

# Who was Edna Peasley?

*March 1945 – “The Aero Club boasts a new American girl, Edna Peasley, who after a weeks illness discovering the glories of the English climate is now helping Edie boost morale.”* This was an extract from the squadron diary of the 712<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron based at the home of the 448<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group at Station 146, Seething.

Not many women worked at Station 146 so to find a woman mentioned in the dairies is a real treat. So who was Edna Peasley and how did she come to Station 146 Seething? With very little information to begin with we can only assume that Edna was part of the American Red Cross as she was working in the Aero Club at Seething.

As the American Red Cross was a civilian group, finding official information about the girls and women who served is difficult.

To begin our search for Edna, we started investigating the newspapers of the time and to the fore came a couple of articles about an Edna Peasley serving with the Red Cross in France. One such article was dated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1945; The Minneapolis Star reported on Red Cross workers in St. Valey, France.

The article presented the name of Edna, her father, and where she came from, so a search of Ancestry was undertaken. Listed in the 1940's census was an Edna. Her father's name, as well as the place they lived, seemed to match the newspaper article. Alongside this was her mother's name and that she had a brother and a rough year of birth for Edna.

Findagrave.com was investigated to find Edna but with no luck, as she no doubt got married and changed her name. A change of parameter to search for her father on findagrave.com gave us more information on Edna. The notes on Findagrave.com stated that Edna was now Edna Gratton, so a new search was instigated. The results showed that this Edna had a birth date that was different by six years, and suddenly she had many more siblings and step siblings. Something did not feel right.

Another change of search parameter and the newspapers were again investigated, but this time for Edna's mother as her date of death was known from Findagrave. Written in Edna's mothers' obituary it mentioned Edna. Edna's surname was different from that given on her father's Findagrave page.

On Edna's Findagrave page, this time with her new surname, it stated that she joined the Red Cross in 1945 and served in England and France. This information looked promising.

So who exactly was Edna Peasley?

Edna Mary Peasley was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1913 in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada to Edwin W (b. 1879) and Florence Barry (b.1888) Peasley. She had a brother, Robert (b. 1918).

Edna's father, Edwin was born in Iowa and her mother, Florence was born in Minnesota. Edwin and Florence married on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 1908 at St. Paul, Ramsey, Minnesota. In 1912 they moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. In the 1916 census Edwin was working as a foreman for the daily paper.





(Edna in 1944)

In 1926 the family were living in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, Canada, and by the 7th September 1937 Edna and her family left Canada and moved to Pembina, North Dakota, arriving on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1937.

The 1940 census shows that the family were living in St Paul, Minnesota. Edwin was working as a printer for a newspaper while Edna was working as a stenographer in a wholesale company. Her brother, Robert was also working for the wholesale company.

At some point, Edna worked for Northwest Airlines, then joined the American Red Cross in 1945 and served in England and France. In fact, Edna was only at Seething for a few weeks before she was transferred around the 16th May 1945. Exactly what her duties were at Seething is still unknown at the time of writing but will be investigated further to see if there are any more mentions of her. However, we were sent a photo of Edna in her Red Cross uniform, which was taken by Ralph Dimick who was a navigator in the 712<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron. In May 1945, Edna was now working at Camp Lucky Strike at St. Valey in France.



(Dimick)



([texashistory.unt.edu](http://texashistory.unt.edu))

Camp Lucky Strike, like many other camps, was a staging camp used for replacements coming into the European Theatre. Now in May 1945, it became a massive tent city for American troops preparing to embark the voyage home.

Camp Lucky Strike like 9 other holding camps got its code name from a popular brand of cigarettes of the time and hence, they became known as the “cigarette camps.”

Lucky Strike was the largest of the cigarette camps, with the ability to hold 58,000 troops. It was the chief assembly point for newly-liberated American prisoners of war, or RAMPS (Recovered American Military Personnel).

In early May 1945, Camp Lucky Strike was divided into four large blocks A, B, C, D. It had two permanent American Red Cross installations with only 8 Red Cross girls working day and night to meet the need that was demanded from the men. Edna was working in Block A and assisted Lucille Rowe who directed the block.



([ww2aircraft.net](http://ww2aircraft.net))

Army Medical Officers asked the American Red Cross to serve liquids and food that the men could easily take. Eggnog (made with powdered milk and powdered egg), fruit juices, soup, cocoa, malted milk and cheese sandwiches were served. The men needed more than the usual three meals a day to build up their strength and the American Red Cross was asked to supervise the preparation and serving of the three additional between-meal feedings necessary for the health of the men. Permission was granted to serve two doughnuts to the men when embarking on trucks for the Port of Embarkation in Le Havre. At no other time were doughnuts served.

In an article from the Minneapolis Star, Edna was quoted saying how amazed she was with the POW's insatiable appetites. The article stated that in 75 minutes, hungry soldiers ate 225 loaves of bread and 800 pounds of cheese. In one day they drank 26,000 cups of coffee, cocoa, soup and eggnog.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1945 there was an appeal from the army for help in the RAMP Extension Camp at Le Havre. On the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1945 Edna was transferred to Le Havre with seven other girls to give a similar service to that offered at Lucky Strike. An article mentions that Edna would take wires to the men, answer every conceivable sort of question, and smile all the time but she wouldn't change her job for anything. After six days Edna's group returned to Lucky Strike.

By June 1945, 49 Red Cross girls were working in Camp Lucky Strike – 10 girls in each block and 9 girls in the two hospitals on the camp.

According to a report found, Block A consisted of three tents manned by five American Red Cross girls, Edna being one of them. It had an attendance of 54,000 men. A total of 727,065 cups of eggnog, cocoa, soup etc and 781,780 cheese sandwiches representing 14,178lbs of cheese were dispensed. This made an average of about 31,600 men served daily. Two stage shows for 1200 men, three community songs for 1200 men, eight bridge games for 2400 men, and ten music sessions for 6000 men summarised the planned activities.

The majority of the men were most interested in quiet games which permitted them to sit still, such as cards, and Bingo. A popular feature of the club was Monsieur Pierre Billon, a portrait artist, who made portrait sketches of the men. He was in demand all day, and always had a long line waiting to be sketched.

By the end of 1945, over 73,000 RAMPS were processed through Camp Lucky Strike and it closed in 1946.



While on R&R on the French Riviera Edna met Donald McStocker. Donald Paul McStocker (service number 19064780) was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> August 1913 in California. He enlisted on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1941 in San Francisco, California. His enlistment papers list his occupation as Engineer, Mechanical. In August 1943, after completing 13 weeks training in the employment of armoured equipment and organisations in modern warfare, he received his Commission as 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant at Fort Knox. It's believed that he served in Germany.

Edna and Donald married in February 1946. In 1950 Edna and Donald were living in San Mateo, California. At the time, they had four children Teresa (b. 1947), Robert and Donald (b. 1948), and Michael. Edna's husband, Donald, was a manager of a motor truck company. They later had another daughter, Deborah. They travelled and lived in Australia and the Philippines before returning to the United States in 1964. They lived in New Jersey and New York before permanently settling in Sacramento.

Edna suffered tragedy in 1967 when her son Donald passed away at the tender age of 19 and then five years later she lost her husband Donald. Edna passed away on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2014 at the grand age of 101 years old and laid to rest with Donald at Queen of Heaven Cemetery in California.



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