

Focusing On You

David Gilliss



David Gilliss (right) pictured with Astronaut Gordon Cooper.

Hello, my name is David Gilliss. I joined the Clan Macpherson Association a few years ago at the Scottish Fair in Oakland at Dunsmuir House. I was attracted to the fair and subsequently to the organization by a number of factors. Being an avid photographer and having knowledge of my heritage combined to make the colorful games, parades, music and the site itself an attractive day out.

I attended several Scottish fairs each year from Monterey, Campbell and Pleasanton to my favorite at Dunsmuir House. I saw the Gilliss family name listed in the Macpherson Clan at the fairs and after speaking a few times with Chairman George McPherson, it took little coaxing for me to become a full member. I enjoy my membership and have met several cousins.

My knowledge of my heritage came primarily from my mother, Louise Gilliss (1913 - 2002) who, over a thirty year period, traced our heritage back a couple of hundred years. She had been president of the Ohio Genealogical Society, and after moving to California started a German (my maternal heritage) genealogy group that expanded to 500 members in Sacramento.

My relatives had family names that included Hall, Ricketts, Perkins and eventually back to Ian, Murdoch and MacPherson. My ancestors from Scotland settled in Maryland, near the location of Annapolis Naval Academy, nearly 500 years ago. The planetarium at Annapolis is the James Melville Gilliss planetarium and a few Gilliss relatives live in that area today. My grandfather (John Scott Gilliss, Jr.) moved from Maryland to Warren, Ohio shortly after 1900 and a few years later married Flora

Hall in 1908. My father (Hiram Randall Gilliss) was born in Warren, Ohio and studied Engineering in Wisconsin, where he met and married my mother Louise Rodau. Her family descended from Muenzenberger, Walke and Luftrute families, originally from Germany, but by the 1800's settled in or near Milwaukee and Janesville, Wisconsin where several relatives live today.

My siblings include a twin brother, Douglas and sisters, Susan (now Gwyn) and Sandra from California, New York, and Ohio, respectively. My brother Douglas flew as an Air Force Pilot during the 1970's and is currently an FAA Flight Examiner, qualified to train and



certify pilots in experimental and privately owned jet fighter aircraft. He owns an L-29 jet fighter (made in Czechoslovakia) and founded a team of four L-29 pilots to form the stunt flying team known as the **Thunder Delfins**. The

pilots for the **Thunder Delfins** are the most experienced actively performing high performance stunt team in the world today. The team regularly performs at air shows, holiday parades and does memorial fly-overs for retired pilots. My sister Gwyn has performed in television soap operas for several years and currently coaches young aspiring actors on techniques for getting selected for television/movie roles. Her book is entitled the ABC's of Soaps. My sister Sandra is a retired manager and lobbyist for a pharmaceutical company, as well as a busy grandmother of 6 grandchildren.

A cousin of my father, Ernie Hall had an early interest in aviation and was a civilian flight instructor during World War I. He later flew from his own grass strip in Warren, Ohio for over 55 years. One of his planes is in the Smithsonian Institution. He was recognized as a member of the Early Birds, comprised of pilots who flew before 1917. Ernie Hall also taught my father to fly; he had a solo flight on September 9, 1931.

During my college years, I worked as a lifeguard on Lake Erie. Two fellow lifeguards had flying licenses and this generated my own personal interest in flying. I took ROTC courses in college and completed Officer Training School to become an Air Force officer. Initially, I was assigned as a Navigator in the two-seat RF-4C reconnaissance aircraft. It was a job which I loved and excelled. Over a four year period, I flew the

reconnaissance version of the Phantom jet in all of Southeast Asia from the Philippines to Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Okinawa and Thailand.



Editor's note: David Gilliss flew more than 200 combat missions, often against MIG fighters and Surface to Air Missiles, in the Vietnam Conflict. For his meritorious service to our country, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and more than a dozen Air Medals.

Later, I completed Air Force Pilot Training near Del Rio, Texas and flew C-141A transport aircraft from Travis Air Force Base, California to worldwide locations, including Panama, Diego Garcia, Sri Lanka, Newfoundland and many others. I hold a FAA Commercial Flight Certificate with an Instrument rating and single and multi-engine qualifications. I enjoy flying with my brother, Douglas' team (the **Thunder Delfins**) and I regularly take photos from the aircraft, as well as on the ground. The team photographs have been featured in magazines worldwide.



After military service, I earned a Master's Degree from Golden Gate University, and worked as Operations Manager/ Manufacturing Manager in several growing high-technology companies in Silicon Valley for 15 years.

During this time, I started teaching graduate and undergraduate Project Management and Technology courses at University of Phoenix and Golden Gate University. I later began teaching at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, where I teach Engineering, Ethics, Strategic Management and Operations Management. After 12 years of teaching, I have taught 36 different courses at four different schools, but prefer Strategic Management and Project Management. Recently, I am teaching at San Jose State University.

I am proud to be a member of the Clan Macpherson Association.