



# Fighter Pilot's Heaven: Flight Testing the Early Jets

*Donald S. Lopez*



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*Fighter Pilot's Heaven* presents the dramatic inside story of the American military's transition into the jet age, as told by a flyer whose life depended on its success. With colorful anecdotes about fellow pilots as well as precise technical information, Donald S. Lopez describes how it was to be "behind the stick" as a test pilot from 1945 to 1950, when the U.S. military was shifting from war to peacetime operations and from propeller to jet aircraft.

An ace pilot who had served with Gen. Claire Chennault's Flying Tiger Fighter Group, Lopez was assigned at the close of World War II to the elite Proof Test Group of the Air Proving Ground Command. Located at Eglin Field (later Eglin Air Force Base) in Florida, the group determined the operational suitability of Air Force weapons systems and aircraft and tested the first operational jet, the P-80 Shooting Star. Jet fighters required new techniques, tactics, and weaponry. Lopez recounts historic test flights in the P-59, P-80, and P-84, among other planes, describing complex combat maneuvers, hair-raising landings in unusual positions, and disastrous crashes and near crashes. This memoir is peppered with lively accounts of many pilots and their colleagues, revealing how airmen coped with both exhilarating successes and sometimes tragic failures.



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