

From Doris

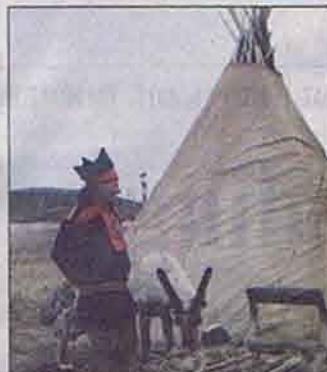
THE HIGH POINT ENTERPRISE

# LIFE & STYLE

**NO KARAOKE:** Norwegian cruise promotes scenery. **4E**

**STOP READING?** Doctor's office material may spread germs. **2E**

**35 YEARS:** French fashion designer surpasses milestone. **3E**



**E**  
Sunday  
February 6, 2011

Life & Style  
(336) 888-3527

## GO RED



The American Heart Association is looking for three women to represent Go Red for Women in Guilford County. Nominate yourself or another Guilford County woman who is a heart attack survivor, a heart disease survivor or who has made lifestyle changes in an effort to help prevent heart disease.

Videotape your personal experience with heart disease or with improving your lifestyle and then upload your video submission by Feb. 21 at [www.facebook.com/goredtriad](http://www.facebook.com/goredtriad), or women may submit their story at Advanced Home Care on Piedmont Parkway.

Three women will be chosen by a judging panel, and the winners will be announced on Feb. 28. These women will be selected to represent Go Red for Women in Guilford County on billboards, in ads, at events and in the media throughout the year. Great prizes, a spa makeover by About Face and yearlong recognition await the Guilford Go Red Women of 2011.

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer in the United States and North Carolina. One in every three women will die of heart disease, but with healthy choices, this killer is largely preventable.

For questions, visit [www.heart.org/goredtriad](http://www.heart.org/goredtriad) or e-mail Sarah. Fedele@heart.org.

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DON DAVIS JR. | HPE

River Landing resident Helen Weant, 90, a flight nurse during World War II, met her future husband, Bob, a bomber pilot, on Guadalcanal.

# A wing and a prayer

## World War II flight nurse recalls dangerous times

BY JIMMY TOMLIN  
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

**HIGH POINT** — When Helen Hunter Weant talks about her days as a World War II flight nurse, she talks freely about being stationed at Guadalcanal, where she swam in the Pacific Ocean and made sand castles on the beach.

She talks about the friends she made — and the bomber pilot she met who would become her husband — during her time there.

She talks about taking R&R in Australia.

What this 90-year-old, sweet-spirited, soft-spoken veteran doesn't talk much about is the danger she faced on her approximately 150 medical air evacuation missions, flying into and out of hostile territory aboard C-47 hospital planes.

"You had to do a lot of praying," says Weant, a native Iowan who moved to High Point after marrying her late husband, Bob, in 1946, and

**'That's when I learned how to pray, because you certainly felt like you were out there on a wing and a prayer.'**

**Helen Weant**  
World War II flight nurse

who now lives in the River Landing at Sandy Ridge retirement center in Colfax. "That's when I learned how to pray, because you certainly felt like you were out there on a wing and a prayer."

That picture of flight nurses as women who displayed bravery while dispensing medical care and mercy to wounded soldiers is consistent with a new exhibit that opened this past year at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

"These flight nurses were really part of a revolution in military medical care," said Terry Aitken, the museum's senior curator for the exhibit, titled "Winged Angels: U.S. Army Air Forces Flight Nurses."

"The introduction of flight nurses and air evacuation made it possible to save more lives than ever before. ... The flight nurses who served during World War II established a standard that continues today."

According to Aitken, about 500 Army nurses served in 31 medical air evacuation transport



SPECIAL | HPE

Helen Weant (back row, far right) and five other flight nurses from the 801st medical air evacuating transport squadron pose in an open airplane bay, circa 1944, wearing their flight uniform coveralls.

NURSE, 4E

YOUR COMMUNITY. YOUR NEWSPAPER.



# Retiree remembers war

FROM PAGE 1E

squadrons. Weant served in the 801st Medical Evacuation Squadron of the 13th Army Air Forces.

Weant enrolled in nursing school after graduating from high school in Sioux City, Iowa, then worked in a community hospital for a few months before joining the Army Nurse Corps in 1942.

"All you kept hearing was 'We need nurses in the service,' so I thought a long time about it," Weant recalls. "I finally decided it might be a way to see the world outside of just Iowa."

A couple of years later - in March 1944 - she departed for overseas duty as a flight nurse.

"It was scary, because we were the first ones to be sent over," Weant says. "When I went in, they really had not started their air evacuation program real well - they were still trying to get it put together. It was a new experience for all of us, and we were jittery and scared."

Nonetheless, the young nurse, whose rank was lieutenant, did her job and apparently did it well. Her scrapbook includes an Iowa newspaper clipping reporting she had won an Air Medal for heroism in the line of duty, related to her many flights to evacuate and care for wounded and sick soldiers.

"These flights involved flying at low altitudes over mountainous terrain under adverse weather conditions in a transport airplane, and often necessitated land-

ing within a few miles of enemy bases," her citation stated, adding that "hostile contact was probable and expected."

In May 1944, an incident happened that drove home just how dangerous Weant's job was. A new social club where she was stationed was planning a dance for its grand opening, and Weant wanted desperately to attend, but it conflicted with her flight schedule. Her only hope was to swap flights with another nurse in her squadron, Lt. Eloise Richardson, a young nurse from Illinois. Weant couldn't get in touch with Richardson in time, though, so she had to miss the dance.

That disappointment soon turned to immense sorrow.

"(Richardson) never got back," Weant says softly. "The plane went down or was shot down or something, and nobody ever found any trace of it. The Army didn't know what happened - they just never came back."

Richardson and the other personnel were declared missing in action, and a year later they were officially declared dead.

Weant shudders every time she thinks about Richardson and the other people on that plane - the plane she had hoped to be on herself.

"Boy, you don't know how that made me feel," Weant says. "That's when I prayed and thanked God many, many times. But I just felt so bad for her and her family."

Weant received her discharge in February 1946. Later that year, she and Bob got married and moved to his native High Point. She continued nursing, while Bob became a traveling salesman; he later went into the ministry and was instrumental in the founding of Urban Ministry (now Open Door Ministries). They had three children together.

"I'm thankful for the experience (as a flight nurse), and I'm thankful I got out of it alive and was able to have a family," Weant says.

More than 65 years later, she has never forgotten what she did for her country.

Nor should the rest of us.

jtomlin@hpe.com | 888-3579



## TRAVEL TOGETHER WITH JESSE HILL TOURS

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O'Donnell/Myrtle Beach

March 23-24 Luxury Spring

Mystery Tour

April 14 "Big River"/Wytheville, Va

April 28 - 30 Savannah &

Charleston Tour

Aug. 2-4 Ohio Amish Tour

Sept. 24 - 30 Cape Cod/Plimouth/

Martha's Vineyard

Flight:

June 6 - 13 Pacific Northwest

& California

Oct. 22 - 30 Tropical Costa Rica

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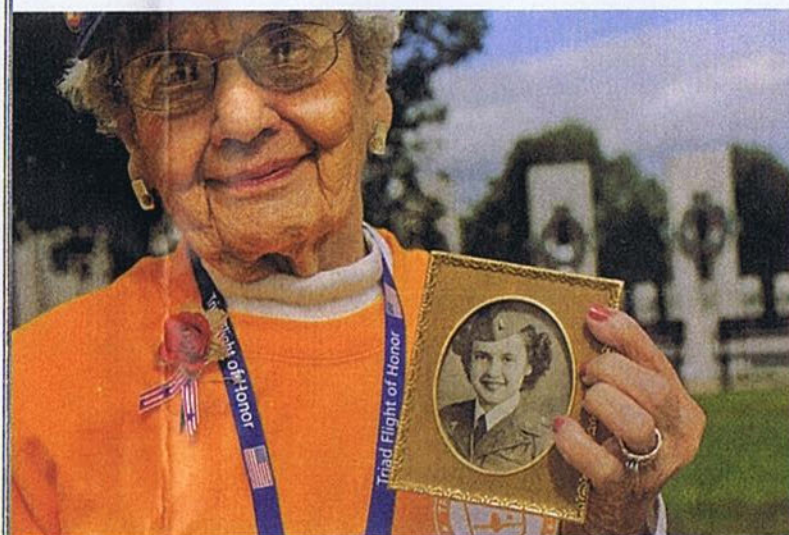
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Clockwise from far left:  
**Helen Hunter Weant**  
now and in wartime. A  
Maryland teacher, who  
brought 150 students on a  
bus trip, shows off a photo  
of his parents. A letter  
from one of the students,  
hand-delivered to Buel  
McCollum. Families wel-  
come the veterans home.



MY FATHER AND I visited the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., in 2005, less than a year after its dedication. Using a cane for support, my father found his name in the registry book, then walked to the column honoring Michigan, his home state. At the wall of 4,048 gold stars, each representing 100 Americans killed, he swept his hand across the words of President Harry S. Truman, chiseled into the stone: "Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices."

As I stand at the memorial with 90-year-old Buel McCollum, who has come here with 100 veterans on a flight from North Carolina, I recall that day with my father. My best friend, he died late last year. Many World War II veterans can't afford such a trip, nor do they have relatives who are able to take them. Since 2009, the Triad Flight of Honor, a project of District 7690, has carried 800 World War II veterans, including McCollum, to the nation's capital for a day of recognition and reflection. Also on the eight flights were 400 volunteers and relatives — "guardians" as they are called — to assist the elderly veterans. Five more flights are scheduled this year.

Time is running short for the effort. More than 16 million American men and women served in World War II, but they are dying at a rate of about 1,000 a day.

McCollum, who drove a tank in France and Germany under General George S. Patton, almost didn't make this trip. His companion of 28 years, Ruby

Caine, died a few days before, and he considered staying home. But, he decided, "Ruby would have wanted me to go."

His guardian, Bobbie Ashley, tells me, "You need to see this." McCollum pulls out a card that a nine-year-old from Easton, Md., had presented to him moments earlier. (Each veteran received a card from an elementary schoolchild.) "Dear veteran," the card read. "Thank you so much for all that you have done for us. Now I feel safe and happy. I hope you are happy too. Your friend, Ruby." Ashley says, "How many children are named Ruby these days? He was meant to be here to get that message."

Rotary clubs and districts nationwide have taken on the challenge of raising the tens of thousands of dollars needed to support such flights. Of the five North Carolina groups sending veterans to the memorial, three are supported by Rotary districts, which have sent as many as 16 flights to Washington in a single year.

The districts work with the Honor Flight Network, which operates in more than 100 cities across the United States. Founded in 2005, the network charters flights for World War II veterans and terminally ill veterans of more recent wars.

Mitzi Ellis, a past governor of District 7690, oversees the details required to run the Triad Flight of Honor. A nonprofit executive, Ellis has managed the launch of two district-sponsored honor flight groups, the first while facing her own battle with breast cancer.





The tour included stops at the U.S. Air Force Memorial (right) and the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial (far right), also known as the Iwo Jima Memorial.

On the day of McCollum's flight, Ellis, the volunteers, and the veterans were up well before daybreak. By 6:30 a.m., Piedmont Triad International Airport was packed with supporters, veterans, and their families. Flag-waving motorcycle club members, many of them Vietnam veterans, lined the road leading to the terminal. Inside, an Andrews Sisters tribute trio sang for the crowd. A water cannon sprayed an arc over the plane as it taxied toward the runway.

In Washington, two tour buses speed the veterans and their guardians around the city, visiting each war memorial. At the World War II Memorial, guardians unfold wheelchairs, visitors crowd the area, and television crews scramble to film the veterans. Several are women, including Helen Hunter Weant, 90, who carries a framed black-and-white photograph of herself in uniform — a striking woman of 23. She was a flight nurse serving on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. That's where she met her husband, a bomber pilot.

As the plane lands back at Piedmont at 9:15 p.m., more than 1,000 people jam the airport terminal. Families cheer and wave banners as each veteran passes under a row of crossed swords held by Knights of Columbus members. Wives, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and well-wishers shout greetings. Some of the veterans wipe away tears. Eugene "Mack" McBride, 87, from Clemmons, N.C., smiles and exclaims, "I've never been so happy in my life."

"We're so grateful to the Rotary clubs across the country who have been key fundraisers and helped make the dreams of World War II veterans come true," says Earl Morse, cofounder and president of the Honor Flight Network. "We don't advertise," he adds. "We focus our funds on transporting as many veterans as safely and as quickly as we can. More than 30,000 World War II veterans are on our national waiting list. Over 1,200 of them have died before they could visit their memorial." ■





1. Service in CBI Theatre - Several months in Chichua, India  
About 9 months assigned to 14TH AIR FORCE. In charge of  
Flight that went to China. Flew Hump in China + worked  
~~in~~ Dispensary.

Returned to Civilian life Dec 1948.

Worked at LaGuardia Fld., N.Y., for 2 yrs in Med. Dept.

Went to Hemet, Ca Feb 1948 and worked in office,  
as office nurse, for two General Practitioners for 31 years.  
One of the doctors I knew in China.

Married Stanley Weinrich (Marine) in 1949. and have  
lived in Hemet ever since. We have no children

Have had several trips to Taipei, Taiwan and  
Hong Kong with 14TH Air Force Assoc. I am a member  
of the Association.

Both of us are retired. Due to husband's illness  
we no longer are able to travel any distance  
from our part of the world.