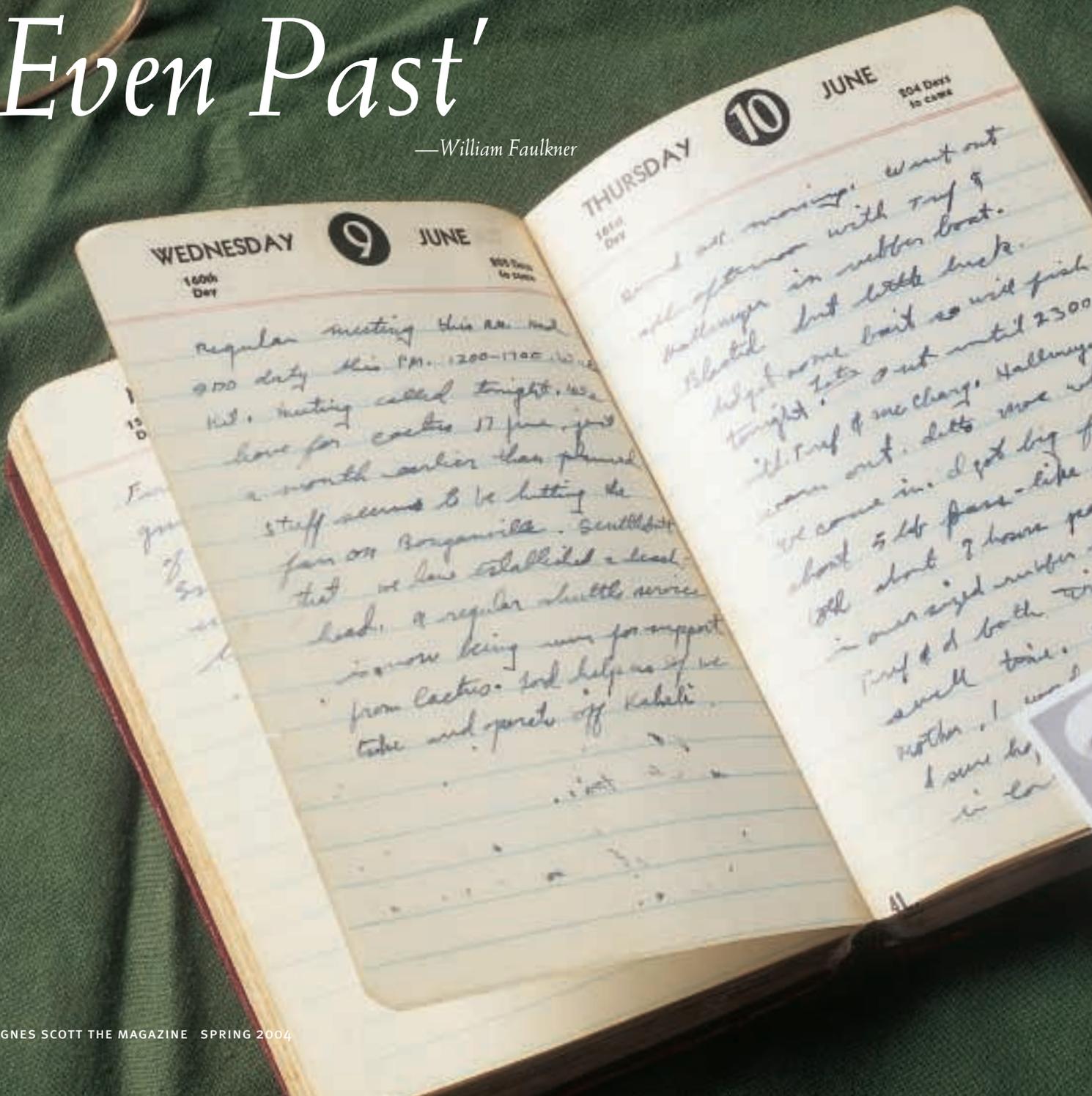


'The Past . . . Is Not Even Past'

—William Faulkner



WEDNESDAY

9

JUNE

160th
Day

500 Days
to Camp

regular meeting this am. had
9:00 duty this PM. 1200-1700
mil. meeting called tonight. we
have for coasts 17 fine jobs
a month earlier than planned
stuff seems to be hitting the
fan on Bougainville. Scuttlebutt
that we have established a lead-
head, a regular shuttle service
is now being run for support
from Coasts. food help us if we
take and operate off Kabele.

THURSDAY

10

JUNE

161st
Day

504 Days
to Camp

around our morning. went out
all afternoon with Prof &
Hallinger in rubber boat.
collected but little luck.
helped some bait so will fish
tonight. sets out until 2300
with Prof & me charge. Hallinger
worn out. little more we
we come in. I got big of
about 5 lb pane-like
all about I have pe
in over sized rubber
Prof & I both to
small toad.
mother. I want
I sure he,
in la



A slice of history flourishes into a present-day drama as a Marine's World War II diary makes its way into the life and memories of an Agnes Scott alumna

by Jennifer Bryon Owen

It's the thing of rainy-day novels and three-hanky movies—World War II, girl meets boy, promises made, boy enlists, boy never returns. The story of numerous couples, this one has a twist.

Sixty years after the boy's disappearance, the girl of long ago learns of his war-time diary, in which she figures prominently.

Violet Jane "V.J." Watkins '40, a history and Latin major at Agnes Scott, returned to her hometown of Nashville, Tenn., to attend graduate school at Vanderbilt University. In a 1940 fall semester political science class, she met Charles Winnia.

"Dr. Fleming seated his students alphabetically. Hence, Watkins, Winnia," she says. "Oh, we hadn't known each other for a week before we started dating."

She supposes their first attraction may have been a mercenary matter: The professor asked the class to buy a particular book, and Winnia suggested he and Watkins share one.

"I found out before we had known each other any length of time that we both felt the United States should stop sticking its toes in around the edges and go to war on Britain's side. That was one thing that certainly attracted me—we felt very much the same about the war situation.

"In fact," she continues, "when we went down to the little bars and night clubs—oh, how grown up we felt, how sophisticated, you know—and had a little Coke high or something of the sort (a highball made with Coke was one of the popular things then, though I shudder now at the thought) our toast was 'To you and the war and the peace to come.'"

Winnia was tall, nice looking, with excellent manners, and he could clearly and eloquently express himself—all things that attracted her, says Watkins.

"I am just 5 feet 3, and he was more than 6 feet tall," explains Watkins. "When we danced in those little night clubs, he liked to say, 'Just as high as my heart.' And you know how girls swallow that kind of stuff."

FROM THE DIARY OF A CORSAIR PILOT IN THE SOLOMONS, THE YEAR 1943

Thursday 7 January

Heard from V.J. Watkins written on 9 Nov. 42. Won't allow communications to so lapse again. I hope some day to make her Mrs. C.C.W.

Friday 12 February

Late mail brought 3rd letter from V.J. Though we haven't seen each other since Dec. '40 we seem to have strong natural interest. Anxiously awaiting further developments.

Thursday 18 February

Feel like writing V.J. but must see her reaction to more familiar note of last letter.

Friday 26 February

Wrote a long letter to V.J. If I have any luck when she comes through on this one, I'll know she is on my side of the fence.

Monday 15 March

Letter from V.J. and mother. V.J.'s snapshot arrived. It really set me to wondering. Either it is a lousy picture (I hope) or she is quite changed and getting dumpy. Let's hope not. Her letter was lacking in expected warmth, but I hope for better. [Watkins says she plans to talk with Winnia about this particular entry.]

Monday 22 March

Letter from V.J. Don't know what to think now. Seems to want to see me, but doesn't actually warm up in the general tone of the letter.

Thursday 29 April

2 letters from Mother praising V.J. highly. Says "marrying is up to you, but will go further and fare worse." The plot thickens.

Monday 17 May

Strange letter from V.J. Wonder if I really know her?

Friday 28 May

After six days here it finally hit me. Seeing these fair complexions & blue eyes under dark hair bothered me & now I know why. V.J. I suddenly realize just how much I want to see that girl again. She takes up on looks where these girls leave off on looks, personality and morals. Lord if I ever catch her and she is as I think, I'll not let her go.

Wednesday 2 June

Sat in cool breeze watching sunset and dreamed a little of Violet Jane. Lord how I want to come home to that girl.

Thursday 10 June

I had a wonderful one [letter] from V.J. I sure hope and pray we are really in love.

Friday 11 June

Wrote V.J. a good letter. She is certainly the one to come home to.

Sunday 18 July

[This entry in a different hand.]

Lt. Winnia lost in dog fight over Kahili. ... Only 11 pilots left.

Editor's Note: Further research on the diary revealed the following message preprinted on a red background and affixed to the top of the page for Saturday, August 21, "Tomorrow is your wife's birthday." Watkins was born on August 22.

On a visit to their favorite nightspot, the Pink Elephant, Winnia told her he was going to join the Marines or a Canadian regiment.

"I agreed with him, and I did not shed tears," says Watkins. "That was the way we were brought up in our family—you don't weep over your people when you send them off to war or whatever. You shed your tears after they have gone. I was, of course, applauding his intention and hoping that all would be well and looking forward to seeing him again. And he apparently was looking forward to seeing me again when he got back."

In December, Winnia returned home to California and joined the Marines. "We had just three months actually of knowing each other right here. Our friendship—well it was more than that, of course—our dating grew rapidly. I'm afraid I neglected some of

"Our toast was 'To you and the war and the peace to come.'"

my Vanderbilt affairs for those delightful evenings. But, our letters were what brought our relationship to blossom."

Winnia was not the only one with whom Watkins corresponded during the war.

"I corresponded with a number of my Agnes Scott dates and Nashville friends," says Watkins. "He [Charles] wrote marvelous letters. I knew it was so easy to glamorize or romanticize. A soldier wants a girl he left behind. I didn't want him to commit himself or, for that matter me, until we were together again. I was

doubtful, but he was quite convinced and said everything would be just fine as soon as we were together again."

One of Winnia's last letters was to Watkins' father, a letter she believes carried a statement of Winnia's intentions toward her.

"My father was not much of a correspondent and had not gotten around to answering Charles' letter. I am just so very, very sorry about that. My father was a doctor, and during the war when all the young doctors were in service, the middle-age doctors like my father were just working themselves to death. I can understand, but I've always wished he had lived up to his intentions of writing Charles back. He would have done it if Charles hadn't been shot down."

Winnia was shot down in July 1943, she thinks over Bougainville, the largest of the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. No trace of Winnia was found, and he was officially declared dead three years later, although there was some indication he was captured. Watkins corresponded with his mother, who actually heard a radio propaganda message from the Japanese with Charles talking.

"He was captured, no doubt about it. The Japanese part of the propaganda message had him saying they had saved his life by dressing his wound or something of the kind," says Watkins. "I'm jolly well sure he didn't put it like that. But one or two of the personal allusions in the message that started it, I don't think they could have found out except if he was alive when he came down."

Winnia's mother went to Japan as a civilian employee in the

War Department, hoping to find some trace of her son while there, but to no avail.

Watkins' last letter from Winnia arrived shortly before he was shot down. She still has all of his letters. "A couple of years ago, I recopied his last letter because the ink was fading. Yes, every now and then, I let myself read that last one.

"Of course, his diary, which was written just for himself, was nothing like as beautifully expressed or as well done as his letters."

Winnia's war-time diary was discovered when Watkins made "a little gift annuity" to Agnes Scott. While working with her on the annuity, Chip Wallace, director of planned giving, and Beth Ma, development researcher, discovered the diary on the World Wide Web.

Because Winnia had planned for a military career, Watkins and Winnia had fantasized a life of "traipsing around all kinds of interesting places." After Winnia's disappearance, reordering her life was difficult, but Watkins says she did try. She enjoyed her professional life as a teacher.

"He was a restless sort of person. Some people are in love with danger, and he was one of them."

"There were a couple of nice guys who were foolish enough to propose," says Watkins. "I did consider one of them. I was very fond of him, but could never quite bring myself to it. Finally, he told me, 'If you can't make up your mind after 20 years, I'm going to marry somebody who will.' I agreed with him.

"Of course, a lot of war marriages ended in divorce. So, if Charles had come home, we might have gotten married and regretted it."

Because of his considerable talents, Watkins believes Winnia would have been an asset to the Marines if he had survived, but also thinks he would not have lived to be old. "He was a restless sort of person. Some people are in love with danger, and he was one of them."

Winnia's diary records the dangers of war sprinkled with references to "V.J." Although she has not seen the actual diary, she did receive a transcript.

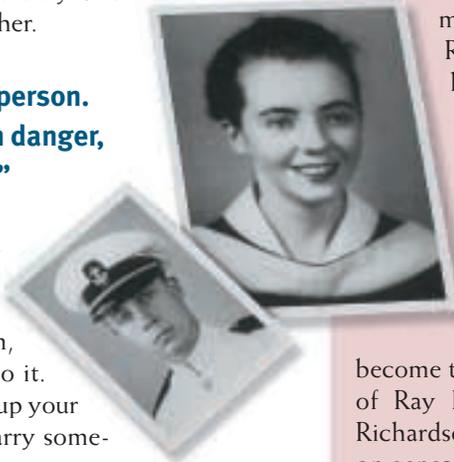
"It makes me inclined to dwell too much on a part of my life I try not to dwell on. After all, even at 80-plus, while one is still here, one should be concentrating on some other aspect of life," says Watkins. "He was a remarkable person, and sometimes I say to him—just to myself, but also to him—'Charles I'm prouder of you than all the other nice guys put together.'

"Certainly, Charles is a very cherished memory."

Jennifer Bryon Owen is Agnes Scott's director of creative services and editor of Agnes Scott The Magazine.

TO LEARN MORE

- www.scuttlebuttsmallchow.com/epilogue.html
- National Public Radio:
www.npr.org/features/feature.php?wfld=1671596



THE SURVIVAL OF A DIARY

The last diary entry was by Lt. [later Capt.] Alonzo B. "Brew" Treffer, or Treff, Lt. Charles C. Winnia's mentor and frequent division leader. The diary had been in his possession since Winnia was lost.

After the war, Treff spent time as a civilian test pilot and retired from an engineering position at Kennedy Space Center. He was killed in a home invasion in 1994.

The diary went to his son, David Treffer. Carl Richardson of Merritt Island, Fla., while visiting with Treffer after church one Sunday in 1999, mentioned he had been in Marine aviation. Treffer replied that his father had been a Marine pilot and had flown from "some little island in the South Pacific in WWII." He asked Richardson to find out about his dad's squadron, which Richardson later identified as VMF-213.

A couple of Sundays later, Treffer, thinking it might help in researching his father's past, handed Richardson a small, old diary he had found among his father's possessions. The diary had been in the garage behind a drill press.

While transcribing the diary, Richardson became emotionally involved with Winnia, Brew Treffer and, through them, the many men who fought in World War II. Seeking more information, he posted the diary on the World Wide Web.

Meanwhile, Dan McAnarney of Kansas had become the unofficial historian of squadron VMF-213, that of Ray Boag, his father-in-law. McAnarney discovered Richardson's posting, and had put his inquiry about Winnia on genealogy.com.

While conducting a routine Internet search last spring, Beth Ma, researcher in Agnes Scott's Office of Development, found McAnarney's posting:

"Violet Jane Watkins ~ 1915 - 1925

Looking for information about Violet Jane? Watkins. I have a (copy of) a WWII Marine's dairy, in which Corsair pilot, Charles C. Winnia mentions her almost every other day in among his thoughts about the war. He hoped to return to ask for her hand in marriage. Sadly, he never returned from Guadalcanal.

Any information would be greatly appreciated. She was perhaps born 1915 to 1925, and her father was a doctor. Though I have no idea of her home town, I have hope that she still may be living."

Ma recognized the name as that of an alumna with whom she and Chip Wallace, director of planned giving, were consulting about a gift to the College. When Wallace called Watkins to confirm delivery of materials from his office, he told her about the diary. She did not know of its existence and was not sure she could read it.

Since then a flurry of phone calls, e-mails and overnight deliveries has transpired between McAnarney, Richardson, Mrs. Rose Rosin (owner of a squadron patch), Watkins and Agnes Scott College. In addition to this article, National Public Radio interviewed Watkins for a "Morning Edition" feature, which aired in February.

Watkins has read a transcript, and the diary remains in Richardson's possession, on loan from the Treffer family.