

Ely Air Lines -

She Flew Anyway

by Mike Ely and Linda Street-Ely

Pre-flight planning is a critical part of flying: checking weather forecasts, inspecting the airplane, and planning ahead for contingencies. In flight, staying "ahead of the airplane" rewards the careful pilot. But if a "contingency" arrives unannounced, closing fast, there may be only seconds to react. On the morning of December 7, 1941, Cornelia Fort learned how true that could be.

Cornelia Fort was a young flight instructor - confident, capable, and a passion for flight.

She was teaching takeoffs and landings near Pearl Harbor in an Interstate Cadet monoplane. It was a routine training flight on a morning like any other.

Then an airplane appeared straight ahead, flying directly toward her and her student.

Training, skill, instinct, probably all three kicked in together. She took over control of the monoplane and pulled up to avoid a collision. As the oncoming airplane passed beneath them, she saw it: a red rising-sun insignia painted on its wings. Seconds later, smoke billowed from Pearl Harbor and Japanese aircraft filled the air. Certainly, she knew that this was no exercise.

Cornelia Fort had just become the first U.S. pilot to encounter the Japanese attack force.

She dove and landed at a nearby civilian field, but danger followed. A Japanese fighter strafed the runway as she and her student ran for their lives. Within minutes, this quiet training flight had become part of one of the most pivotal moments in history.

Civilian flying in Hawaii was stopped immediately. But that didn't deter Cornelia Fort. She joined the newly formed



Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, the predecessor to the WASP, made up of women pilots who delivered military aircraft across the United States so male pilots could deploy overseas.

It was demanding work, and long unrecognized. They flew unfamiliar airplanes, in all kinds of weather, without the status or protections given to military pilots. Still, they flew because the country needed airplanes moved.

By 1943, Cornelia Fort was among the most experienced WASP pilots. During a formation ferry flight from California, over Texas, another aircraft flying too close clipped her wing, sending her airplane into a spin from which there was no recovery. She was twenty-four years old. Her grave marker reads simply: Killed in the Service of Her Country.

In a flash, routine became history. A normal lesson, remembered forever. A normal ferry flight, her final flight. I doubt she set out to become a symbol, yet her story captures something essential about aviation and life: courage can arise from doing ordinary work exceptionally well, especially when circumstances change without warning.

Had you heard of Cornelia Fort before? Most people associate Pearl Harbor with ships and headlines. But there was this young instructor, already in the sky that morning, doing her job, when she reacted with skill and presence of mind as a world war suddenly appeared in front of her. Her story was no longer limited to conquering the sky; it became the story of how she managed a personal crisis the moment the world changed.

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Charles and Jo Ann Wiggins opened their home for a small get-together for special friends from France, Marc Morlat, his fiancée Céline Croise, and Marc's mom Marie-Claire Morlat one evening last week.

We inquired about the ages of these fine folks and were informed that Charles just turned 92 and Jo Ann is 90. They do look great, don't they?

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Mark your calendar now for Bridgehaven's Bunny Bingo, March 28

DAYTON - It's a fun-filled morning when Bridgehaven Children's Advocacy Center hosts Bunny Bingo. The doors open at 9:30 a.m. on Sat., March 28, at Cedar Bayou Farms, 2466 CR 486 in Dayton. This exciting morning will include games, prizes, snacks, and plenty of family fun - all while sup-

porting a meaningful cause. Kids will enjoy playing 10 rounds of bingo, with the chance to win exciting prize-filled baskets in each game. From candy and toys to themed surprises, every basket is brimming with joy! Proceeds from Bunny Bingo directly benefit the Bridgehaven Children's Advocacy Center,

helping children in need find hope and healing. Don't miss this egg-citing day of fun and prizes! Bring the whole family for a day of bingo, laughter, and giving back. There is still time to get involved by reserving a table or becoming a sponsor. Visit givebutter.com/bunny-bingo26 to reserve tables or

for sponsorships. If you would like to volunteer for this event, please reach out to ascruggs@bridgehaven-cac.org. For additional information, contact mcginnis@bridgehaven-cac.org. Thank you for supporting the children in our community - we hope to see you there!

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