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# AVIATION CONNECTIONS: NEWSLETTER

Spring 2023

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Eastern Carolina Aviation Heritage Foundation

April 2023

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# Norman Fetzer: Navy Blue

By Barry Fetzer, ECAHF Historian

This is the first in a three-column series about my Uncle Norman Fetzer (Aug 1920-Dec 2004), my dad's brother, who was a Navy pilot during WWII. While he never saw combat (apparently a granting of his wish as you'll see later), he still served in interesting capacities as a pilot "plowed back" as a flight instructor following his graduation from flight training and then overseas after VJ (Victory over Japan) Day in occupied Japan as part of an "ACORN" unit (an acronym for Aviation Construction Ordnance Repair-Navy) where he performed duties described in the following pages.

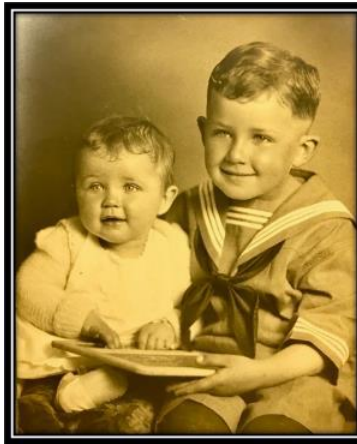
And here we go again with my failure—a failure I repeated many times with my WWII-era relatives—to get details of Uncle Norman's service before he died. I've mentioned this failure of mine several times in previous editions of the ECAHF newsletter. Some historian I am, eh? Even though I knew him well and even though I wore his Navy wings during my own service as a naval aviator in the Marines, and even though we visited each other several times as adults, and even though he lived long enough to attend my Marine Corps retirement ceremony, I failed in all those years to get details from him of his military service, first person details that would have made his story come to life to a much greater degree than I am able to do through research and recounting the superficial discussions we had and the second and third-hand stories of his service in the Navy. Oh, I got a few stories during visits with him over the years, but not the details that even his eldest son, my first cousin "Norman J" (Junior), does not possess. If I could get just one thing across to readers of this newsletter through these columns, it would be to ask your relatives questions about their lives and record their answers while they're living.

Uncle Norman honored me by, early in my own naval aviation career, giving me his leather flight helmet and goggles, khaki flight suit, various Japanese "war trophies" taken from crashed or scrapped Japanese aircraft following the War, a 10K gold NAS Pensacola graduation ring, his sterling silver (clad in gold) naval aviator wings that I wore as mentioned above during my own naval aviation career, and his flight time log books. Most of these items I donated several years ago to the Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola Florida.

But, in addition to the stories, photographs, and written records we retain, our family still possesses two items representing Norman's service as a naval aviator: a small set of US naval aviator wings with a pin clasp that his mother Mary (my paternal grandmother) wore in honor of her son's service, and the "business end" of a Japanese Zero fighter (or so the story goes) aircraft piston converted into an ashtray.

Norman's service in an ACORN unit occurred after his service as a flight instructor, after WWII hostilities ended, and during his service as part of the occupation forces in Japan. I will cover more about his service in an ACORN unit in the third column of this series. In the second column of this series, I will focus on his training as a Naval Aviation Cadet and student naval aviator and his deployment to occupied Japan.

This first column of the series will focus on his early life and his enlistment at the beginning of WWII into the US Navy and the beginning of his flight training as a naval aviation cadet at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola, *Home of Naval Aviation*.



**Norman Fetzer (right) with his brother Robert, my dad, circa 1925. Norman was 5 years old and already showing signs of interest in “haze, grey, and underway”. Fetzer Family photo.**

Norman experienced a normal boyhood—as normal as it could be during the Great Depression—growing up in Bedford (Ohio) in a middle-class family that, unlike many families, had work. He graduated from Bedford High School in 1937. He worked for a few years in the Fetzer Brother’s Feed and Hardware Store his father and uncle owned and then attended Kent State University for a couple of years.

I don’t know for certain how or why Norman became interested in flying—one of the many questions to which I never got an answer. Growing up during the early years of aviation, it was many young boys—and girls—dreams to follow in the likes of Charles Lindbergh’s or Amelia Earhart’s footsteps. And his Uncle Ray, his mother’s sister’s husband who lived next door, was a dashing pilot who flew in the 1932 National Air Races in Cleveland, Ohio as I recounted in the Winter 2021 edition of this newsletter.

What 12-year-old boy doesn’t dream of breaking the bonds that chain him to earth? Uncle Ray’s stories—Norman might have even seen him fly while attending the 1932 Air Races themselves held only about 17 miles from Norman’s boyhood home— could have been a strong motivator for Norman to pursue aviation.

But whatever the reason for his burgeoning interest in conquering the “wild, blue yonder”, it was during his second year at Kent State that Norman received the below letter. This letter may have pushed Norman “over the edge” and led him to make a decision as to which military service he would join. We all like to have choices. There were fewer choices back then. But one of the choices all able-bodied men could make, was to enlist...now...vice risk being drafted



## INFORMATION REGARDING UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE AND MARINE CORPS RESERVE AVIATION TRAINING AS AVIATION CADETS

The Navy Department requires a large number of candidates for flight training as aviation cadets, leading to appointments as commissioned officers in the United States Naval Reserve and Marine Corps Reserve.

The period of training requires normally about nine to twelve months, of which three to four months are spent at a naval pre-flight training school, and the remainder in primary and advanced flight training. Upon successful completion of flight training a student is commissioned as ensign, Naval Reserve, or second lieutenant, Marine Corps Reserve, and ordered to active duty in the Aeronautic Organization of the Navy. Applicants who are accepted must agree to serve continuously for four years on active duty unless sooner released. While on active duty they receive the full pay and allowances of their grade.

### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR APPOINTMENT

Candidate must:

- (a) Be a male citizen of the United States for a period of at least ten years.
- (b) Be not less than eighteen years of age, and have not reached his twenty-seventh birthday at the time of enlistment.
- (c) Agree to remain on active duty for four years, including periods undergoing training as aviation cadets, unless sooner released by the Navy Department. If applicant is a minor, written consent of parent or guardian is required.
- (d) Be unmarried, and must agree to remain unmarried until completion of flight training and acceptance of commission as ensign, U. S. Naval Reserve or second lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps Reserve unless sooner discharged, or released from such duty by the Navy Department.
- (e) Be educationally, morally, physically, and psychologically qualified for appointment as aviation cadet, in accordance with prescribed standards.
- (f) Have a minimum education of graduation from an accredited high school.
- (g) Must be able to pass Coarse Screen and Fine Screen Mental Tests, as follows:
  - (1) **COARSE SCREEN TEST:** Required at Navy Recruiting Stations. Will be the basis for determination as to whether an applicant, who is otherwise qualified, should be forwarded at government expense to the nearest Naval Aviation Cadet Selection Board for the Fine Screen Tests and final consideration for enlistment. This **Coarse Screen Test** will consist of a Navy General Classification Test, in which a satisfactory mark must be obtained on the first trial. Those who pass the Coarse Screen Test, the preliminary physical examination, and are considered desirable officer material, will be forwarded to the prescribed Naval Aviation Cadet Selection Board for interview, flight physical examination, and final determination of mental and other qualifications for enlistment.
  - (2) **FINE SCREEN TEST:** Will be conducted only by Naval Aviation Cadet Selection Boards. All applicants received from Recruiting Stations, or who present themselves directly to the Naval Aviation Cadet Selection Boards, must finally establish their mental qualifications by successfully passing the **Fine Screen Test**. For information, the Fine Screen Test consists of an Aviation Classification Test (**Personnel Test**) and a Mechanical Comprehension Test. No applicant will be enlisted in class V-5 who does not obtain satisfactory grades on the Fine Screen Tests regardless of the extent of his formal education.

Individuals who have failed the Army flight training course are not eligible for flight training in the Naval Reserve and Marine Corps Reserve.

Candidates should apply to the nearest Navy Recruiting Station or Substation. Accepted candidates must present the following documents:

1. Birth certificate properly executed with signature and seal of the Registrar of Vital Statistics or other proper custodian of the record.
2. Transcript of college record showing studies pursued and grades received. (This must bear the original signature of the registrar and the seal of the school).
3. In the absence of a college record, submit transcript of high school record, showing studies pursued and grades received, and acceptable evidence of graduation. If college transcript is available, high school transcript will not be required. High school transcript will, however, be required for all applicants who have not gone to college, or who cannot readily obtain college transcript. In the latter case, the college transcript should be submitted for the record as soon as practicable after enlistment, if the applicant is accepted.
4. Three letters of recommendation from responsible citizens who are in a position to testify as to the applicant's character, etc. These letters should be written on the business stationery of the person making recommendation.

(over)

Page one of the Naval and Marine Corps Aviation Cadet training recruiting letter Uncle Norman received from the Navy Department. Fetzer Family photo.

My dad, four years younger than his brother Norman, received a similar letter from the Navy Department, also recruiting him for service as a Navy pilot. My dad's letter, though, was accompanied by a letter from the Naval Aviation Cadet Selection Board in Detroit, Michigan that says, "A Naval Aviation Cadet in your neighborhood has submitted your name to this headquarters as a prospective candidate for Officer Flight Training with the United States Navy. You are well aware of the fact that soon you will be a fighting man. Whether or not you will be serving in a branch of the armed forces of your own choosing will depend upon the action which you take now. Every young man of draft age today owes it to himself to investigate now, while there is still time, the various branches of the military service."

Apparently, my Uncle Norman recommended his brother, my dad, for Navy pilot training, a recommendation my dad eschewed in favor of enlisting in the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) as an enlisted weather forecaster instead of a "high falutin', officer pilot" like Norman decided to do.

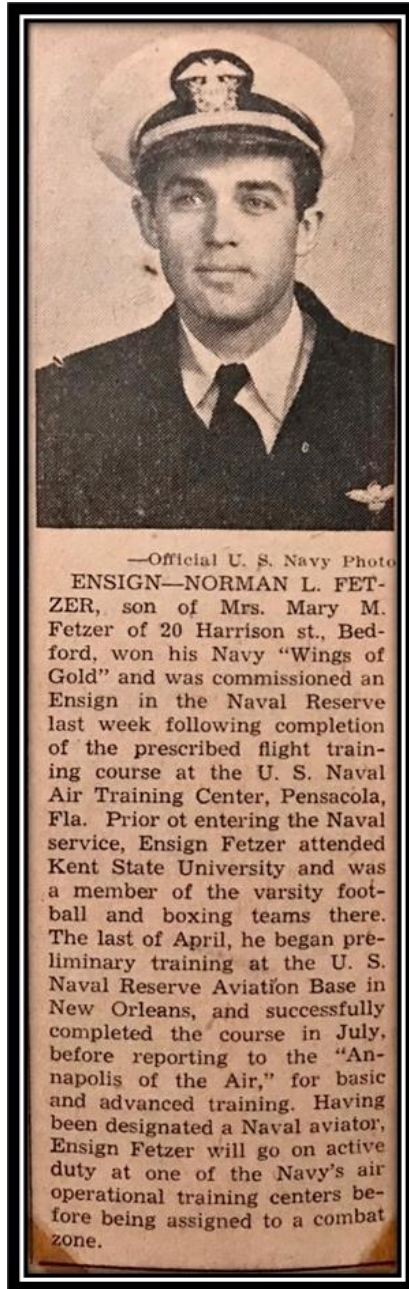


Naval Aviation Cadet Recruiting Poster. Photo courtesy [scharch.org](http://scharch.org).

So, Uncle Norman decided to pursue military life in the spotlight as a naval aviation cadet while my dad decided for the enlisted ranks and perhaps less risk. But Norman wasn't necessarily looking for risk, either.

A month after receiving the above letter, shortly after December 7, 1941, the "date which will live in infamy," Norman started his Naval Aviation Cadet training. Eight months later, Norman sent a letter to my dad from NAS Pensacola dated August 17, 1942 writing, "Dear Bob, I'm flying every day and will soon be thru—I hope. I am going to be sent to instructors' school, so it looks like I'll get my wish. As ever, Norm."

As it would turn out, Norman would not be "assigned to a combat zone" as an aviator as indicated was likely at the bottom of the below newspaper column from January 1943. Perhaps, newly married, staying in Pensacola with his new bride, and steering clear of combat as long as he could was his "wish" expressed in his August 1942 letter to his brother.



**Cleveland Press column on Norman's graduation from Navy pilot training, circa 1943.  
Fetzner Family photo.**

Norman received his Wings of Gold on December 18, 1942, slightly more than a year after Pearl Harbor and just about ten months after beginning his training. He was married on the same day he was winged and then "plowed back" as a basic flight instructor at NAS Pensacola. "Plowed-back" was the term used in naval aviation for newly-winged aviators who were assigned directly from their own graduation to flight instructor duties. "Plow-backs" were vital during WWII to train the massive number of pilots required for the war effort.





Left photo: His bride-to-be, Cecelia, and his mother, Mary, pinning “Wings of Gold” on Ensign Norman Fetzer’s Aviation Officer Working Green uniform, December 18, 1942.

Right photo: Cecelia and Norman’s wedding photo taken the same day as his winging. They did not have the luxury to put off decision-making for pursuing their biggest life events with Norman’s potential combat service staring them in their faces. Fetzer Family Photos.

Next “Navy Blue” column in the Summer 2023 edition of the ECAHF Newsletter, the second in a three-column series: From Norman Fetzer’s Pensacola, Florida flight training experiences to his departure overseas for duties in occupied Japan.



Join us in celebrating, promoting, and protecting eastern NC’s aviation heritage and supporting Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education in our youth.

<https://ecaviationheritage.com/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

High School Summer Camp  
July 10-14, 2023

Middle School Summer Camp  
July 17-21, 2023

Elementary Summer Camp  
July 24-28, 2023

Free Family Fly-In STEM Night  
August 18, 2023

Fall Partnership Event  
TBA

2024 Gala  
February 23, 2024



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## Spotlight an Exhibit



### A-6 "Intruder" Tribute Monument

The A-6 Intruder Association designed and erected this tribute monument to honor all Navy and Marine A-6 Squadrons. The monument is located at the Havelock Tourist & Event Center. It was dedicated and unveiled on May 17, 2019 with a celebration to honor those that served. The monument not only honors those who died while flying in the aircraft, but it also memorializes anyone who worked on the plane and supported the Marine and Navy squadrons who utilized the A-6 Intruders. Crew members and pilots, who once flew the aircraft, came from around the country to see the new monument.

A-6 Intruders first saw action during the Vietnam War, where the craft were used extensively against targets in Vietnam. The aircraft's long range and heavy payload (18,000 pounds or 8,200 kilograms) coupled with its ability to fly in all weather made it invaluable during the war.

The mighty A-6 Intruders once formed the very backbone of both Navy and Marine Corps attack aviation for more than 30 years. Between 1963 and 1997, there were 17 Navy squadrons and 7 Marine squadrons of A-6s in existence. Today, having been phased out in favor of newer aircraft, there are none in active service anywhere.

Visit the Aviation Exhibit and honor those men and women who served to maintain this powerful aircraft.



## Please Join ECAHF Each Year

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.

Together, by joining forces as members of ECHAF, we will help honor Marines' vital mission in advancing military aviation, a mission they've accomplished since 1942 when MCAS Cherry Point was commissioned as a USMC airfield. In addition, your membership will help influence a new generation of aviation enthusiasts and skilled workers for the future. Be a part of this challenging and exciting mission.

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- Squadron (Family Membership) \$50.00
- Wing (Business/Group Membership) \$250.00

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