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AVIATION CONNECTIONS: NEWSLETTER

Spring 2022

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Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation

March 2022

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Art Nalls

USMC, (Ret)



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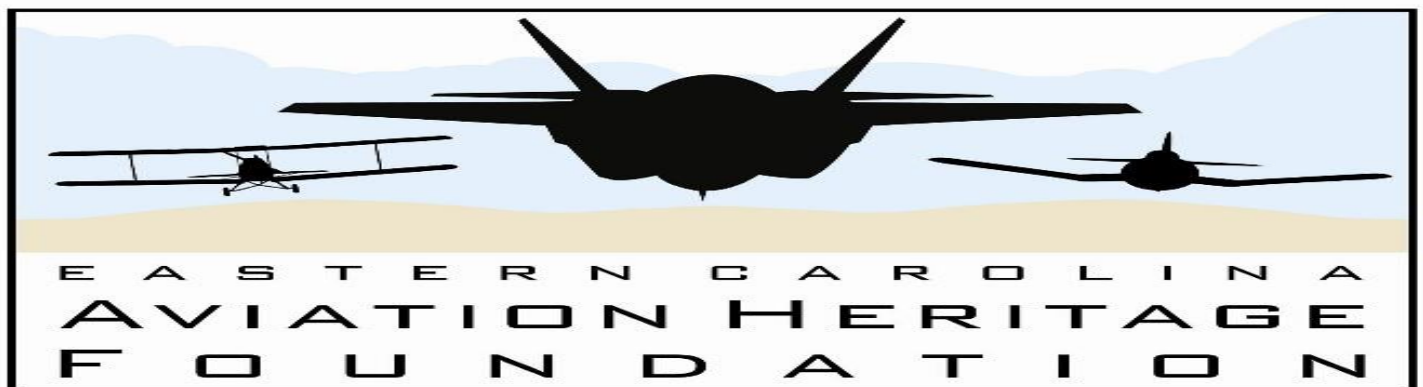
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2022 Elementary School Summer Engineering Camp



**COMING
SOON**

Middle School Summer Camp

July 18-22, 2022

Elementary Summer Camp

July 25-29, 2022

Free Family Fly-In & STEM Night

August 12, 2022

Fall Partnership Event

TBA

2023 Gala

February 24, 2023

The Tangled Web We Weave: Part 1

By Barry R. Fetzer, ECAHF Historian

In paraphrasing Sir Walter Scott who wrote in 1808, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave” [when we dig into family history even a little] and along the lines of that thought, I will move away from writing about aviators for the next two issues of the Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation Newsletter and, instead, focus on my first cousins (once removed) Helene (Tresemer) Cook and Richard “Dick” Cook. Dick was a US Marine combat engineer stationed at New River/Camp Lejeune during WWII before he was transferred to Camp Pendleton, California and then to the Pacific Theater where he was injured in combat several times before being ushered out of the Corps and returned to civilian life along with thousands of his fellow Marines in 1946.

In these historical vignettes I’ve written previously about Helene’s first cousin, my Dad (a US Army Air Forces (USAAF) Weather Forecaster stationed in eastern China during WWII), about her Uncle Ray Hill (her Mom’s sister’s husband who was a USAAF Air Transport Command pilot during the War), and her brother, Richard Tresemer (a USAAF B-26 pilot). Helene shared some wartime correspondence between her brother, Richard, and herself that I recounted in the last edition of this newsletter.

Why write about a “mud Marine” and his wife in this aviation heritage newsletter? Partly because there’s a love story here between Helene and Dick that “flies” well beyond just aviation topics. And there’s a local, eastern North Carolina aspect to this story in which local readers might be interested. But mostly I’m writing about Helene and Dick because—like many of us... “the tangled web we weave”—there are sacrifices and challenges and sorrows in the lives of these two people that transcend mere military occupational specialties, tragedies that many suffer yet they still “keep on keeping on”. These stories of persistence and grit should not go unheralded.

John Adams, second President of the United States, wrote in the same year that Sir Walter Scott wrote about tangled webs in 1808, “Our obligations to our Country never cease but with our lives.”

Many, like Dick Cook, carried their obligations to their country to their death. Many others carry burdens far greater than his...some worse than death...burdens most of us can’t even imagine.

It is an ironic twist of fate, however, that those so burdened...those dedicated and selfless Americans who have risked and sacrificed their lives to guarantee America’s freedoms and way of life...that they have won, for us, the opportunity to forget their deeds.

While our obligations to our country, as John Adams said, may not cease until we are dead, America asks not that everyone’s gift to the nation be death or suffering like Dick Cook’s...or Helene’s challenges and sorrows in life for that matter. What America does ask for, though, is at least remembrance, appreciation, and respect for those willing to sacrifice, as a sign near the entrance to a cemetery in Okinawa where American military are buried reads, “We gave our todays in order that you might have your tomorrows.”

So, I write about Dick and Helene Cook so that their “todays” might be remembered and appreciated for their rising above their challenges and circumstances.

What is it about some people that allow them to endure great sorrow and hardships that would cripple others? Perhaps it is one of life's great mysteries why some develop a quality of grit and perseverance that allows them to not only survive, but to thrive, through difficult struggles. Both Dick and Helene, arguably Helene even more than Dick, suffered adversity and grief, yet they survived...surviving being "the name of the game" as my Dad used to say. And they didn't use their hardships as an excuse for failure or bad attitudes during their lives. They rose above their sorrows.

Late in her life Helene opened up about one of her first sorrows: as a 14-year-old girl in 1936 or 1937, in love with horses (as many young girls are), she was "attacked" in a northern Ohio horse barn by an older man. Given the times and chances of being believed by the adults at the time (almost zero), she never told anyone about her assault, holding her secret for 70 years. But happier times...at least temporarily...were to follow.



**Helene Tresemer high school graduation portrait, circa 1941
(Fetzer family photo)**

She met the love of her life, Dick Cook, nearby where they both grew up in central Ohio. They fell in love—I don't know how they met but wish I did—he an older college man and she a pretty high school girl, probably swept off her feet by a dashing, handsome young man, soon to be commissioned as a US Marine officer.

In late 1999 I asked Helene by letter if she wouldn't mind telling me a little about her life. In her January 2000 response she apologized for the delay in responding, offering that she had been as sick as she had ever been for a month during the holidays and finally had the strength to respond. "Dick enlisted in January 1942, one month after Pearl Harbor," Helene wrote in her tiny script. "He graduated from Ohio State University in June 1942 with a degree in mining engineering. He was ordered to Marine Corps Base Quantico in August for Officer's training, graduating on October 31st and

being commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant, USMCR. A week later and refused leave for marriage in his bride's hometown in Ohio, Dick and I were married in Washington, DC."



Helene Tresemer Cook's engagement photo from an Ohio newspaper in 1942

My cousin Helene was a pretty young woman but also had what I would describe as a "beautiful mind". Even into her 80's and having endured much sorrow in her life, she maintained her positive and deeply inquisitive nature. She was interested in people. She loved animals. She was kind. She asked a lot of questions. She was capable and independent, doing many things herself that many would either overlook, ignore, or pay to have done, even late into her life. She smiled all the time. She loved to write, even taking a creative writing course late in her life. And she wrote letters...of which I am grateful to have many in my possession.

A glimmer of Helene's beautiful, positive mind sparkled in the following recollection: "When Dick and I were married I remember the church being very cold (saving energy during wartime). Dick wore his long, green USMC wool overcoat during the service. Our minister's name was Hastings. He asked if we wanted music and he sang a few bars before marrying us and gave us some down-to-earth marital advice along with a marriage booklet he told me to hand to Dick to refresh his memory from time-to-time. Reverend Hastings' name always intrigued me. My mother was married by a minister named Fast and my daughter was married by a minister named Swift. Who says God doesn't have a sense of humor?"

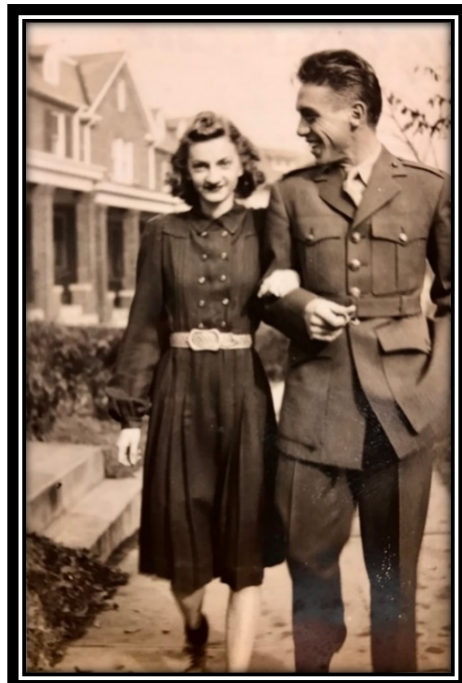
Helene and Dick were married during WWII, a time when marrying was as much a necessity as it was a nicety...as much an acknowledgment of a craving to be together forever as it was a need for a legal commitment. Neither Helene or Dick knew what the future held, how long Dick would be gone and whether he would return whole or even alive from combat. Regardless, their hope and love shone brightly and they were married without the full support of her parents. And Dick's desire to ensure Helene would have some "legal status" and protections and some financial support should he

not return from combat drove their decision to be married during the very dark days of early WWII.

These were the days, too, when if the Marine Corps wanted you have a wife (as the old saying goes) “they’d issue you one”. There was some truth in that old saying back then. There was a war going on too. Helene supposed Dick may have hidden the fact he was married from his leaders.

Helene, at this point 80 years old in December 2000, wrote on a handmade Christmas card with her pencil drawing of a winter scene, “Dick’s first duty station was Camp Lejeune, New River, NC. I followed him there and we rented a room from Miss May and Billy in New Bern near the junction of the Neuse and Trent Rivers. We rented one room upstairs and could use the tiny kitchen downstairs to cook at night. The bathroom was down the hall. We didn’t need much room as newlyweds. We liked running into each other. It was very cold in the winter. I didn’t think there was any central heating. We had a little wood stove in the bedroom in which Dick started a fire before leaving each morning for the 50-mile drive to Camp Lejeune riding with the mail man.”

It is possible Dick did ride with the mail man but there were probably lots of Marines needing rides to Camp Lejeune during that time. What made Dick special that he and not a hundred other Marines got to sit on the mailbags in the back of the truck for the long ride to Camp Lejeune? It’s possible he just made the acquaintance of the mail man, impressed him somehow, and lucked out. It’s also possible Helene’s memory was failing her about her husband riding with the mailman or it’s also possible that Dick didn’t tell his bride how he really got to Camp Lejeune from New Bern in order to spare her from worry. But hopping the train between New Bern and Camp Lejeune every morning wouldn’t have been out the realm of feasibility, either, according to Mr. John Green, a historian with the Craven/Pamlico-Carteret Regional Library in New Bern.



With love in his eyes for his young bride. Helene and Dick Cook strolling likely in New Bern, circa 1942. (Fetzer family photo)

Either way, living in New Bern but being assigned to Camp Lejeune/New River was a “long haul”, especially as early as Marines...typically the earliest of early birds...would be required to report for duty. Automobiles, if available, were expensive. Gas and tires were rationed. But a young couple probably preferred the “big city” excitements available in New Bern rather than the country atmosphere of New River/Jacksonville at that time.



A mail truck in 1947, not unlike the one in which Dick might have ridden every morning from New Bern to New River. How he got back to New Bern every evening is unknown. (Courtesy of Smithsonian's National Postal Museum, Curatorial Photographic Collection)

Helene continued writing, “In the summertime we went to Ghastly Gaston’s for a real, ice-cold Coca Cola”. The Gaston Hotel, termed by locals as “Ghastly” due to its state of disrepair, still had a nice dining room and was advertised in a New Bern travel brochure at the time as, “...in existence since the ‘slave days’ and appointed with antique furniture and the ambiance of the old South.” Ultimately it was renamed the Governor Tryon Hotel and was destroyed by fire in the 50’s according to Mr. Jim Hughes, curator of the New Bern Historical Society.



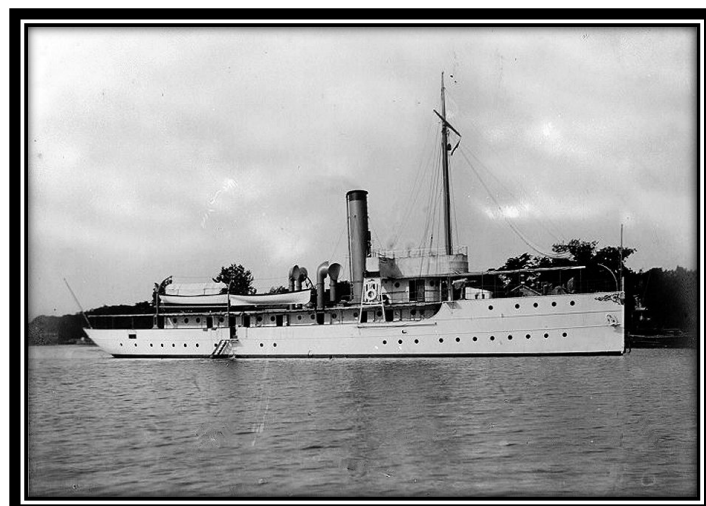
The “Ghastly” Gaston, circa 1940, as Helene might have seen it (Courtesy of the New Bern Historical Society)

“While I missed him terribly and couldn’t wait for him to rejoin me at night when he returned from Camp Lejeune, I made use of my time alone. I remember going to the New Bern Library to read while Dick was on duty. And I swam in the delta of the two rivers nearby our room and sailed my little sailboat there, passing by an old Coastguard cutter, the ‘Pamlico’ I think she was named, moored there.”

Helene noting the “Pamlico” moored in New Bern close to her rooming house is an interesting footnote in history. According to Wikipedia, “‘Pamlico’ was a revenue cutter initially of the United States Revenue Cutter Service that served from 1907 to 1946 designed specifically to cruise inland waters and did so while stationed at New Bern, North Carolina her entire career.”

“She was of all-steel construction and featured a shallow draft. The Babcock & Wilcox triple-expansion steam engine powered a twin screw that propelled the cutter along at a top speed of 9.8 knots with a range of 817 nautical miles and armed by two 6 pounders. “‘Pamlico’ was the first Revenue Service cutter to have water-tube boilers installed in an engine room.”

“She was launched in March 1907 and commissioned on 26 July 1907 at Baltimore, Maryland. When the Revenue Cutter Service and the United States Lifesaving Service combined in 1915 to form the US Coast Guard, ‘Pamlico’ became part of the new service and was thereafter known as USCGC Pamlico. On 6 April 1917, with the declaration of war by congress, the US Coast Guard was transferred to US Navy control. ‘Pamlico’ continued to serve in the Fifth Naval District as a training and recruiting ship for the Navy. In October 1917, she was assigned duties as a training ship in Chesapeake Bay to train naval officers being assigned to European waters and she continued that mission until her transfer back to Coast Guard control on 28 August 1919. By 1935, ‘Pamlico’ was the oldest cutter on the active list of cutters in the Coast Guard. With the end of World War II, Pamlico was finally decommissioned in September 1946 along with other older cutters, replaced with surplus US Navy ships. With the exception of a short period of service in the Chesapeake Bay during World War I, she had served her entire career in the North Carolina sounds. ‘Pamlico’ was eventually sold and converted to a barge and later to a diesel-powered freighter named Charles W. Currett.”

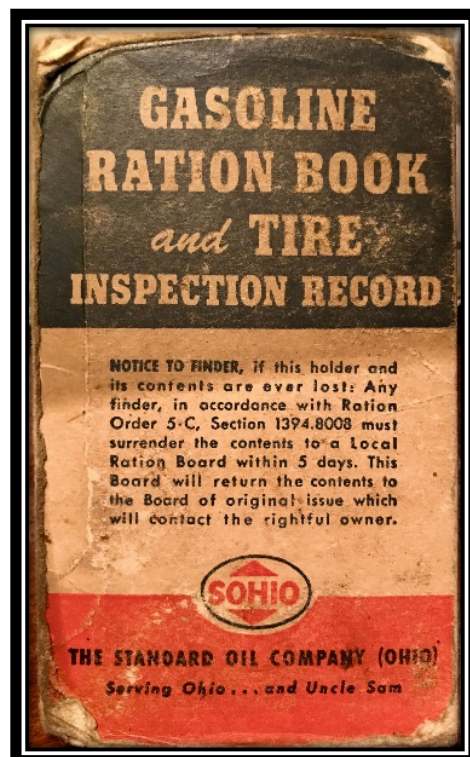


**US Coast Guard Cutter Pamlico
(Courtesy of the US Coast Guard)**

But Helene's time in New Bern was not all reading, swimming, sailing, and admiring the "Pamlico". "Miss May", Helene continued in her letter, "didn't have any screens on the window of our room, mosquitoes invaded, and I developed malaria. Miss May and the doctor advocated blackberry wine as a cure! I suspect things (in New Bern) have improved since that long time ago."

Mr. Green confirmed that malaria was still a danger in New Bern during WWII so it is entirely possible that Helen, was in fact, afflicted with malaria from Miss May's screenless windows.

Helene continued in her letters, writing about one of many "Marine Corps Ways"—the Marine's peculiar way of doing things that Helene was learning about. One of those "ways"? Receiving unexpected orders. "Dick suddenly got orders to transfer to California in August 1943," Helene wrote. "We had purchased an old car. We got gas with ration coupons but it was impossible to get enough decent tires even with the ration coupons."



WWII-era ration book. Inside advice referring to tires says,
"Save the carcass, recap...and roll!"
(Fetzer family photo)

"So, when we started driving to Columbus, Ohio from New Bern we didn't get far before the tires gave out and we had to return to NC. We left the car (never to see it again) and tried to catch a train west."

Helene continued, "Dick had the responsibility of not only getting to Camp Pendleton by his reporting due date, but getting me back to Columbus (and I was ill with Malaria) but also his younger brother who had come to North Carolina to visit. We managed to find a troop train to ride."



WWII era train in at the Havelock Station, perhaps one like it Dick caught for his daily ride to Camp Lejeune and one Helene and Dick might have rode west to Ohio and California. (Courtesy of Havelock Historian Eddie Ellis, Jr, from his book “Historic Images of Havelock and Cherry Point” (McBryde Publishing, New Bern, NC, 2010)

“It was so crowded,” Helene went on, that “the Marines, soldiers and civilians aboard were all jammed in like sardines in the train cars. After the difficulty of just getting aboard, finding room to endure was exhausting. There were men scrunched overhead on the baggage racks, crouched in the aisles and hanging out the windows.”

“I finally wiggled my way to a spot in-between the cars where I could get some fresh air, see the tracks, and ‘toss my cookies’, an unfortunate occurrence that happened routinely throughout the trip from New Bern to Columbus due to my malaria.”



WWII-era soldier leaning from train car photo by Frank Brown (Courtesy of UCLA, Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library)

“We finally reached Ohio, I regrettably said goodbye to Dick even though I was glad to get off that packed troop train, and he continued on his way to California. I recuperated from malaria for a few months before following Dick again this time to California. He was stationed at Camp Pendleton at Oceanside. I rented a room in a hotel in San Clemente so we could be together when he was not on duty. I could write reams about our time in California together, some of the best days of our lives.”



**Helene posing in a USMC jeep in Oceanside, CA, circa 1943
(Fetzer family photo)**

“Alas, duty called again and in July of 1944 Dick was ordered overseas and didn’t return to the east coast for almost two years when I finally got to be with him again. During his overseas duty I returned to Columbus and worked at an airplane factory praying for Dick’s safe return. Only a few letters from me made it through to him. None of his letters made it home to me,” Helene lamented to me in her letter.

I never knew Helene was a “Rosie the Riveter” during WWII. The fact she worked at an airplane factory was mentioned so off-handedly and only came out because I asked her about her life. She did not dwell on the type of her work at the Curtis-Wright factory in Columbus and I wish I had asked her for details about her work there.



For all I know Helene could be pictured in this photo of the Curtis Wright Helldiver factory in Columbus, Ohio, circa 1944, in which she worked awaiting Dick's return from the Pacific (Courtesy of the Ohio History Division)

While I don't know what her job was at that factory, as slight—tiny really—as Helene was, she might have been a secretary or office worker of some sort. Still, I like to think of her nonetheless as similar to the likeness of Rosie on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post by Norman Rockwell.



Norman Rockwell Painting of Rosie the Riveter (From the Saturday Evening Post cover in May 1943)

Next Summer 2022 edition of the Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation Newsletter: Part 2 of the Helene and Dick Cook love story.

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The A-4 was introduced by Douglas Aircraft Company in response to a 1952 Navy request for a carrier based attack aircraft. Designer Ed Heinemann exceeded the Navy's expectations when he responded with the turbojet powered aircraft weighing less than half of the requested weight, but capable of carrying four times the weapons payload. The prototype A4D-1 was first flown in 1954. The A-4 enjoyed a production run of 24 years with a total of 160 A-4Ms built. The last A-4 was retired on June 22, 1994.

The feats of the "Sky Hawk" in combat are legendary. In Vietnam, the aircraft proved a reputation for survivability, dependability, and the ability to carry a huge weapons load, delivering it with extreme accuracy. This one-engine aircraft was flown by a single pilot to top speeds of 670 mph.

The exhibit model was manufactured April 22, 1967. It saw service with VMAT-102 "Sky Hawks", VMA-214 "Black Sheep", and VMA-131 "Diamondbacks" and was retired in June 1994 with a total of 4125.8 flight hours. This aircraft was placed on display November 17, 2002 and is on loan from the United States Marine Corps Museum in Quantico, Virginia.



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