

OCTOBER 16, 2017

First Lieutenant Edward J. Peterson, Jr.

CENTENNIAL LODGE OF PERFECTION ORATION

BY: DANIEL K. CONWAY, 32° KCCH



The eldest son of an itinerate farmer, Edward Joseph Peterson, Jr. was born in a predominately Swedish farming community near the township of Orleans in Harlan County, Nebraska on November 16, 1917.



Orleans, Nebraska, circa 1920

The Edward, or "Pete" as he was later known, spent his early childhood first in Loveland, Colorado and then Berthoud, until his family finally moved to Denver, where he attended Stevens Elementary and Morey Junior High School.



Morey Junior High School, circa 1930

In 1931, his family settled into a house on 4100 South Sherman Street in Englewood, where he completed his junior and senior high schools, graduating from Englewood High School in 1935. He ranked number five academically in his graduating class and was an all-conference stand-out in football and track.



Englewood High School, circa 1930

Pete attained the rank of Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts, and was instrumental in the founding of the Englewood Chapter of DeMolay; organizations both dedicated to preparing young men to lead successful, happy, and productive lives.



Edward Peterson, circa 1935

After high school, he attended the University of Denver, graduating in 1939 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education, and went on to earn a Master of Arts degree in 1940. While attending graduate school, he worked three part-time jobs; one for the university, another for an auto supply company, and another for the post office.



Englewood Post Office, circa 1940

During this time, Pete became actively interested in aviation and enrolled in the Civilian Pilot Training program offered by the Walt Higley Flying School at the Denver Municipal Airport. Created before World War II, the CTP was a U.S. government program to create a trained pool of potential military pilots in case of war. Flying became an all-consuming part of Pete's life during this period.



Denver Municipal Airport, circa 1944

While earning his civilian pilot's license, Pete met his future wife, Ruth Wallrich of Alamosa, also a licensed pilot, who shared his love of flying, athletics, and the outdoors. After completing his civilian pilot training, Pete enlisted in the Army's Aviation Cadet program and was ordered to report to Stockton Field, California on March 22nd to receive his basic military pilot training. However, before doing so he had a few important matters to attend to.



Edward and Ruth Peterson, circa 1940

On February 17th Edward Peterson, Jr. petitioned to receive the degrees of Masonry, and by a special dispensation from the Grand Master of Masons in Colorado, Francis Knauss, was initiated an Entered Apprentice on March 6th in Englewood Lodge #166. Then, he and Ruth married on March 17th and shortly thereafter left for California and his initial assignment.

Petition for the Degrees of Masonry

To the Worshipful Master, Wardens and Brethren of Englewood Lodge No. 166, A. F. and A. M.:

The petition of the subscriber respectfully represents that having long entertained a favorable opinion of your ancient institution, he is desirous, if found worthy, of being made an Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason, and of being admitted a member of your Lodge. If accepted, he pledges himself to a cheerful obedience to all the requirements of your by-laws, and promises a strict conformity to the ancient usages and customs, and the established rules and regulations of the fraternity.

The Following Questions are Required to be Answered in Writing by the Petitioner:

When were you born? November 16, 1917

Where were you born? Salinas, Calif.

What is your occupation? Substitute Postal Clerk

Where do you reside? 4100 So. Sherman St

How long have you lived in Colorado? Twenty years

How long have you lived within the jurisdiction of this Lodge? None years

Do you believe in the existence of one ever-living and true God? Yes

Do you know of any physical, legal, or moral reason which should prevent you from becoming a Free Mason? no

Have you in the past violated, or are you now violating, the criminal law of Colorado? no

Do you promise not to violate such law in the future? Yes

Are you engaged, as a principal business, or through a business controlled by you, in the manufacture or sale of intoxicating liquor? no

Do you promise not to so engage in the future? Yes

Have you ever applied for the degrees of Masonry? no

If so, when and in what Lodge?

Dated at Englewood, Colorado, this Seventeenth day of February, A. D. 19 41

[Signed] Edward Joseph Peterson Jr.
FULL NAME

Recommended by: James T. Coleman Postoffice address: 4100 So. Sherman St
Bro. B. Gilchrist

Members of the Lodge who have known the petitioner for at least one year.

THIS PETITION WILL NOT BE RECEIVED UNLESS ACCOMPANIED BY FIFTY (\$50.00) DOLLARS

Edward Peterson's Masonic petition, 1941

Upon completing flight training on October 31st, he was commissioned to a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Air Forces and ordered to report for active duty in Spokane, Washington. By February of 1942 he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant and was also pronounced proficient on the 1st Degree on February 13th by courtesy of Tyrian Lodge #96, F. & A.M. of Washington. The Brothers of Tyrian Lodge then passed him to the Degree of a Fellow Craft on March 6th, and Brother Peterson was subsequently pronounced proficient on the second degree on March 13th.

In April, the Army allowed him to return to his home state and reassigned him to Lowry Field in Aurora, Colorado. Then on May 7th, 1942 Brother Peterson was finally raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason in his home Lodge of Englewood #166.



Lowry Field, circa 1940

Less than two months later in July of 1942, Lieutenant Peterson reported for duty as the Operations Officer for the 14th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron at the Colorado Springs Army Air Base. Like his fellow pilots, Lieutenant Peterson eagerly prepared for combat with this squadron and their F-4 "Photo Lightning" reconnaissance aircraft. The F-4 was the reconnaissance version of Lockheed's P-38 "Lightning" twin-engine fighter, which was introduced before the U.S. entered World War II in 1941.



Lt. Peterson (on left), circa 1941

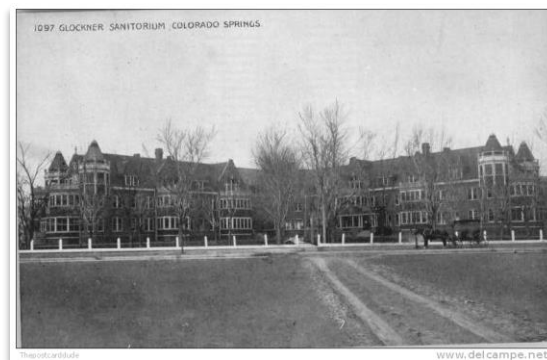
As the squadron operations officer, he had more hours in the P-38 aircraft than his fellow pilots. This experience also made him the squadron test pilot. On the morning of Saturday, August 8th, Lieutenant Peterson prepared for a routine test flight for an aircraft with an engine change.



Lockheed's F-4 "Photo Lightning" (P-38 photoreconnaissance variant)

Everything appeared normal before take-off, but eyewitnesses saw something terrible as the aircraft lifted off the runway. Just as landing gear came up, smoke poured of the left engine, and that engine suddenly quit. The left wing dropped and hit the runway, igniting a fuel tank and engulfing the aircraft in flames as it crashed to the ground.

A base truck was on the scene almost immediately. Three enlisted soldiers risked their lives by running through the massive fire to get Lt. Peterson out of the aircraft. They lifted him out of the cockpit by his parachute straps and carried him to a waiting ambulance, which set out for Glockner (now Penrose) Hospital in Colorado Springs.



Glockner Sanitorium, circa 1910

Lieutenant Peterson suffered extensive burns on his head, chest, and legs. While at the hospital he faded in and out of consciousness and repeatedly asked those around him if he would regain his sight and be able to return to flight again. His fellow officers admired his fortitude and was very popular with all the 14th Recon Squadron members, officers and enlisted alike. Despite his fortitude, Edward Peterson, Jr. died from his injuries at 3:00pm that afternoon.

At his wife Ruth's request, his remains were cremated and scattered over Pikes Peak, Denver, and Alamosa from a P-38 to honor his love of flying. A letter to General Henry Arnold, commanding general of the Army Air Forces, said "Courage, determination, and devotion to duty characterized Lieutenant Peterson. He was an officer of the character and high ideals who commanded the affectionate respect of all his associates."



Pikes Peak (near Colorado Springs, Colorado)

Edward Peterson was the first Coloradan to lose his life in the line of duty here in Colorado. On December 13th, 1942 in honor of his sacrifice, the Colorado Springs Army Air Base was renamed Peterson Army Air Base, also known as Peterson Field. In 1976, Peterson Field was renamed Peterson Air Force Base.



Main Entrance to Peterson Field, 1943

Perhaps the best way to summarize Lieutenant Peterson's sacrifice for his nation comes from the words in a letter presented to his family signed by President Franklin Roosevelt:

***"He stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die, so that freedom might live and grow, and increase its blessings.
Freedom lives. And through it, he lives."***

