

Donald G. Turner
Veteran of WWII and Vietnam
by Carla Rowe

A motorcycle ride on a hot summer day to escape farm chores would alter the life of young Donald Gene Turner, who until then, had planned to farm in the local valley.

It was the summer of 1942. As a recent graduate from Dayton High School, Gene was working on the family farm, located along the North Touchet and owned by his parents, Harry and Lois Turner. Getting a day off, he turned to riding his motorcycle, a passion of his since age fourteen.

Having no particular destination in mind, Gene jumped on his bike, turned east and soon found himself in Lewiston, Idaho. As he passed Idaho Normal College, he noticed a guy with a motorcycle just like the one he was riding – a 4-cylinder Indian.

“I was curious,” Gene said. “So I stopped and introduced myself.”

According to Gene, while the two men were talking, a lady came out of the administration office to ask if he had come to sign up for a course in the fall.

“No,” Gene told her, “just looking at the motorcycle.”

But the lady persisted, explaining he could enroll directly into the Air Corp course, at the college, which is presently called Lewis and Clark College. According to Gene she said everything but his clothes would be furnished – and uniforms would be provided later.

An innocent stop to talk motorcycles began a new career for Gene. He enrolled in the Air Corps course and spent one and a half years in Lewiston, logging in 200 hours of flight time.

“They must have been grading on a curve,” Gene joked.

Afterward he continued in the United States Army Air Force flight program, transferring to Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas to continue basic flight training.

Donald D. Turner
Veteran of WWI and WWII
1914-1994

A week ago, I was in a hot summer day to escape from a world of
the life of young Donald D. Turner who had been in the
in the local valley.

In the summer of 1914, as a young graduate from Ohio State
I was working on the family farm located along the North Turnpike and
owned by his parents, Frank and Lela Turner. Getting a way off to
with the intention of a passage of the state's

to get to his destination in mind, I had jumped on his bike and
and as he passed I saw a man in a suit. As he passed I saw a man
College, he noticed a guy with a motorcycle just like the one he was riding
in a flash.

"I was curious," I said, "he stopped and introduced myself."

As I was in a hot summer day to escape from a world of
the life of young Donald D. Turner who had been in the
in the local valley.

"I was curious," I said, "he stopped and introduced myself."

But the lady persisted, explaining he could easily identify the Air Corps
course at the college, which is presently called Lake Erie College.
According to Turner she said anything on his clothes would be identified
and Turner would be provided later.

An hour later to talk to Turner's son a new man for Turner. He
enrolled in the Air Corps course and spent two and a half years in 1914
located in 200 for us of right time.

"I don't know how you have been reading on a curve," I said.

Afterward, I continued in the United States Army Air Force flight program
training in England. A Force Base in Texas to continue basic flight
training.

For two years he continued training through the Air Corps Cadet program beginning in Missouri, preflight school in San Antonio, Texas; as well as several other flight schools in Texas before going to Del Rio, Texas where he entered the B26 tactical aircraft program.

While in flight school in Lubbock, Texas, Gene, who by then was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the Air Corp, married Ula Mae.

He transferred to Shreveport, Louisiana to complete the final training to go overseas. During his final training hours, the Army cancelled the B26 program. The Army then sent him back to San Antonio, Texas, this time to Randolph Field, where he would train to become a single engine fighter pilot.

Turner stated he was at four different bases at different times over the course of the next three to four months. However, the Army yet again, had different plans for Gene. For four months he trained out of Murfreesboro, Tennessee for the B24, which was an American heavy bomber.

While there training, the pilots lived with local residents. According to Gene, he and Ula lived with two sisters who worked in a ribbon factory. Sharing meals together, they developed into a family and exchanged Christmas cards for over 50 years. The pilots he trained with became great friends as well.

Being transferred from one program to another to take additional training had taken a lot of time, and it was 1944 before Gene finally found himself on sub patrol duty over the Gulf of Mexico for the end of World War II.

In 1948 the U.S. Army Air Corps was absorbed by the U.S. Air Force. "We were given the blue uniform of the Air Force, and changed our shoes to black," Gene shared.

Gene continued his education at the University of Oklahoma and Tinker AFB in Oklahoma City where he trained to fly the C-141.

When he returned home from active duty, he served as a civil engineer in the reserves for the Walla Walla base. Settling into Dayton, he and Ula raised two daughters, Merlene and Gale. He began a career of building houses in

The program for continued training through the Air Corps Cadet program... designed to bring the military school in San Antonio, Texas, as well as... flight schools in Texas before going to the Air Corps... to attend the Air Corps program.

While in flight school in Texas, Cadet... second Lieutenant in the Air Corps... (USA).

He was ordered to ship to complete the final training to go... his first flight school, the Army assigned him to... program. He then sent him back to San Antonio, Texas, this time to... flight school, where he would have to become a flight instructor.

He was then assigned to a different school than the course... to the Air Corps. He was then assigned to... flight school in Texas, where he was assigned to... flight instructor. He was then assigned to... flight instructor.

While in flight school, the flight school with flight instructor... (USA) and the flight school with flight instructor... flight instructor. He was then assigned to... flight instructor. He was then assigned to... flight instructor.

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Dayton and also he helped engineer the Portland Airport, as a maintenance engineer.

“Later I started messing with the fly boys again and went to jet school in the associate reserves,” Gene said.

Gene eventually became Commander of the 313th Military Air Lift Squadron at McCord Air Force Base. One Sunday evening, in April of 1972, during the Vietnam War, after the reserve Air Force members had gone home, Gene was sitting at his desk when he received a call. It was the Operations Officer of the 22nd Air Wing and they needed a pilot and crew for a C-141 mission.

The C-141 aircraft, produced by Lockheed, was capable of missions with an endurance of 8,000 miles and could carry a 60,000-90,000 pound load, according to Gene. For this mission, the load of ordinance and operations would be smart bombs to aid American soldiers in the Battle of Kontum delivered to Pleiku. The base at Kontum had roughly 1,200 defenders facing an attack by the North Veitnamese with ten large Russian tanks.

Gene and his crew of eleven flew from McCord to Naval Air Station North Island then to San Diego where the plane was loaded. From there he made stops in Hawaii, Wake Island and Clark Air Force Base in the Phillipines before being briefed in Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam.

Gene faced gun fire while approaching the runway at Pleiku. He maintained an altitude of 4,000 feet, just out of weapon range until the airport perimeter was secured. While landing, Gene discovered rocket fire had created a large hole in the middle of the runway. A C-130 aircraft, used for special operations missions, was burning on the other end of the air field when they landed.

“Another hometown boy, Kenny Fletcher from Starbuck was also there and saw the whole operation,” Gene shared.

The ten Russian tanks, manned by the North Vietnamese, were all destroyed by 8 a.m. the next morning. However, we lost 1,200 U.S. and South Vietnamese soldiers in the attack.

“Why we didn’t have equipment there already is a mystery to me,” Gene stated as he shook his head in disbelief.

...and also he helped engineer the forward A-109 as a maintenance
engineer.

"I was a ground crew member with the F-4U boys again and went to jet school in the
States," Gene said.

Gene eventually became a member of the 313rd Military Air Refueling Squadron
at MacDill Air Force Base. One Sunday evening in April of 1952, during
the Vietnam War, before the war, he was a pilot and was flying a C-119
and flying in his back when he received a call. It was the Operations Officer
of the 313rd Air Wing and they needed a pilot and crew for a C-119 mission.

The C-119 was a bi-engine turboprop aircraft produced by Lockheed. It was capable of carrying up to
20,000 lbs of cargo and could carry a crew of 10-12 people and operators.
According to Gene, it was used to transport supplies and equipment
to the front lines to aid American soldiers in the hands of the enemy.
Gene and a pilot from Houston had roughly 1000 lbs of supplies being
transported by the front Vietnam with ten large crates.

Gene and the crew of eleven flew from MacDill to Hanoi Air Station. Gene
found out to his surprise that the plane was loaded from the inside
top of the fuselage and Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines
before being pulled in for 200 miles Vietnam.

Gene found out the plane was approaching the runway in Hanoi. He was
an altitude of 4,000 feet just out of weapon range and the airport perimeter
was secured. While landing, Gene discovered that the fuselage was
open in the middle of the runway. A C-119 crew member for special
operations mission was running on the ground of the air field and they
landed.

"Another hometown boy, Kenny Fletcher from Stoughton was also there and
saw the whole operation," Gene stated.

The two Russian tanks, manned by the North Vietnamese, were destroyed
by 3 F-4U's in the morning. The crew was lost in 1952 and 1953.
Vietnamese soldiers in the area.

"I did not have any equipment, I only had my eyes on it. Gene
said as he shook his head in a matter.

They flew out with an intelligence officer. The next day, Gene and his crew took 60,000 pounds of food and rations into Pleiku which were distributed by helicopter into Kontum. They brought out army special forces and a reporter.

It is a 29 hour flight from McCord to Pleiku, a route Gene would take a total of 102 times across the Pacific.

One of the missions was to furnish materials between his 313th Squadron, the 4th Squadron, 8th Squadron and 9th Squadron. George Wood of Dayton was there too, piloting a C-124, but they didn't know each other at the time.

When reflecting on all the equipment and supplies flown across the Pacific, Gene stated, with a shake of his head, "We delivered enough ordinances into Korea to tip the island over."

Other missions included "hauling high tech stuff to certain places at certain times," flying parts to Saigon and returning to McCord with VSIs – very seriously injured troops, as well as the remains of 55,000 men lost during the war. He also brought home soldiers who had successfully fulfilled their tour of duty, and some local soldiers like to speculate Gene flew them home.

One trip was to a top secret recovery base in the northern part of Thailand, arriving there about after dark, about 8 or 9 at night.

"We had a lazy navigator, and when I asked him how much longer until the runway, he told me 15 minutes. The instruments then were not like those of today and he was about 15 minutes behind the airplane. But I told my crew, 'I see a runway over there, I'll land and see where we are.'"

According to Gene, as they touched down on the runway, the lights turned out to be fires every 100 feet. Those on the base were camped near the fires, as a tiger had been spotted at the base the day before.

Another time Gene was in Tan Son Nhut under a condition red warning when a rocket hit two F102s across the base and the concussion raised the wings of Gene's C141 plane. "I was ready to get out of there. 153,000 pounds of fuel on an airplane raises hell."

They flew out in an intelligence officer. The next day, there was a...
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“We had more air traffic at Tan Son Nhut than O’Hare in Chicago or even New York,” Gene commented.

As Commander of the 100 flying personnel in the squadron, Gene had different people assisting him every trip. “It was quite an incident. I had well trained crew members. They worked like dogs.”

Finally, in 1973 Vietnam came to an end. A few days after the war was over, Lieutenant Colonel Donald Gene Turner, retired with recognition for his international aviation, which is equal to a master’s degree. He served a total of 31.5 years in the United States Air Force, between active duty and the reserves.

While in the service, Gene traveled to 26 different countries. “I have pictures of people all over the world. It’s hard to get any other way,” Gene shared.

Back in Dayton, Gene resumed building houses, completing seven more for a total of 43 in the Dayton area. He also worked 24 years for the Port of Columbia as Port Manager. While he was manager, the Port built several buildings for businesses and created 80 permanent, full time jobs to the local economic base.

“It’s been quite interesting,” Gene assessed, as he reflected on his life experiences. “Not too bad for an old jack pine savage.”

"We had more air traffic in the 1950s than we do today," he said. "I remember flying in the 1950s and it was a different experience. They worked like dogs."

The 1950s were a time of rapid growth in the aviation industry. The number of airlines increased from 100 in 1945 to 200 in 1960. The industry was booming and everyone was working hard to keep up with the demand.

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"It's been a long time since I've been in the industry," he said. "I remember flying in the 1950s and it was a different experience. They worked like dogs."