

FOLLY'S WAR

Dr Kerry Rodgers reports on a WWII short snorter of an American Red Cross gal

The recent publicity given to Tom Spark's *Short Snorter Project*, along with his web site www.shortsnorter.org, has yielded some delightful responses. One arrived in late May in an e-mail from Ann Boyd. She wrote:

Hi. My great aunt died several years ago in her late nineties. She served in WWII in the Red Cross in India, Australia, and the States. I have her short snorter with the \$1 silver certificate leading it off and subsequent paper money from the many locales she was in during the war. I know it would please her greatly to know that this is included in your collection.

And what a snorter it turned out to be: Eleanor Roosevelt's, Jinx Falkenburg's

and Jimmie Dodd's signatures were there, along with a host of servicemen and women. Ann's great aunt had a most eventful war. There's a great yarn behind this snorter.

Folly's service

The great aunt was Florice 'Folly' Langley, born into a family of five in Alabama on 2 August 1895. She left college in her late teens and headed to New York. Her hope was to break into Broadway musicals or even opera. She had a warm, beautifully modulated contralto but, in the event, managed to make only a few chorus lines before a series of family calamities in the 1920s called her home.

The 1930s found her employed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the largest of the New Deal agencies. It was the start of a career that would find Folly deeply involved in helping people for the rest of her life.

She quickly graduated to supervising WPA facilities in north Alabama. Immediately prior to the outbreak of war she was also engaged in social service work with the US Army. Along the way Folly was invited to the White House for tea and sherry with Eleanor Roosevelt, possibly via her friendship with Alabama Governor Jim Folsom.

In the aftermath of Pearl Harbour, Folly tried to enlist in the military. She already had two nieces in the Navy and Marine Corps, and a nephew in the Army. Folly had a family reputation for being somewhat economical with the truth concerning her age. She confessed to the military that she was 40-something but even so proved too old. So she applied to the American Red Cross, shaving off some ten years in the process. In this pretence she was blessed by a youthful appearance.

The ARC took one look at Folly's WPA track record and signed her up with alacrity. By 29 July 1942 she was crossing the equator aboard the troop transport USS *Mount Vernon*, bound for Australia. On the way they stopped off at Wellington, New Zealand, where, no doubt, Folly acquired the ten shilling component of what would become her wartime snorter.

The ARC team disembarked in Melbourne. Folly's immediate brief was to set up ARC service clubs in Queensland. August saw her on a train to Cairns and thence to Mareeba in the tropical north.

From 1942 to 1945 up to 10,000 Australian and US service personnel would use Mareeba airstrip, *aka* Hoevet Field, as a staging post for battles in New Guinea and the Pacific. Units based at Mareeba included the USAAC 19th and 43rd Bomb Groups, the 8th Fighter Group, plus 5 and 100 Squadrons RAAF and the Australian 33rd Light A-A Battery.

Folly is credited with building the Mareeba ARC Service Club from the ground up. Its doors were certainly wide open come 25 December when Folly would experience her first Christmas in temperatures of 120° F. This tropical clime caught up with our gal. Early 1943 found her hospitalized with dengue fever. It took her to the cleaners and would recur throughout the war.

July saw her recommencing her travels, this time bound for Fiji. Independence Day was celebrated in Club Sambo, Suva. It coincided with Eleanor Roosevelt's visit to the Pacific war front. Once again Folly received an invitation to meet the First Lady at Government House where That Signature was added to Folly's now burgeoning snorter.



Folly Langley ARC. Image by Tom Sparks courtesy Ann Dodd.



Folly fully kitted-up in India. Image by Tom Sparks courtesy Ann Dodd.



Actress, fashion model and "pin-up" girl, Jinx Falkenburg signing snorters amidst admiring troops. Image by Florice Langley, courtesy of Ann Dodd.

At some juncture Folly must have returned to the USA as, on New Year's Eve 1943, she received orders to report immediately to Newport News, Virginia, to embark for new horizons. This time it was aboard the troop ship *SS Empress of Scotland*, formerly the *Empress of*

Japan, bound for India. Here Folly would serve out the remainder of her war.

An exact record of her Indian assignments is not known. APO addresses for her include 433, 465, 629 and 886. In Assam she not only enjoyed some river fishing but was enthusiastically wooed by

an English tea planter. She regretfully turned down his proposal and spent the latter part of 1944 and early 1945 ministering to the needs of servicemen in and around Calcutta. Here she spent Christmas with an American Railway Battalion.

However, the dengue fever returned. She was hospitalized in the 234th General Hospital and invalided out before VJ-Day. It seems that for the first leg of her voyage home she may have thumbed a lift on a C-54 flying from Karachi to Abadan in Iran. On arrival in the USA she spent further time in hospital in Denver or Arizona.

Folly's snorter

Folly's snorter chronicles her various postings. For her it served as a valued itinerary of her travels and a fond reminder of those she met. It comprises twelve notes:

US one dollar silver certificate series 1935A (P416a), Australia ten shillings (P25a), New Zealand ten shillings (P158a), Fiji one penny (P47a), South Africa ten shillings (P82d), India ten rupees (P19a), Iran twenty rials (P34A?c), Egypt ten piastres (P168a) – no signatures, Military Authority in Tripolitania ten lire (PM4a) – no signatures, Algeria fifty francs series 23-1-1942 (P84), Portugal twenty escudos series 28-01-41 (P153a) – no signatures, Bermuda five shillings (P8b).

Along with the signatures of ARC colleagues and servicemen and women, are those of a United Services group who crossed paths with Folly in India. On the back of the 10 rupees are the monikers of Pat O'Brien, Betty Yeaton, Jinx Falkenburg, Ruth Carrell, Jimmie Dodd and Harry Brown. From late October through early December 1944 these six spent fifty days touring the China-Burma-India theatre of the war. They performed over 100 shows in Karachi, New Delhi, and Luichow, with 10 days at forward air bases in China.

The first five signatures on the face of the same note are all of CNAC captains: J.H. Watson, R.W. (Bob) Jenkins, W.M.C. McDonald, Ridge Hammell and J.T. (Jimmy) Scoff. For those who have just come in, these are the pilots who risked life and limb to fly supplies over "The Hump", aka The Himalayas, from Kashmir into southwest China. There is a dedicated China National Aviation Corporation web site out there: www.cnac.org. From it I was delighted to discover that Captain Robert (Bob) W. Jenkins is very much alive and living in Mt Dora, Florida, age 89. Quite where Folly caught up with him is not known. It is possible it was in 1945 when Bob Jenkins had returned to the fray after a stint stateside in the latter half of 1944.



Folly's Short Snorter Note #1, US one dollar silver certificate, series 1935A, from Folly's time in Australia. A number of signatories are ARC colleagues. Front, May 30, 1943: Malinda Ehlers, T. Richard Bennett, -, Anita Woodworth, Grey M. Lusty, Hank Harris, Walter J. Lightfoot, Swing Johnson, -, Lynn F. Woodworth 12th AF, -, -, Walter G. Dyer, -, Margaret C. Gibbs, R. O. Johnson. Back: R. G. Breene, Kenneth L. Brown Capt. (in margin), -, -, James J. Cushman, William E. Davis, Reggie Quinn, -, ? Roosevelt, -, G. J. Thompson, -, C. L. Goldtrap, Capt. Johnson R. Saunders, -, -, -. Image by Tom Sparks



Folly's 10 rupees, note #6 in her short snorter, recording her service in India. Front: Capt. J. H. Watson CNAC, Capt. R. W. Jenkins CNAC, W.M.C. McDonald, Ridge Hammell, J. T. Scoff, Johnny W. Brothers, Leonard E. Browules, James H. Stone, Magil Willingham (Ala), Herbert A. Beatty, F/O, M/Sgt C. L. Hoke, Al Thomas 1st Lt AC, Christian E. Hawkins 1st, Henry F. Marten. Back: Pat O'Brien, Betty Yeaton, Jinx Falkenburg, Ruth Carrell, Jimmie Dodd, Harry Browz, C. Hag Haggerty, Emmett D. Jones, Maj. L.G. Bruggeman Jr USMC, Rayburn D. Boren Capt AC, Sofie Walker, Lulie Sewell. Image by Tom Sparks.

Bob explained that William McDonald was Chief Pilot for CNAC. Both Watson and Jenkins bunked-in with McDonald when they first arrived in Calcutta. They had a three week work stint in Assam before they returned to Calcutta to, "whoop it up and sign short snorters." McDonald shared apartment with Frank Higgs, the Check Pilot for CNAC who later became the model for a character in the comic strip *Terry and the Pirates*, penned by a childhood friend of Higgs in Ohio.

Bob recalls that they lost 25 airplanes in 2 years but only one of those was shot down. Although they received two new planes each month, at the end of the war they had the same number in the fleet. Ridge Hammell was a good friend of Bob's and was one of those who did not make it home.

Images of all the notes that comprise Folly's snorter are available on Tom Sparks' website along with the names and affiliation of the signatories identified to date. Try: www.shortsnoter.org / Florice Langley Short Snorter

Folly's peace

Post war, Folly took out a master's degree in social work at Tulane University, having successfully persuaded them to admit her as a graduate student even

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Folly singing with the troops. Image Tom Sparks, courtesy Ann Dodd.



*First lady Eleanor Roosevelt, ARC, signing short snorters in Fiji.
Image courtesy The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.*



Fiji one penny note autographed by First Lady, Mrs F.D.R. Image by Tom Sparks.

though she had never graduated from college. Subsequently she worked for and then became Executive Director of the family service agency in Charleston, South Carolina. She then relocated to run the social service agency in Macon, Georgia, where she stayed until she retired.

She found that families in the US had just the same problems as those in Australia, India or Fiji. And those same problems arose in all classes of society, both the very wealthy and the very poor. Counselling was the name of Folly's game and afterwards she relaxed with her #1 hobby: fishing.

Folly had never added back those years she had shaved from her age on joining the Red Cross. Family Services thought she was retiring at 65. She was 77. She had hassles when she turned seventy-five proving to Social Security that she was sixty-five so she could draw her benefits. And she had been born Florice Shanks but she subsequently adopted her mother's maiden name of Langley and retained it in later life along with her revised birth year.

Her ties to her home in Roanoke were always strong. From afar she had assisted both emotionally and financially with raising her five Alabama nieces and nephews of her three sisters, one of whom had died in 1926 and another who had lost her husband in 1925. It is in Roanoke that she finally retired, living with her other sister until her death at 96 on 3 January 1992.

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An elephant ride for Folly in India. Image courtesy Florice Langley and Ann Dodd.