

BeThinking of Old Orleans

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EVERETT CARLTON STRICKLAND



Everett C. Strickland

*"He stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have
died to die*

*That freedom might live, and grow, and increase its
blessings.*

Freedom lives, and through it, he lives -

*In a way that humbles the undertakings of most
men."*

*(Franklin D. Roosevelt to the
Strickland Family, 1942)*

Everett Carlton Strickland was born July 6, 1918 in Waterport, the son of Everett J. and Elizabeth Tuttle Strickland. As a youngster, as not to confuse his name from his father's, he was called Carl.

Carl attended the Waterport School and graduated, at the age of 15, in the Class of 1934. There were five students in that graduating class, one of whom was Carl's sister, Beryl.

His academic record, from the time of sixth grade, shows he was an above average student; excelling in math and sciences. Following high school Carl attended the Medina Collegiate Center, a satellite of Alfred University in Medina for two years for extra courses in Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. He then entered Lehigh University, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in September of 1936 for electrical engineering study and presumably a career in that field. While at Lehigh Carl maintained high grades, was in the upper half of his class, and was often on the Dean's Honor Roll.

Carl left his college studies in February of 1941, with only three months left before graduation, to enlist in the Naval Reserve Air Force. Possibly this was to be able to select his own branch of service, perhaps he felt it would aid in his engineering career -- we will not know the actual answer. He is still considered a member of the Class of '41 of Lehigh University.

He completed a six week elimination test and made his solo flight at Floyd Bennett Field and was then stationed at the New Officers Flying Base at Jacksonville, Florida where he completed his training in October, 1941, receiving his gold wings and his Ensign's commission.

At this point in his career Carl was the first naval flying cadet from this county in the United States service. (There were several others who earlier had joined the Canadian Flying Corps.) Most of his time at the Florida base he served as an instructor. Ensign Strickland asked to be transferred to

active duty immediately after Pearl Harbor. He spent two weeks furlough with his family about January 15, 1942 and left for the Pacific Fleet by February 1st.

Carl served on the armored cruiser ASTORIA (CA - 34). Cruisers are not aircraft carriers with landing decks, yet they often carried two or three planes. Ships early in World War II did not have sonar or radar; what they did carry was catapult planes and their pilots. This system sent planes from the deck in a sling-shot method. The pilots would then fly out to whatever distance permitted, spotting either the enemy position, or reported on the accuracy of their own heavy guns. When the pilots returned to their ship they would land in hopefully calm seas and be hoisted back aboard. Ensign Strickland, according to all reports, thrived on this means of piloting and served as an inspiration to other pilots.

In his last letter to his family, which was received July 22, 1942, Carl wrote: "The tone of your letters seems to have changed since I left -- so much more enthusiastic, as if you were enjoying living again rather than sitting around worrying about me. And you can never know how much happiness that brings me."

The ASTORIA had participated in the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway. Early in August of 1942 the ASTORIA was in Savo Sound. This is a narrow body of water between Guadalcanal and Tulagi. It is called "The Slot."

It was in The Slot that one of the worst defeats ever inflicted on the United States Navy occurred. On the night of August 9, 1942, a heavily-supported Japanese force of cruisers and destroyers, well experienced in night maneuvering, with darkness and stormy weather to help them, surprised the U.S. forces. In this battle the British heavy cruiser CANBERRA, and the United States cruisers QUINCY, VINCENNES, and ASTORIA were lost, taking with them over 1000 seamen.

A press war correspondent, Joe James Custer, a survivor from the ASTORIA, wrote of his experiences: "The ASTORIA was hit by numerous torpedoes and gun-fire from enemy planes and was afire from end to end when she broke in two. The Captain was not aware he even had a back portion of a ship when he left the sinking portion of the front." Ensign Everett C. Strickland, as a pilot, was on the stern of the ship.

The ship's captain, Capt. William Greenman of Watertown, New York, later reported that Ensign Strickland, in the heat of battle, recognizing the danger from the planes on the deck being hit by enemy shells, attempted to take off in one but found the mechanical releasing devices had been damaged. He then was attempting to shove the plane over the side with his own hands when he was fatally cut down by fire from a Japanese aircraft. Carl had turned 24 years old just one month and three days before his death.

The United States Secretary of Navy, Frank Knox, wrote in his letter of sympathy to the Strickland family: "Let us be proud that he gave his life, as so many now are doing, upholding the highest tradition of the Navy in the service to his country and in the defense of the principles for which we are fighting. It is believed his sacrifice will bring a posthumous decoration."

There were several decorations. The Albion branch of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post #4635, was named in honor of Ensign Everett Carlton Strickland. Another organization honoring the young pilot was the Everett C. Strickland Chapter of American War Dads which held their meetings in the Veterans Building in Albion.

The most notable commemoration was the naming of the Destroyer Escort (DE - 333) in honor of Ensign Strickland.

(Next week see: "BeThinking of Old Orleans" for the history of the U.S.S. STRICKLAND (DE - 333).

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