

Betty and Fred's Honeymoon ... on a Man of War?

Betty Loeblein and Fred Gressard grew up on the shores of East Twin Lake in Kent, Ohio. They were childhood friends and so it was no surprise to anyone when they decided to get married in the spring of 1942 as soon as Fred graduated from the United States Naval Academy. Fred had been in an accelerated program, which graduated naval officers in three years because of WWII. Their wedding and reception were held at the Twin Lakes Country Club, overlooking beautiful East Twin Lake in Kent, Ohio, on June 24, 1942.

Since Fred had only a few days of leave before reporting to the USS Fletcher (DD 445) in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, Ensign and Mrs. Gressard knew they had to take a relatively short honeymoon. Betty's father loaned them his brand new 1942 Buick Super Convertible for the drive to Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, and booked the best suite on the SeeAndBee ferry for their return trip to Cleveland. The twenty-nine year old SeeAndBee was a coal-fired side-wheeler and one of the workhorses of the Cleveland and Buffalo Transit Company. Their honeymoon was wonderful, an event they still talk about sixty-six years later.

Ensign Gessard reported for duty on the Fletcher as it was about to head west through the Panama Canal to join the war effort in the Pacific. In November, the Fletcher joined a convoy of ships attempting to disrupt the Japanese supply efforts around Guadalcanal. The thirteen-ship convoy, with

the aid of radar, intercepted the Japanese fleet and a fierce battle ensued. All of the American ships were damaged, except the Fletcher (They were the thirteenth ship in the thirteen ship task group and the battle took place on Friday the thirteenth, thus earning the Fletcher the nickname of the Lucky Thirteen (Later nicknamed The Fighting Fletcher). After eighteen more months of sea duty, LTJG Gressard was transferred to the US Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida to commence training as a naval aviator.

After basic and intermediate training, Fred was transferred to the Glenview Naval Air Station in Illinois to practice carrier landings on the USS Wolverine (IX-64) in Lake Michigan as a part of his fighter pilot qualifications. Fred was surprised to find that the USS Wolverine (so named because it was to operate in Lake Michigan...the Wolverine State) was in actuality, the refitted SeeAndBee...with a newly added 550-foot flight deck.

Fred's landings were successful, making him one of the few Naval Aviators, or for that matter, probably the only aviator in the history of aviation to make carrier landings on the site of his honeymoon! Did Fred land on this coal-fired, side-wheeling honeymoon ship, or did Betty and Fred honeymoon on a Man of War? I think that both cases are true...and believe this is a one of a kind aviation (and love) story.



Postscript: Betty and Fred are still happily married and live fifteen hundred feet (about three Wolverine flight decks) from the Twin Lakes Country Club, where they are active members. Fred retired from the Navy as a Captain and owned businesses in Kent, Ohio and England.

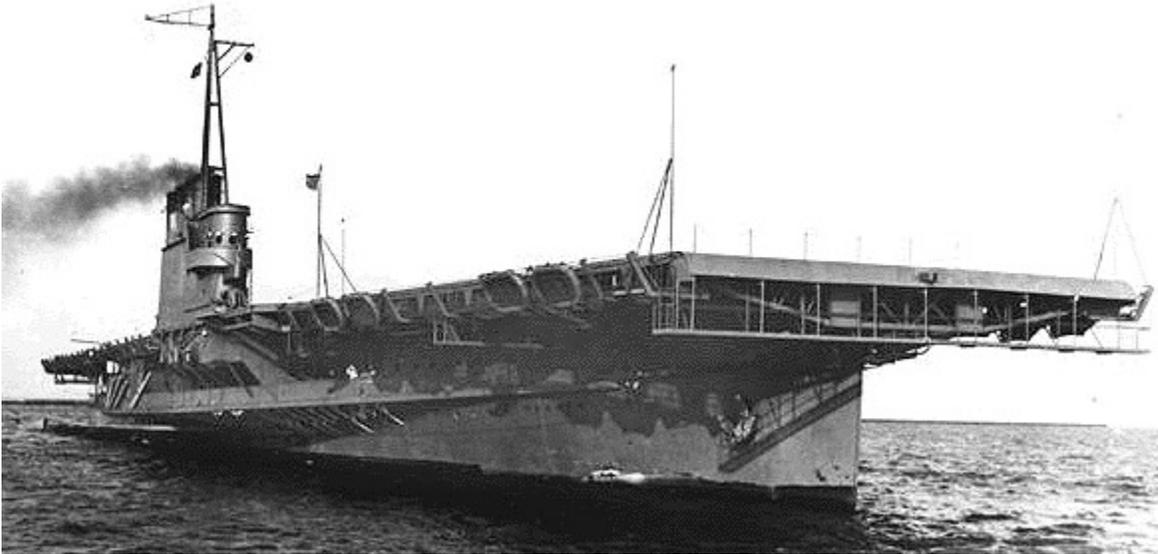
June 2008



The SeaandBee



USS Fletcher (DD-445)



USS Wolverine (IX-64)

