flew 50 relatively hairy bombing missions over Germany, Romania, France, Poland, Yugoslavia, in three months and that included a one week R&R on the Isle of Capri. We usually lost at least one B-24 on each mission. At that rate, we lost 28 ships in 28 missions. The odds didn't look too good. I do not believe that we ever flew a mission without flak holes in our airplane. One time, which was our hairiest mission, we counted over 100 holes. It was some a miracle that no member of our ten man crew was hit by shrapnel.



The rest of the crew returned to U.S. I stayed and volunteered to fly another tour of duty in P-38's. The P-38 Squadron Commander agreed to check me out in the 38; however, General Nate Twinings' Headquarters said OK only if I took a 30-day rest first. I said no and came on home to fly more B-24's. First at Orlando, then Victorville, CA.

- 1945** Promoted to 1st Lt and assigned to Lemoore AAB as Engineering Officer. I flew the P-38, AT-6, BT-13, AT-11, and C-45 and supervised the retrofit of B-25's which were destined for the South Pacific. The Big Bomb took care of that so they all went to the junk yard someplace.
- 1946** Married Lee Kelly and then assigned to Merced AAF as Physical training Officer. Flew B-25's on training missions over the Pacific Ocean. On one mission the Navy shot at us as we flew towards the offshore Islands. You would think that we were the enemy! And then on to Davis Monthan, where I flew the B-29.
- 1947-48** Enrolled in the radar course at Boca Raton, Florida. Hurricane came through and wiped us out. Moved the School to Biloxi, Miss. Graduated in 1948 and was asked what I kind of a job I was interested in. I said anything but an Instructor. So I became an instructor and course supervisor at Keesler AFB. Flew the B 25, B-17 and B-26 and T-6.
- 1949-51** Went to Germany as a member of the occupation forces. First duty station was at Hof and then on to Giebelstadt. I was OIC of maintenance for our MPS-5 Radar set and also an intercept controller. We would track Mig 15's as they headed towards the German border. We would scramble F-84's for interception. The Russians tested us and we tested them. I Flew the F-80, F-84, C-47 and L-5.
- 1952** Returned to the States and was assigned as an Air Force ROTC Instructor and Commandant of Cadets at Wayne State University, Detroit. Flew the C-45, B-25 and C-47 and took some of the Cadets along for the ride.
- 1956** Returned to Keesler, AFB for Advanced Communication - Electronics course.
- 1957** Sent to Korea (Taejon & Taegu), as Commander of an Air Force Advisory Detachment. The ROKAF Colonel had an L-5 and a Korean Pilot; however, he always asked me to fly him to Seoul, Pusan and K-13. He nicknamed me Mr. Chang. I nicknamed him Headlight Kim and then his wife flashlight Kim and his kid's penlight Kim. I really enjoyed working with the Koreans. They would take me on hunting trips. One time they shot a small deer and hauled it down to the nearest farm house. They cut it open and took a bamboo reed and drank the hot blood. Naturally, they gave me a reed and said try it. I chickened out. I flew the L-5, L-20, C-47 and the ROKAF C-46. Since the Koreans were not allowed into Japan, we flew their C-46's to Hong Kong for IRAN (maintenance).



- 1958-60** Promoted to Major and assigned to Fairchild AFB as Squadron Commander of Air Force Communications Service (AFCS). I was responsible for the control tower, the GCA and the Nav-aids. Flew the T-33 and C-45.
- 1960-62** Promoted to Lt/Col and assigned to Turkey (Karamursel) as Squadron Commander of AFCS. I had three Detachments. Two on the Black Sea and one inland. We provided the long haul communications for those collecting intel on the Russians. Flew into Lebanon, Cairo, Athens, and Madrid. I hosted General Grant when he flew into Istanbul. Flew the T-29, C-47 and L-20.
- 1963** Assigned to University of Nebraska (Omaha) to complete Bachelor's in Education.
- 1964** Sent to Tinker AFB as Central Comm. Region Planner (AFCS).
- 1965-67** Assigned to Wheeler AFB as Director of Plans and Programs for AFCS, then to Hickam AFB as a Comm-Elect Planner for PACAF. Promoted to Colonel and assigned as Commander, 1957th Comm. Group with Detachments at Johnson Island, Guam, Pago Pago and Australia.
- 1968-70** Sent to the Pentagon as worldwide planner of communications & electronics, Air Force OPR for the sale of the Alaskan Communications System which we sold to RCA for \$31 Million. Then to the Dept. Of Commerce to help them understand this Sale so that they would not intervene to delay the process. Next assignment was as Commander of the 2044th Comm. Group in the Basement of the Pentagon. And then on to up to work with the DOD staff for Comm-Elect matters.
- 1970** Retired as Colonel after 28 years of an outstanding Air Force life.
- 1971-91** Moved to Arizona. Attended ASU and received a Master's in Public Administration. Employed as Executive Director of the Lakes Community Association. Then started, owned and/or operated a tax & accounting service, two beauty shops, a dry cleaners and two rental units. My first wife, Lee, died after 44 years of a great marriage. Then, by some miracle and while visiting relatives in the San Bernardino Mountains, I found the girl I first dated in 1941. June was a recent widow living in Lake Arrowhead and caring for her 98-year-old mother. I courted her real good, and we got married a year later. (How sweet it is!) I am now a 'father' of two beautiful, married daughters, a grandfather to 4 grand kids and a great grandfather to two.
- 1991-06** Sold my businesses and retired again. Too busy to work. Active in Tempe South Rotary Club (Past President), Tempe Republican Men's Club (Past President), Tempe Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs and Daedalians (Military Pilot Fraternity). We also attend military reunions of the 454th Bomb Group and the 603rd AC&W Squadron.
- 2007** Moved to a \$25 million mansion (Retirement Complex) in Redmond, WA to be near our youngest daughter and Grandkids. Life is good! While in our Fairwinds Retirement home, June and I started the Old Rooster's Club. The Employee Holiday Fund, The Garden Club and Co-chaired the committee which started our Residents Association.