

Dickinson, Georgia Rae: Waves On The Beach ^[1]

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Georgia Rae Dickinson: Waves On The Beach

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The [Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station](#) ^[3] opened near the remote crossroads of Havelock in 1942. Originally known as Cunningham Field, it included a vast industrial complex where civilian tradesmen maintained and repaired warplanes. With the local boys overseas during World War II, Cherry Point relied on women from all over Eastern North Carolina for its work force.

Georgia Rae Dickinson worked at Cherry Point from 1943 to 1945. She commuted from Morehead City, where she also volunteered at the local USO. I liked her the minute I met her. When she was telling stories about Cherry Point and the USO, she made me laugh 'til it hurt one moment, then moved me to tears the next. She laughed loud and often, and I could hear more than a trace of a fine brogue that she inherited from grandparents who grew up on Shackleford Banks.

The experience of working in skilled industrial trades alongside Marines transformed these women's lives. "It was an exhilaration, a boost, a thing that makes you feel like you can do anything," Dickinson told me. "It was something you don't do every day."



Georgia Rae Dickinson. Photo by Chris Seward, 1998. To request permission for further use or to purchase a print, please contact the News & Observer.

In Georgia Rae Dickinson's words:

I was an aircraft painter. I had been working at the Sanitary Fish Market in Morehead City since I was 15 years old, but you could make twice as much money up at Cherry Point. I made \$1 an hour and I worked a 50-hour week. We worked si

We shared Hangar 1 with the Navy until the Overhaul and Repair building was completed. At O&R there were dozens of shops. There were shops that did motors, instruments, props, radios. Anything that was connected with an airplane was

They pulled an older man from the Navy station at Jacksonville and put him in our shop to teach us how to paint. We all called him Pop and loved him dearly. We didn't know a paint gun from nothing else. It was just unbelievable how dumb w

We painted F-4Us, B-24s, Hell Cats, the PBV sea planes, a few Piper Cubs. The Navy had a squadron of B-24s, a big, heavy, two-motor plane with two rear stabilizers. They were used out of Cherry Point for submarine duty. We painted thei

In the main paint shop, the airplane parts came to us hanging on chains from an overhead conveyor that moved the parts from cleaning vats to various stages of painting. We painted in front of big booths, about 20 feet long. Whatever paint s

At times, we worked on planes with a big, high tail assembly. That rudder was 15 feet in the air and it had three hinges. There was just room enough on a hinge to get one toe in. So you went upside of it, and all this time you've got safety toe

One time something had to be spray-painted in the nose cone of a plane. I was given a little jar of paint the size of a baby food jar. I climbed as far forward in that plane as I could get, and then I put my hand up ahead of me, and I was pusher

I'll tell you a funny thing. When we were still in Hangar 1, these Navy men fell in for their blinker practice every day. He'd blink, blink, blink and sit there and talk about the girls across the way! He'd say things like, "Look at that cute one with th

We worked right shoulder to shoulder with the men and the boys. You have to take into consideration that all of these boys were young and brash and most of them away from home. You learned a lot of words that you never heard at home!

It was funny the people you met and never saw again. At the USO, I must have met a million boys. They were like waves on the beach: You got a whole set this week, and a whole other set next week, and a whole other set the week after. Th

We had a group of girls at the USO called the Girls Service Organization, GSO. Sometimes we were carried to Cherry Point for big dances, with like 3,000 men and 50 girls! It was hard to keep a partner! You'd be dancing and you turn around

One of them I got to know, Charlie Abrams, was raised on a fruit farm in upper New York State. He said to me, "When I get back home from the Pacific, I'm going to send you three bushels of apples."

I said: "Charlie, I'll never get those apples. You will forget all about me. When you get home, you'll be so engrossed in your home and your family and all your old friends and your old girlfriends, you'll never think about me again."

He said: "Oh yes, I will. If you don't get those apples, you'll know that I'm dead."

It has bothered me all these years: Which one of us was right? Was I right and he forgot all about me? Or was he right and he's dead?

David Cecelski is an historian at the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Additional Resources:

[Audio Recording](#) ^[4]: Interview with Georgia Rae Dickinson by David S. Cecelski, 28 July 1995 and 25 August 1995, K-0125, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/sohp/id/13142> ^[4]

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[Military](#) ^[7]

[Personal and oral histories](#) ^[8]

[Women](#) ^[9]

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[Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station](#) ^[12]

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