MAX WALTER WHITSON

(Written text and photographs provided by Max Walter and Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson). Max Walter Whitson was born on July 18, 1930, in Venice, California, and was the son of John P. and Nora Velmina (Nelson) Whitson. Max Whitson was educated in the Bakersfield elementary school system and graduated from East Bakersfield High School, Bakersfield, California, in 1949. Max joined the National Guard while attending Bakersfield Junior College (for 18 months). He joined the NAV CAD (Naval Cadet Program) in Pensacola, Florida, and received his wings in 1953 at Corpus Christi, Texas. He completed carrier landings while at Pensacola and Corpus Christi. Max was stationed at Alameda Air Station flying PBM (Patrol Aircraft). He was then deployed to Japan where he also flew PBM's. Max Whitson was released from the service in 1956 and returned to Bakersfield Junior College and then transferred to Fresno State University, graduating in 1959 with a BA degree in special subjects, Industrial Arts. Max taught photography, arts, and crafts at Tehachapi High School in Tehachapi, California. He returned to the service in 1961. Max was then sent to Corpus Christi, Texas, as a flight instructor, where he flew the S2F Grumman (Submarine Tracker). In 1964 Max was deployed to Midway Island (Territory of the USA) to fly the HU16 Grumman Albatross, air-sea-rescue. He was released from active duty in 1966 and returned to Bakersfield, California. Max served in the Naval Reserve, "weekend warrior" program at Los Alamitos, California, for three years flying the P2V Patrol aircraft. He towed glider pilots at Tehachapi Glider School, in the summer of 1966. Interestingly, his first tow was Astronaut Virgil "Gus" Grissom. (It was not unusual, at that time, for astronauts to come to Tehachapi, California, for glider practice. Max Whitson returned to teaching in 1967 and taught mechanical drawing and metal shop at junior high school. Max Walter Whitson retired from teaching in 1991.

Max Walter Whitson, married Barbara Ann Fife on August 26, 1959, at Little Chapel of West, Las Vegas, Nevada. Barbara Ann Fife was born on October 2, 1936, in Taft, California, and was the daughter of Mark James and Alice Mathilda (Nelson) Fife. She was raised a Methodist. Barbara Ann Fife graduated from East High School in Bakersfield, California, in 1954. She continued her education at Bakersfield Junior College and Received an Associate Arts degree in 1956 before switching majors and transferring to Fresno State University and earning a BA degree. Credential: Elementary Education, Fresno State Extension, Bakersfield Campus, Credential: Educable Mentally Retarded, California Lutheran College, Bakersfield Extension: Credentials: Learning handicapped, Resource Specialist, Degree: MS, Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson was an Elementary School Teacher (Grades 1, 2, and 3), taught Educable Mentally Retarded: pre-primary level, Multiple-handicapped: ages 6, 7, and 8: included Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, Autistic blind, and deaf.

In 1964 Max received orders to Midway Island (located near the end of the Hawaiian chain of Islands). Since the orders were not for concurrent travel, Barbara was allowed to only go as far as Honolulu. Three days after Max left for Midway Island there was a catastrophic earthquake in Alaska. Consequently it was expected that a tidal wave would arrive in Honolulu and also Midway. Barbara's only friends on the island of Oahu were two hours away by bus or forty-five minutes by car. And of course she didn't have a car. And the only communication with Max was by letter of "ship to shore" which had a very long waiting list before the earthquake. Meanwhile Max was on duty flying a plane in which he had no experience. The order was to fly around the island so the plane would not be on the ground when the tidal wave hit. Midway is only two and a half miles long and two miles wide. So it was a very boring flying experience for many hours. Fortunately the tidal wave did not materialize and six months later orders arrived for Barbara to join Max on Midway Island.
They both enjoyed Midway Island very much. Snorkeling was a favorite sport. All the fish inside the reef were poisonous except Longusta. They were known as the lobster without pinchers on Midway. It was not unusual for the lobster to produce two and a half pounds of meat.

Midway Island was a bird sanctuary for many species of sea birds. Probably the most well known of the birds was the Layson Albatross or "gooney bird". The gooney birds walked on their knees for quite sometime and then assumed an upright position. Since their whole backyard was covered in nests, Barbara checked each one daily to watch the progress. One morning she noticed one small chick with a red band on its leg walking upright and wandering all over the yard. Max happened to see Dr. Fisher from Indiana University, who was an authority on the Layson Albatross. He mentioned the strange chick. Dr. Fisher became quite interested and visited their home that morning. He stated the band was not one of his and the chick would not survive since the parents would not find him when they returned with their meal of squid. Since Barbara had no means of obtaining squid or processing it as the parents did, there was nothing to be done.

A beautiful bird known as the fairy tern also nested on the island. Since these terns don't build a nest, the chicks were always falling from the trees. The dainty ferry tern lays its egg, on occasion, on the limb of a tree. When hatched, the chick holds fast through wind and weather until old enough to fly. One day a chick was found on the Whitson's patio. Unable to find the parents, they decided to adopt it against the advice of the medical doctors on the island. (The doctors felt the Navy personnel should let nature take its course). It became a daily routine in the evening to gather minnows for the chick. After dinner the chick use to climb up Max's leg to his shirt pocket and sleep inside the pocket. When Max was gone, friends went with Barbara to gather minnows in the shallow waters by the rocks. One evening, while standing in the water, she felt something brush against her ankle. Looking down there was a moray eel staring up at her.

Midway Island was one hundred and forty miles from the international dateline. The common statement on the island was "we are 140 miles from tomorrow".

Max Walter Whitson enjoyed flying radio control gliders in contests in Bakersfield, California, and other areas. Max won several plaques and awards, but his most cherished award was 10th place in an international competition in Visalia, California, competing against 300 pilots.

Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson hobbies included Tai Chi Chuan (Traditional Form:103 movements), enjoyed walking daily: two miles, and cooking. Barbara also enjoyed Volunteering: in Corpus Christi, Texas she chaired a Hospitality Committee, VT-28, Receptionist: Navy Relief Organization, Co-advisor Student Officer's Wives organization. Currently she is co-advisor of Resource Services: Kern County Retired Teachers organization.

The Max Walter and Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson made their home in Bakersfield, California.
Max Walter Whitson photographed riding his horse in Long Beach, California. Date: 1935 or 1936. (Photograph courtesy of William John Krause II).

Max Walter Whitson photographed with his grandmother, Mary Elizabeth (Johannesson/Nelson) Nelson, in Bakersfield, California, during the summer of 1942. (Photograph courtesy of William John Krause II).

Max Walter Whitson. Date and place unknown. (Photograph courtesy of William John Krause II).

A photograph taken of Barbara Ann Fife (front) with her mother, Alice Mathilda (Nelson) Fife, and sister, Bette Jean Fife, on Pacific Street in Bakersfield, California. Date: 1936.

A photograph taken of Barbara Ann Fife (right) with her grandmother, Mathilda Nelson, and sister, Bette Jean Fife, in Bakersfield, California. Date: 1937.

A photograph taken of Barbara Ann Fife (left) with her mother, Alice Mathilda (Nelson) Fife, holding a second cousin and sister, Bette Jean Fife. Barbara is seven or eight years old. Bakersfield, California. Date: about 1944 or 1945.

Wedding photograph of Max Walter Whitson and Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson which took place at the Little Chapel of the West in Las Vegas, Nevada, on August 26, 1959.
A squadron photograph of Max Walter Whitson taken on Midway Island (Pacific Ocean) in 1964.

A photograph of Max Walter Whitson and Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson leaving the Little Chapel of the West in Las Vegas, Nevada, on August 26, 1959.

A photograph of Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson in Honolulu, Hawaii. Date: 1964.

A photograph taken of Max Walter Whitson in 1967.
Max Walter Whitson (center front row) with the crew that made a logistical flight from Hawaii. The plane is a DC 7 Northwest Airline. Log flights came in twice a week. Flight crew: Koepp, C.F. ABHC; LT M. W. Whitson; ENS R. B. Mordhorst; Bentley, C. E. ABH-2; Cathecart, Souza, R. J. ADJAA; Kiender, W. H. ABH-3.

Max Walter Whitson (third from the right) with other officers in the Naval Reserve at Los Alamitos, California. They are standing in front of a P2V, a Patrol aircraft. The officer second from the left is Captain Sink. He was commissioned to design President Nixon's Library. Date: 1972.

Photographs taken of Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson and her first grade classes in 1966-1967 (top) and 1968 (bottom). Williams School, Bakersfield, California.
Max Walter Whitson (center wearing sunglasses) with from left to right: his uncle, Victor Christ Nelson, his Aunt’s, Lorraine Marian (Nelson) Bain and Anne Mathilda (Nelson) Stull and Alice and Mark Fife. Bakersfield, California. Date: September 18, 1965. (Photograph courtesy of William John Krause II).

Max Walter Whitson (right) photographed with one of his mother’s brothers (Victor Christ Nelson) and two of her sister’s: Lorraine Marian (Nelson) Bain (far left) and Anne Mathilda (Nelson) Stull. Bakersfield, California. Date: 1965. (Photograph courtesy of William John Krause II).

Max Walter Whitson photographed in Bakersfield, California. Date: September 18, 1965. (Photograph courtesy of William John Krause II).

Max Walter and Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson photographed at Bakersfield Junior High School where he taught mechanical drawing and metal work. Bakersfield, California. Date: September, 1981. (Photograph courtesy of William John Krause II).
Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson photographed with one of her scotties (Megan) at the Whitson home in Bakersfield, California. Date: Fall of 1984.

Max Walter Whitson (right, number 3) photographed following a third place finish in a Woody Contest with the Southern San Joaquin Soaring Society in 2009. Visalia, California.

Max Walter Whitson (far right) photographed with the First Place SSJSS Team from Bakersfield, California, following a soaring competition. Fresno, California. Date: 1991. SSJSS=Southern San Joaquin Soaring Society.
A photograph taken of Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson (back left) with her class at McKinley Elementary School during the 1991-1992 school year. Bakersfield, California.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

A VISIT FROM CALM. We saw a possum! Mrs. Moreland brought her. The possum was in a box. The box had holes in it. The box had a towel. She covered herself up with the towel. She ate purple grapes. Her favorite food was cheese. She held the cheese in her hands. Her hair was soft. Her tail was prickly. She smelled all of us with her nose. Her whiskers tickled our hands. She has a pouch. She doesn’t like people to look at her pouch. She went all around the room. Mrs. Moreland put her in the box and took her home. We liked possum! We will see her again when we go on our field trip.

A story written by Mrs. Barbara Ann (Fife) Whitson's class (pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade) at McKinley Elementary School before a field trip to CALM during the 1990-1991 school year that was published in the school yearbook. CALM stands for California Living Museum an organization that takes injured animals and rehabilitates them to the extent of their capabilities. Unfortunately most are not able to be released again because they are not able to fend for themselves. The CALM gives them a home for the rest of their lives. Both Max and Barbara Whitson have a lifetime membership to the museum.