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AVIATION CONNECTIONS: NEWSLETTER

Winter 2021

WWW.ECAVIATIONHERITAGE.COM

Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation

January 2021

As the Commandant of the Marine Corps recently described 2020, "If there were a watchword for 2020, the shortlist would certainly include 'change,' 'uncertainty,' and 'adaptation.' This is so true for everyone across the globe. This past year has also impacted our organization and our goals to promote science, technology, engineering, and math to our youth of Eastern North Carolina.

During 2020, ECAHF cancelled the Family Fly-In and Movie Night. This annual event is free to the public. The event is aimed at children with the goal of encouraging them to explore potential career paths in aviation and understand the value of STEM skills in all types of jobs. In 2021, the event will be *changed* to accommodate the need for social distancing by having the entire event outdoors.

The Summer Engineering Camp was unfortunately cancelled due to the *uncertainty* of keeping everyone safe during this week-long camp. The camp provides a positive glimpse into various fields of engineering by using hands-on creative investigations and real-world building activities. Tentative plans are being made for a 2021 Engineering Camp.

In order to continue to promote STEM skills with our youth, ECAHF has *adapted* to assist with meeting our goals. A "STEM Activities" link has been added to the ECAHF Website. The first design challenge is titled "Blast Off." Students are encouraged to complete the design challenge, video the execution and upload to the link provided. All students completing the challenge will receive a commemorative coin and certificate. Please share this information with all students, kindergarten through 12th grade.



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Spotlight an Exhibit



HH-46D "Pedro"

The Marine Helicopter HH-46 Sea Knight enjoyed over 35 years of Marine Corps service. From Vietnam to Desert Storm, the "Frog" was the Marine's front line medium-lift assault helicopter until 2015 when replaced by the V-22.

In addition, to the Marine Corps' combat assault missions, the H-46 Sea Knight was used by the Navy and Marine Corps for search and rescue. The Pedro search and rescues (SAR) was a familiar welcomed site over Eastern North Carolina.

Boeing delivered 624 H-46s to the Navy and the Marines from 1964 to 1971.

This exhibit model was manufactured by Boeing/Vertol in May of 1964 and was stricken from Navy inventory on April 26, 2005 with a total of 8604.2 flight hours. This craft was formerly Angel One from Headquarters, MCAS Beaufort, SC, where it performed search and rescue missions.

Great Uncle Raymond Hill

WWII Ferry Pilot

By Barry R. Fetzer, Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation Historian

“If you want to grow old as a pilot, you’ve got to know when to push it and when to back off.”

BGen Chuck Yeager, WWII Fighter Ace and first human to break the sound barrier (1923-2020)

This is the second of a two column series about my Great Uncle Raymond Hill, who learned to fly at the dawn of aviation, a decade—give or take a year or two—after the Wright Brothers’ “First Flight” successes at Kitty Hawk. While we don’t know for sure, based on surmising the dates from family stories, Ray probably had his “first flights” around 1912 or 13 at the age of 16 or 17. He went on to participate in the 1932 National Air Races alongside early aviation greats like Amelia Earhart, Jimmy Doolittle, and Jimmy Haizlip. I surmised in my last column that Ray might have actually met these famous pilots and might even have been related (as an in-law) to Jimmy Doolittle through the marriage of his sister, Gertrude, to a Doolittle. But more genealogical research is required to confirm this.

I also wrote in my last column that Great Uncle Ray may have crashed at the 1932 Nationals, surviving the crash but possibly ending his “barn storming” ways—pushing the edge of the envelope—as an aviator, likely at the insistence of his wife, my Great Aunt Luella who was my paternal grandmother’s sister.

But while Ray’s crash likely ended his participation in the 1932 National Air Races and air racing or aerobatics he might have flown in the future, it didn’t end his flying career. A note here on historical accuracy. While it is my goal as an amateur historian and my responsibility as the Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation Historian—and my duty as a historian in general—to strive for accuracy, because of the paucity of written and photographic records (at least those we have discovered so far) and the flimsy nature of decades old memories—especially those of children—I am including in this column a bit of conjecture or guessing...maybe I’ll describe it as “deducing from known facts” or using *poetic license* (to use a term that gives my speculation on Ray’s flying career, perhaps, a bit of a “sweeter smell”).

So now that we’ve gotten the admission out of the way that as a historian writing about my Great Uncle Ray I am using what we used to call in the Marines (using a highly technical term) a “SWAG” or a “Scientific Wild-Ass Guess” to write this column, I’ll mention once again old aviators as I did in my last column.

“Bold” aviators, so the aviation saying goes, don’t make it to “old”. The aviation adage I mentioned in my last column, “There are old aviators. And there are bold aviators. But there are no old, bold aviators,” applies to my Great Uncle Ray. After his crash at the 1932 National Air Races in Cleveland, Ohio, a crash that likely ended his air racing, barn storming, and aerobatic aviation exploits, the crash did not end his flying career.

Ray’s transition during WWII to a more “stable” aviation vocation—that as a Ferry Pilot—allowed him to keep flying and get to “old”...at least as an aviator. Unfortunately the Hills have a family history of heart disease and Great Uncle Ray’s third heart attack killed him at 61 years of age. But at least it wasn’t “bold” aviation that

killed him. While taken from us too early by heart disease, he lived long enough to have a role in serving his nation during WWII, and a cherished role in his family as a graying father and grandfather.



**Ray (holding Robyn), Luella and Chris Hill, circa 1955
(Hill Family Photograph)**

We know almost nothing of this “ferry pilot” phase of Great Uncle Ray’s flying. That’s probably because no one thought of asking him or cared to ask him—or his wife Luella—before they both died. Most people of Ray’s generation just didn’t talk much of their “accomplishments”—especially without being asked—let alone other things in their lives. They kept their personal and even their professional lives...well...personal. They talked neither of themselves nor their families. When my Mom questioned her mother about a family member my grandmother’s response was, according to my Mom, “Why do you care about old, dead people anyway?”

My “inner historian”, though, cares. I believe a look back at “old, dead people” provides a lens to our future...a “those who don’t learn from the past are doomed to repeat it” kind of idea. I guess I got that interest honestly from my Mom, just as I received honestly from my aviation kin—including Uncle Ray—the love of the “wild blue yonder” and pilot “blood” coursing through my veins.

Ray didn’t talk much about his own life, either. That’s why we know almost nothing except for some hazy memories or off-handed comments he made about ferrying aircraft. If we had records of someone asking him we might have a few details of his early aviation days or his time as a ferry pilot, but otherwise he just moved on, got on with his life, and didn’t talk much about his WWII service like most of his generation and that of his children’s generation. It is only later generations, including mine and particularly follow-on generations and the advent of social media where talking about oneself (even to the extent of what one had for supper and even posting pictures of the meal itself), is vogue.

So what little we know about Ray's duties ferrying aircraft is this: I have a vague memory of sitting in his living room on Broadway Avenue in Bedford, Ohio, him in his easy chair mentioning off-hand that he ferried aircraft during WWII. Chris, one of Ray's eldest grandchildren and my second cousin, has recollections of his mentioning ferrying aircraft during the War as well.

We also have photos of Ray in uniform like the one of him below wearing the standard US Army Air Corps officers' cap insignia and wearing wings that do not appear to be the standard issue US Army Air Corps aviator wings. Unfortunately, the photos' resolution does not permit definite identification of the wings he was wearing.



**2d Lt. Ray Hill portrait taken in Kansas City, Missouri, circa 1943
(Hill Family photograph)**

Ferry Command (what later became known as the Air Transport Command, or ATC, as we'll discuss later in this column), wings insignia were different (and there were several variations) than the standard US Army Air Corps wings.



**Various Air Transport Command pilot and aircrew wing insignia
(Courtesy: witherells.com)**

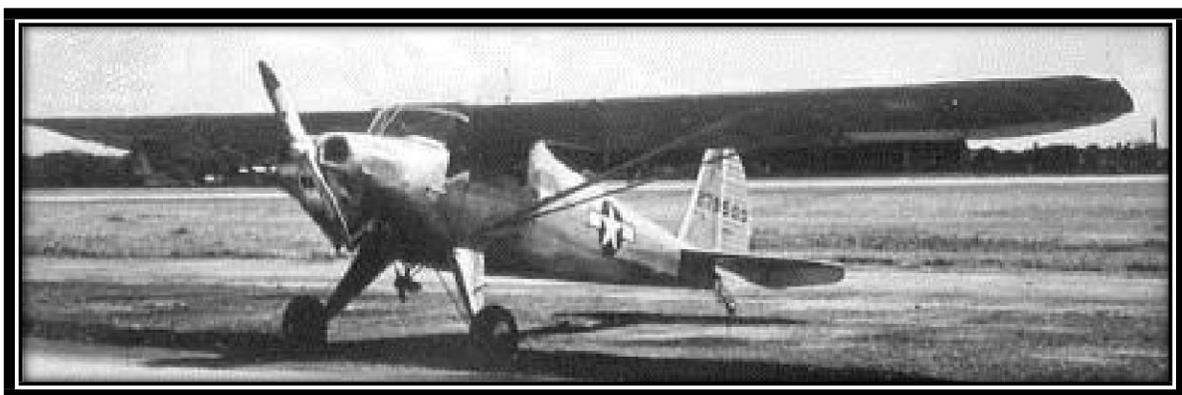
And ATC made use of both military and civilian pilots in accomplishing its mission as we'll see a little later in this column.



**Air Transport Command Civilian Pilot Wings insignia/Air Corps Ferry Command
(Courtesy: Pintrest)**

And finally, we have a wooden propeller that my cousin Robyn, Ray's granddaughter and Chris's sister, passed along to me. Markings on the G.B. Lewis Company (Watertown, Wis.) propeller (circa 1942) (Ser 5206/DES L11B-42) indicate the prop was used on the Continental A-65 engine.

According to the Smithsonian Institute, "During World War II, this engine, under the designation O-170, was adopted by the U.S. Army as the standard engine for use in all light liaison aircraft including the Luscombe Model 8A Silvaire.



USAAF Luscombe UC-90A Model 8A adopted by the United States Army Air Forces during World War II (s/n 42-79549) as an observation aircraft. The above photographed prop looks very much like Ray Hill's G .B. Lewis Company wooden prop Ray's granddaughter has entrusted with me. (Courtesy: USAF)

While certainty of the aircraft on which an antique wooden prop was used is very difficult without first hand eyewitness accounts, photographs or aircraft logbooks tied to

propeller serial numbers, it is possible given the likely manufacture date of the prop and Uncle Ray's flying duties with ATC, that this prop came from an Interstate S1A Cadet or a Luscombe 8A, both of which were used by the USAAF as training and spotting/observation aircraft during WWII when what had formally been civilian aircraft manufacturing and use were switched almost exclusively to the US military for the massive, national effort necessary to win the War.

But who knows? This prop might have come from an aircraft Ray flew himself, or it could have been a souvenir he picked up along the way. We may never know for certain.

History can be, and often is, illogical. But while history may be illogical, Ray's enlistment— or volunteering...we just don't know which—into ATC makes logical sense given his civilian flying experience and the dire national need for pilots—any pilots—to accomplish the massive Continental US and worldwide-based aviation logistical tasks needed to fight and win a global war while younger pilots were sent overseas to fight the air battles that helped win World War II.

Being born in 1894, Ray would have been 49 years old when the above Kansas City portrait of him was taken, nearly 50 years of age being “ancient” in aviator years. Especially combat aviators.

In order to withstand the rigors of training and combat flight, most military aviators start out in their 20's. According to the website history.navy.mil, “a 20-year-old Naval Aviator named George Bush embarked on a mission which he would later describe as one of the most dramatic moments of his life—an experience that gave him a ‘sobering understanding of war and peace’.

It was September 2, 1944. Lieutenant Junior Grade George Bush was a pilot with Torpedo Squadron Fifty-One (VT-51) aboard the aircraft carrier *USS San Jacinto* (CVL-30), a light carrier which was deployed in the North Pacific.

“Just two years earlier, on June 12, 1942, Bush had graduated from high school and joined the Navy as a seaman, second class. But, in less than a year, he completed flight training at NAS Corpus Christi, Texas, was commissioned an ensign, and went on to fly TBM Avengers with VT-51. For a time, he was the youngest pilot in Naval Aviation.”

Twenty year old future President of the US George Bush survived his “sobering understanding of war”, according to History.com, “leaping from his burning plane shot down by enemy fire and parachuting into the Pacific Ocean where he floated for hours on a life raft, vomiting uncontrollably and bleeding profusely from his forehead.”

Fifty year-old “gray beard” Ray Hill, though, couldn't fly off aircraft carriers and would likely not have survived that combat incident experienced by George Bush. But he could ferry aircraft from factories in the US to their assigned military bases, one of hundreds of aviators assigned to ATC who performed such missions.

But while dog-fighting, massive bombing formations, fighter escort missions, and close air support gained most of the honor and press and glory, ATC did well what wins all wars: logistics. So, in fact, these ATC pilots—both males and females—are some of the most important unsung heroes of America's successful effort to win WWII.



Air Transport Command Insignia, 1942
(Courtesy: Wikipedia)

A note about ferrying aircraft by sister services. The US Navy, possessing their own “air force”, also had their own ferry command, one of the Navy’s ferry squadron’s patches depicted below. While this column is primarily about my Great Uncle Raymond Hill and his likely role in the massive US Army Air Forces’ (AAF) aircraft, logistics, and manpower ferrying activities accomplished by ATC, we should take note of the Navy’s vital role in this endeavor too. According to the website:

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Air_Ferry_Squadrons_of_World_War_II, “From a military field, the largest being Floyd Bennett Field in New York, (Navy) ferry pilots flew to the aircraft factories in transport planes, picked up the newly-built planes, and flew them back to the Field. After the aircraft were tested, accepted and commissioned, ferry pilots delivered the majority of these newly-built aircraft to the West Coast.”

In 1944, also according the above website, “Captain John W. King, USN, Commander of the Navy’s AirFerons (Air Ferry Squadrons), issued the following commendation: ‘We of the Naval Air Ferry Command, although not in direct contact with the enemy in the performance of our duties, have a vital and direct link with the fleet and those engaged in combat. By the safe delivery of virtually all the new production service type aircraft to the fleet commands, we insure an adequate flow of the aerial means for the accomplishment of the mission of the Navy - the destruction of the enemy.’”

The above descriptions of what the Navy Ferry Command accomplished describe well what the AAF ATC—and Great Uncle Ray—also did. But ATC did it on a far grander scale than the US Navy.



VRF-1 Air Ferry Squadron Patch
(Courtesy: www.familysearch.org)

According to Wikipedia, “By no means least among the achievements of the Army Air Forces in World War II was its development of a worldwide system of air transport. The development of transport aircraft in the 1920s and 1930s added a new dimension to the art of warfare, and around its varied capacities the AAF built an air transportation system such as had never before been envisaged. That system, and its functions, soon became synonymous with the organization which controlled it, the Air Transport Command.”

Wikipedia and other on-line sources such as the ATC Association website (<https://sites.google.com/site/atcassn>) provided the resources needed to write this column. But several books including Flight to Everywhere (by Ivan Dmitri, Whittlesey House, New York, NY, 1944) and Wings across the World: the Story of the Air Transport Command (by Hugh Cave, Dodd, Mead, and Company, New York, NY, 1945) outline quite well the role ATC played in helping to win WWII, especially its overseas flying missions and routes.

Cave writes about ATC in his forward, “They are the men who ride the skyways of the world—the pilots and crewmen of the Air Transport Command of the United States Army Air Forces. They’ve stolen Father Time’s scythe and equipped him with propellers.” Sea-based logistics was king...until ATC propellers beat Father Time’s scythe into plowshares.

Based on the above sources, I could write reams on ATC. But a quick recap of its history follows from Wikipedia. “The British ferrying service was well under way when the Lend-Lease Act became law on 11 March 1941. With the North Atlantic sea lanes vulnerable to German U-boat attacks, Major General Henry H. “Hap” Arnold established the Air Corps Ferrying Command on May 29, 1941, to deliver lend-lease aircraft overseas (by air) from the USA. Commanded and organized by Brig. Gen. Robert Olds, the mission of the new command was, first, “to move aircraft by air from factories to such terminals as may be designated by the Chief of the Air Corps,” and second, ‘to maintain such special air ferry services (i.e., air transport services) as may be required to meet specific situations.’



Circa 1943 photo of 2d Lt. Ray Hill (r) wearing an Officer of the Day (OD) armband and a fellow pilot under the left engine of a B-25, possibly taken at Fairfax Field, Kansas City, MO. where B-25’s were manufactured. Note nacelle damage right of Ray’s shoulder. (Hill Family Photo)

During the fall of 1941, Ferrying Command had assumed an additional responsibility for delivery of some AAF's own planes from factory to stations within the United States. After the Pearl Harbor attack, the ferry of aircraft within the United States quickly became a major function of the Command and its mission expanded to the domestic ferrying of all multi-engine Army aircraft, all British and Lend-Lease aircraft, and with the air movement of troops by domestic airlines as well."

Fairfax Field in Kansas City, Missouri was a major B-25 manufacturing site and the site of a major ATC squadron, the 2d Ferrying Squadron, and Kansas City is where the above portrait photo of Ray Hill was taken. We don't know, yet, whether Ray ferried factory-fresh B-25's from Fairfax Field to their intended CONUS-based training sites or whether he just happened to be assigned to ATC in Kansas City where the above portrait photograph was taken of him.



**Fairfax Field, Kansas City Missouri, circa 1940
(Courtesy: Wikipedia)**

According to Wikipedia, Air Transport Command moved the 2d Ferrying Squadron of the 5th Ferrying Group from Dallas Love Field to Fairfax on April 15, 1943, and the squadron ferried out 157 B-25s during May. Ray could have been one of those B-25 ferry pilots. The above photo of him with a B-25 is an "indicator of a chance of a possibility" that Ray ferried B-25's...but that's all it is. As Winston Churchill's quote about Russia's intentions in 1939 goes, "It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma", and what kind of aircraft Ray flew with ATC is an enigma. Still, missing the written records, logbooks, or personal stories it's still fun to ponder and contemplate what Ray's war time service might have been.

ATC is a well kept secret. I think a student of modern warfare would have to assume some kind of massive air logistical effort would have had to have been

undertaken during WWII, but I knew nothing of Ferry Command or ATC until starting the research for my Great Uncle Ray Hill's efforts during the War that led to this column. In all my studies of the history of WWII, I had never read of it. Why might that be?

ATC pilots, crew, and ground support personnel received little of the glory that combat aviators received during and after the War. This is probably another reason we know little of Ray's service with ATC: ATC people served in vitally needed roles during the War and then went home back to civilian lives and jobs and were mostly forgotten.

Some probably regretted being what might have been considered at the time as serving in "rear echelons" or "in the rear with the gear" and not involved in "the real action" and consequently just quietly did their jobs and moved on with their lives, having nothing—they assumed—to tell their grandchildren about all Nazis they had killed during the "big war". Relatively few ATC people experienced combat.

But Ferry Command and later ATC had such a critical part to play in a global war. Again from Wikipedia, "From the domestic ferrying assignment it was only a step to the Command taking over the responsibility for delivering or supervising the delivery of AAF and lend-lease aircraft to theaters of war scattered across the world.

After the USA entered World War II, it became clear that the fastest and most economical method of moving combat aircraft from the factory to the front, which might be 10,000 to 15,000 miles away due to the worldwide nature of the conflict, was to ferry them under their own power. Also, to keep aircraft at their highest efficiency, an air transport system for the rapid delivery of spare engines and parts, auxiliary equipment of all kinds, flight crews, and ground personnel became an absolute necessity, and supplementary to the traditional and considerably slower method of surface transport."

"Indeed," Wikipedia goes on, "a limited view of the role of long-range air transportation in World War II persisted for some months after the USA became an active belligerent. Not until the late spring and summer of 1942, when large backlogs of supplies awaiting air shipment to the front began to build up at ports of embarkation and when it became clear that almost unlimited demands would be made in future for the rapid movement of urgently needed materials and personnel, did the idea of air transport as a major instrument of logistics begin to take shape.

'Hap' Arnold made a decision on 20 June 1942 which renamed the Ferrying Command as the Air Transport Command. Effective 1 July 1942, the new Air Transport Command was given what the official history of the AAF described as 'sweeping responsibilities':

1. The ferrying of all aircraft within the United States and to destinations outside of the United States as directed by the Commanding General, Army Air Forces.
2. The control, operation, and maintenance of establishments and facilities on air routes outside of the United States.
3. The transportation by air of personnel, materiel, and mail for all War Department agencies, except those served by Troop Carrier units."

According to Dr. Robert van der Linden Curator of Air Transportation and Special Purpose Aircraft and a supervisory curator in the Aeronautics Department of the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, "The ATC's Ferrying Division, which included the famous Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), replaced the Army Air Forces Ferrying Command and delivered newly-built aircraft from their factories to training bases or

ports of embarkation. From there, the aircraft were flown to overseas destinations including war zones.”



“Unauthorized (some might say, especially today, “rogue”) ATC Patches, circa 1944, using ladies to represent the compass depicted on the official ATC logo pictured above, page 6. (Courtesy: Flying Tiger Antiques)

Wikipedia continued in its details about ATC, “The Air Transport Command was initially only a semi-military organization, with most of its leadership coming from the ranks of airline executives who accepted direct USAAF commissions, usually as colonels or majors. Until 1944, ATC also drew heavily on the airlines for manpower, using experienced civil airline pilots, radio operators, and other aircrew personnel from the airlines to crew transports that had been purchased by the Army from civilian sources.”

Reminiscent of racy WWII aircraft nose art, the unofficial ATC patches depicted above (sewn sometimes on the inside of flight jackets to avoid attracting ire from the “brass”) and the possibility that ATC aircrew wore many different versions of wings on their chests (Ray’s wings in the above photos of him are clearly not standard issue AAF wings even though we cannot specifically identify them) are indicative of the “pseudo-military” or “civil-military” personality of ATC. Civilians in the midst of ATC might have driven the organizational culture to a bit of disdain for uniform regulations and a dislike for some of what military folks call the “Mickey Mouse” of mindless regulations and policies...the “painting of rocks” as Marines were once ordered to do to spruce up areas being visited by VIPs (Very Important Persons...the “brass”).

Having a disdain for painting rocks or not, ATC got the job done and (again from Wikipedia) “by the end of World War II, Air Transport Command had developed into a huge military air carrier with a worldwide route pattern. From an organization of approximately 37,000 personnel (6,500 of them overseas) in December 1942, it numbered nearly 210,000 in August 1945, the bulk stationed overseas (150,000). By the end of the War the command had 3,090 major transport aircraft assigned.

Circling back to the beginning of this column, we don’t know much about Ray Hill’s aviation career, and we don’t know with 100% certainty what aircraft he actually flew with ATC mostly because we haven’t found written records to confirm it. But here’s what we do know about my aviator Great Uncle Ray Hill: He flew early in America’s quest to conquer the sky. He participated in the 1932 National Air Races. Several of his kin remember him saying he ferried aircraft during the War and sparse photographic evidence indicate that was probably the case. He had a photo in uniform taken of him in

Kansas City, Mo., which back then was a hub for ATC and B-25 manufacturing during the War. The photo of him in front of a B-25 is a clue he might have ferried these aircraft. We have his wooden prop that could have come from an AAF Luscombe UC- 90A Model 8A observation aircraft, another aircraft he possibly flew.

But while knowing the aircraft he ferried would be interesting, perhaps most important in the final analysis is this: we know Ray experienced the joy of flight during his life, a wonderful thing for those of us lucky enough to do so. And we know he caught the flying “bug” like most of us do who are blessed to break the bonds of earth, a bug that irreversibly pulled him into the stratosphere despite his wife Luella’s admonitions about his flying, especially after his crash at the 1932 National Air Races.

I think Ray might have agreed with Greek philosopher and sage Epicurus who was quoted as saying, “Skillful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempest (and Ray would add, ‘surviving crashes’.)” Ray’s love of the wild blue yonder and the thrill of flying—despite its risks—irresistibly carried him up and away, again and again.

Irish poet Padraic Colum compiled in 1922 a book of poems (*Anthology of Irish Verse, edited by Padraic Colum, Boni and Liveright, New York, NY, 1922*) including one entitled The Dead Aviator, a poem that well describes that overpowering draw that pulled the Wright Brothers to Kitty Hawk and my Great Uncle Ray...and me...and tens of thousands of others to also experiment with breaking the chains of gravity. “I was the lark whose song was heard/When I was lost to sight/I was the golden arrow loosed/To pierce the heart of night./I fled the little earth, I climbed/Above the rising sun,/I met the morning in a blaze/Before my hour was gone./I ran beyond the rim of space,/Its reins I flung aside,/Laughter was mine and mine was youth/And all my own was pride.”

And we, too, are proud of Ray’s history with, and devotion to, aviation.

Postscript

These historical vignettes for the Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation (ECAHF) Newsletter about my family members who served in aviation roles are a labor of love—and respect—for their service during WWII. So far I’ve covered my Uncle Bill Hay (Marine and Mitchell PBJ aircrewman), my Dad Robert Fetzer (AAF weather forecaster), and now my Great Uncle Ray Hill (AAF ATC pilot). Columns to follow include my Uncle Norman (my Dad’s brother who was a Navy pilot during WWII) and my First Cousin (once removed—my Dad’s first cousin) Richard Tresemer (who was an AAF bomber pilot during WWII).

I am appreciative of your interest in aviation history and my family members’ roles in it, your readership, and your support of ECAHF. Thank you.





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ECAHF needs your support to share the story of the advancement of military aircraft and those who have made it possible in eastern North Carolina. Your membership helps to provide resources to encourage students to acquire science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills through interactive exhibits and programs.

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