

Ward J. Derks
34th Squadron
Pilot

Ward Derks was born in Zeeland, MI.

Ward received his wings at Luke AFB in Arizona in 1943. From there, he and other members of his class were transferred to a fighter group stationed at Kahuku AFB, Hawaii "where we all flew P-47s... and then P-47'N' models... for a couple months and lost 3 of our 24 pilots to accidents..."

Soon after, Ward joined the 413th on Ie Shima. Ward remembered the 413th flying extended missions, as long as ten hours, to China and Japan.

"The only non-pilot I recall is our flight surgeon on the Pacific Islands - Dr. Garlick who was terrific & he met us each time we came in from somewhere. Naturally he never let us taxi our planes to parking - our crew chief did that. Each pilot had a crew of three including mechanic, gunner and crew chief."

After the war, Ward "did extensive flying, P-47s, F-51s, P-39s, P-38s - a total of 41 different fighters - (none in combat)." Ward wrote that he played Olympic basketball in 1953. It is likely he is remembering the 1954 Asian Games which took place in the newly reconstructed Rizal Stadium in Manila, Philippines. The original stadium had been destroyed during the war.

"Naturally, with all the airplanes (fighters I had available to me as a USAF Capt.) I flew all over the globe until August 1953 when I finally became a ground officer (PIO - Public Information Officer) for generals in the Air Force all over the world (mostly the Pacific).

According to Ward's obituary in Tulsa World, "He was also an instructor pilot and public affairs officer for the first ThunderJets team, a precursor to USAF Thunderbirds."

I flew to every country in the world except never south of the Panama Canal and became a commercial real estate broker in Phoenix from 1955 until 2002 when I retired to Tulsa - close to my five adult children in the states... my total military flying time is 13,470 hours."

"I have been a lucky one - in perfect health and 5 great adult children... all are healthy and we do lots of family things - we are all greater travelers."