

## About the Author



ERNEST “ERNIE” C. FORD WAS BORN IN 1921, in a rural, dusty part of eastern New Mexico, where his father worked as a cowboy and handyman. The family soon relocated to southwestern Kansas where they struggled through the Dust Bowl before moving to southeastern Colorado in 1935.

Upon graduating from Manzanola High School, Ernie ran away from home and headed west. Within months, he joined the Army to pursue his pilot’s wings. During his life, he traveled to more than 90 countries, to all 50 states, and to most U.S. territories.

During World War II, his family learned of his achievements through telegrams and letters from the War Department, and through newspaper accounts—they were amazed. The War Department brought him back to the States to headline in U.S. Bond Tours—he had flown a record 364 combat missions in New Guinea before reaching age 22.

While on Bond Tour in Minneapolis, he met Esther Marie Trautner, a preacher’s daughter from the Dakotas. They were married in Indianapolis on Memorial Day in 1944. Ernie and Etta were blessed with four children and seven grandchildren. Ernie continued to move and travel as an Air Force pilot until his retirement in 1963. He then relocated his family to Sacramento, California, and began a second career as a New York Life Insurance Agent. Throughout, Ernie and Etta remained active in church life.

In January of 1946, Ernie was given a two-year State Department assignment to fly to Bogota, Columbia. Thirteen pilots were to train Columbian pilots to fly C-47 planes. Ernie’s assignment was to fly State Department dignitaries to all the capitals throughout Central and South America. This is what some call “showing the flag”. They went to each embassy en route.

When he returned to Columbia, flying over the Andes mountain range, he encountered solid cloud coverage with plenty of turbulence. At 21,770 feet, with no oxygen, and both of his hands frozen to the wheel, Ernie was gasping for air. Flashes of lightening from the nearby thunder storm added to the seriousness of the situation. The Crew Chief along with two others frantically tried to release his hands from the controls. This was a typical case

of high altitude bends. Another pilot who was a passenger was able to take over and land safely at their destination.

From then on, Ernie restricted his flights to below 15,000 feet. Flying in Columbia without oxygen at high altitude was in violation of Army Air Corps regulations. As a result of a heart condition, Ernie was returned to the States in May of 1946.

In June 1950, Ernie was flying from Japan to Korea the night the Korean War broke out. Before replacement pilots arrived from the states, Ernie flew 21 combat missions within the first two months of the war, for which he received the Air Medal.

In July of 1958, Ernie was ordered to undergo tests at Brooks Army Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, for a heart evaluation. The EKG discovered that Ernie was a Wolf-Parkinson-White (WPW) patient which required further evaluation. The WPW syndrome indicates a very rapid heartbeat caused by an extra electrical impulse affecting the heart rhythm. Ernie was born with an extra valve in his heart chamber which caused the electrical impulses.

After a week of evaluations at Brooks Army Hospital, Ernie was approved for flying with a waiver. He was allowed to continue to fly because he was a command pilot with so many hours of flying experience. Even though he remained on flying status he was restricted from flying jets.

In April of 1988, Dr. Larry Wolf did an Electro-physical Study of Ernie. Dr. Wolf then cauterized the electrical charge in Ernie's heart, which proved to be a successful procedure.

A few years ago Ernie was asked, "To what do you attribute your long life?" He simply replied, "I never was shot down!" He then added, "God has been my co-pilot!" Ernie always gave God the Glory.

He passed away on March 4, 2010, at age 88.

