



OBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Pearl Harbor Stories

J.C. England: Part Two

Helen was a flawless beauty. She was a California blonde, lovely, with a radiant smile. However, behind that smile was tragedy. Her mother committed suicide when she was 12, and four years later, her father died in a construction accident. She was raised by her aunt, finished high school, and then entered the local college.

Helen met a young man from Oklahoma named J.C. England. J.C. planned to finish two years of college and join the Navy. A college education guaranteed him an officer rank and a fine salary.

J.C. was sweet on Helen, and she welcomed the attention. Soon, they became a couple. In February of 1941, she suspected she might be pregnant; by March, it was confirmed. They eloped in Mexico and quickly returned for J.C. to finish his second year. J.C. graduated from college, joined the Navy, and married Helen—all within a couple of weeks.



J.C. and Helen elope to Mexico; March 1941



J.C. and Helen marry; June 1941

The summer of 1941 was a happy time for them. J.C. had a steady income from the Navy; Helen worked odd jobs and kept house. They had more than they ever imagined. The future looked bright and full of promise—until that day in September when J.C. received orders to ship out.

Helen was worried. What would she do without him? She was pregnant and alone. To make matters worse, his departure date added additional pain. The Navy ordered J.C. to ship out on October 3, 1941. Helen gasped when she saw the news. She had been born on October 3, 1921. Her upcoming 20th birthday was going to be especially sad.



J.C. England leaving home; October 1941

Helen's aunt lived nearby, and J.C.'s parents resided a few miles away. That was the extent of her family. October passed slowly, but on November 9, Helen gave birth to a healthy baby girl. She named their daughter Victoria.

Before she was out of the hospital, Helen was already plotting to follow her husband. She was determined to join him in Hawaii so their family could be together.

Helen used J.C.'s paycheck to buy a ticket aboard a Hawaii-bound steamer. As soon as she felt strong enough to travel, she packed her suitcase, grabbed baby Vicky, and caught the next available ship.



Typical passenger ship traveling between California and Hawaii: 1930's

Helen stood out among all the other passengers. Here was a beautiful young mother with her newborn baby on her way to join her husband, an officer in the Navy. The crew treated her like a princess. Everyone opened doors for her and pulled out chairs for her to sit. Passengers and crew alike fawned over her adorable baby.



Deck chairs and coffee service on ocean liner; 1930's

Helen had never been happier. She could finally dream about her future. With J.C.'s steady pay and her ambition to improve their life, she felt that nothing could stop them from someday achieving the Hollywood lifestyle she had often seen in magazines.

The ocean was smooth, and the weather was perfect. The roar of the engine and thick black smoke were proof that every minute she was getting closer to J.C. That's why Helen felt such panic the moment the engine stopped and the ship became still in the water.

Every passenger was stunned.

The ocean swells rocked the ship back and forth. Chairs slid across the deck, and a few dishes crashed. Wild rumors spread like wildfire.

Finally, after nearly an hour, Helen heard the engine roar to life again. A belch of black smoke filled the air, and the propeller began to move the ship. However, to everyone's horror, the ship looped around in a large, slow circle until the sun was directly above the bow.

Finally, the captain called everyone's attention to explain. President Roosevelt had delivered a speech: The Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. America was at war.

They had been ordered to immediately return to California.

Next: J.C. England Part Three