

DALE FRANKLIN WATTERSON BIOGRAPHY (Partial)

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The following biography will be included in a book, *FRAGMENTS OF WAR*, being written by Janice K Watterson, daughter. Included are details from the memoir of Alpha Jean Watterson, articles in the Sutherland Courier, and family stories and letters.

The 24 year old navigator, Dale Franklin Watterson, was named after his maternal grandfather, Franklin Martin, a big, brawny and bewhiskered man fond of singing, whistling and playing “The Irish Washer Woman” or “Pop goes the Weasel” on his fiddle. To know Dale is to know his family, the hard work of farmers, and the tendrils of life sown in the fertile Iowa soil. Words like homestead, locusts, shoveling snow, cyclones, infant deaths, prairie schools, and family made a common vocabulary in the Martin home in Iowa.

Dale’s mother, Alpha Martin, was the first born, and educated at the country school while she helped take care of her 14 brothers and sisters. “Schools were not graded in those days, so when I could read in the fourth reader, diagram sentences, conjugate a verb, do partial payments, compound interest, and excel in spelling, I was thought, by my father, proficient enough to attend high school,” Alpha wrote later in her life story. She continued to attend school while caring for her family when her mother was ill, earning her teacher’s certificate, and as she filed on land to create her own homestead. She taught school and snow shoed to her homestead. Alpha wintered alone in Northern Minnesota to “prove up” her claim.

Alpha met John Watterson in Sanborn, Iowa while she was teaching and awaiting court decisions for her homestead. According to the yellowed wedding announcement, they were married in 1916. The news clipping described the bride as “a woman of splendid character and sunny disposition. She has been a very successful teacher in the rural school of the county for a number of years and for the past two years has been homesteading and teaching school near Cramer, Minnesota.” The bridegroom was praised as “an industrious young man of sterling qualities and pleasing personality.” The clipping ends with the statement “These young people have every prospect for a bright and happy future and all join in wishing them a long and happy married life.”

John was an excellent farmer and for a while things went well. With the Great War, farm prices were good and the Martin siblings helped each other with crops. Four children were born, Glen, Dale, Jane, and Bernard. But then things went hard, some of the farm land had to be let go. In 1923, Franklin and Emma Martin, Alpha’s beloved parents, passed away within 3 weeks of each other. In the summer of 1924, a cyclone blew down the cattle barn, a hog house, granary, wind mill and everything on the farm the young Watterson family was renting. Their whole family crop had been blown away. While the Alpha and John were trying to rebuild, their little daughter Jane, became seriously ill and died suddenly. Dale was between life and death at the same time and barely survived.

John and Alpha had to decide whether to try another start. Their boys were getting old enough to work with their parents and friends and neighbors were very good at helping each other. Managing to buy an old Ford Sedan, the family went to the homestead, to relax, to renew, to be together. They returned with a new energy and again tackled farming. While the rest of

the country experienced the Roaring Twenties, low farm prices and weather made farming in that area very difficult. Dale was raised where Locusts could stay 5-7 years destroying crops. Winter wind had no great tree breaks or mountains to slow down its force. Fire was the savage that could destroy a family's livelihood. In Walkman cemetery on Memorial Day, there is an avenue of flags, not for faceless names but for their brothers, fathers, cousins and uncles.

By 1932, John and Alpha gave up farming, and moved to Sutherland, Iowa, penniless but for the W.P.A. project job that John attained. They watched their community go through the terrible blizzard in 1936 where 25 men shoveled for 1 ½ miles to open a path for a bobsled to bring a man to town for medical attention. The following summer there was the worst drought in Iowa History. Farm prices were low and war clouds were again forming.

World War II brought an end to the Depression but totally changed the Watterson family as all three of the sons joined the Service. Glen, the oldest joined the Red Cross Domestic Service to work with service personnel. Dale joined the U.S. Army Air Force to become a Navigator flying with the 8th Air Force in England. Bernard became a Pharmacist Mate in the New Hebrides Islands in the Pacific. Three men who had grown up together with a strong family and community were now spread across the world, far from the pleasures of watching fireflies on the slough west of town, and visiting with neighbors.

There aren't many pictures of Dale as a child. Film and processing were hard to get and expensive. One portrait shows a sunny, tow headed child with just a hint of the curls that would follow. In the few family pictures, Dale is in the middle, the middle child after the death of his sister. He inherited his father's height, and always seemed bigger than his brothers and peers. Another reason for him to be in the middle. From Alpha, he had a pragmatic personality and pleasant disposition. Years later, his older brother Glen would write about Dale, "The thing I think of most is his naturalness—he was just himself—there was no other like him—that is the every-day living quality that no one can take away from us, and that will never die." His easy smile, his sense of responsibility, his good natured acceptance of life and his place in it all contributed to a strong awareness of himself. Growing up in Sutherland, Iowa, he worked hard at different jobs when he could get them, and he had a good time whatever he was doing. Mostly, Dale was an active young man who would go whistling, half walking, half running wherever he was going.

In high school, Dale found an athletic program just made for him— American football. He was always the biggest guy on the team and played tackle. Soon, he acquired the nickname that would last, "Moose." He was the heavyweight of the team, 180 lbs by age 17, then 185 lbs. by the end of the season compared to teammates in the 130's and 140's. His weight would be a strength in high school and college football but sometimes a problem after that. Off season, Moose was also on the basketball team where his younger brother, Bernard joined him. Sports added to Dale's self-discipline and sense of teamwork. Tough extra practices for the Sutherland Tigers only fired up their enthusiasm. The Sutherland Courier once referred to Dale as a bulwark of the line to stop the opposing team. A clipping shows Dale in a three point stance and describes his last game as a Tiger.

DALE WATTERSON

Playing his third year as tackle, Dale makes his last appearance on the home field tomorrow night. His 185 pounds is expected to raise havoc with the Dutchmen's

line as he goes after revenge for last years 47 to 6 pummeling the Tigers received at Orange City. A senior, Dale has played good ball all season, but tomorrow night is expected to rise to even greater heights and lead a faltering Sutherland eleven to a win over the lads from the west." Sutherland Courier, November 10, 1938 .

A black leather folder holds Dale Watterson's Diploma from Sutherland Consolidated High School in 1939. In his hands, he had a football scholarship to Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It was the equivalent of a passport to the big city life, and Dale was leaving his small farm town. He was tall and handsome with dark curly hair and he was taking the solid character of a man with him. A friend of Hattie's commented how quiet Dale was, and in a letter from a pilot, he remembered Dale's quietness but reliability.

Coe College was the sectarian Liberal Arts College in the heart of Cedar Rapids, in the heart of Iowa in the heart of the Country. Known as a clean, moderately sized, industrial community, Cedar Rapids never lost its connection to the agricultural importance of the state. The aroma of the Quaker Oats Mill would waft over the city that also had steel mills making sparks. The combination of college and city was an excellent segway for the young man leaving home.

Dale had worked for the first year after High School graduation to supplement the cost of his only year at Coe. He lived in Greene Hall, played in intramural sports, and was on the Freshman Football team. In May 1941, Dale becomes an initiated member of ALPHA DELTA ALPHA . It would be the next year that Dale again worked, then signed up for the military, and married Hattie Capek, the love of his life. It was his time.

Dale Watterson's young married life and training in the U.S. Army Air Force will be covered in supplemental chapters. The crew of AC #44-6470 went missing on March 31, 1945.