CARL W. HICKERSON (1900-1990)

Prescott and the Verde Valley

Carl Wendell (or Wendall) Hickerson was born in the Indian Territory of Oklahoma on March 14, 1900. Raised with 10 siblings, he attended grade school in Texas, then high school in Hollis, Oklahoma. He attended Southwestern State Teachers College (today's Southwestern Oklahoma State University) at Weatherford, Okla., graduating with a bachelor's degree in 1926.

CARL W. HICKERSON

> "He was born in the Indian Territory, received his grade instruction in Texas and returned to the land of his nativity for his high school and college work. He took a five year course in the University of Hardknocks after finishing high school and before entering Southwestern in the fall of 1923. Know a workman by his chips – has served as president of the sophomore clubs, the Senate, the student assembly, editor of the Oracle, editor of the Southwestern, business manager of the Oracle and member of the college debating team."
>
> "Senior Biographies." *The Southwestern* (Weatherford, Okla.), May 11, 1926: 1

The course in "hardknocks" referenced above included service in the U.S. Army in 1918.

Following graduation, Carl became the principal of "school No. 7" in Harmon County, Okla., probably near Hollis. In 1928, he married Barbara Ruth Hughes in Mangum, Okla. Barbara had also been a student at Southwestern State Teachers College, graduating in 1924. In the years between her graduation and her wedding, Barbara taught school in Jerome, Arizona. At the time of the wedding, Carl was reported to be teaching biology at Southwestern State.

During the summer of 1929, the newlyweds attended summer classes at Arizona State Teachers College in Flagstaff. The following school year, they taught in Texon, an oil boomtown near Big Lake, Texas, with Carl serving as principal.

Perhaps due to Barbara's previous experiences teaching in Jerome, or the couple's time in Flagstaff, around 1930 they were inspired to move to Yavapai County. At first, Carl opened an auto repair shop at the Verde Motor Company in Jerome. However, he soon returned to public education, successfully campaigning for the office of Yavapai County School Superintendent in 1932.

It was during this period that Hickerson became a driving force in the early development of Ernest A. Love Field. Exactly when he first became interested in flying

is unknown, but it is believed that his formal instruction began at Prescott in 1934 when he organized and hosted a federally-funded aviation ground school taught by Bill Daniels. From that point forward, Carl worked and advocated on behalf of Prescott's airport. Like Louis Price, George Voller, Ernest Kuhn, Cliff Davis and the other local aviators, Carl addressed civic groups, helped organize air shows, served on local aviation committees and completed airport-related tasks for the benefit of the city.

Carl's first airplane was an American Eagle biplane. In February 1938, he and Floyd Murphy purchased a new Aeronca, flying it back from the Cincinnati factory. On that trip, foul weather prompted a forced landing near Clarendon, Texas. A few months later, disaster struck the hangar owned by the two men:

> "A sudden gust of wind that almost reached gale proportions swept down on Ernest A. Love field Sunday afternoon and left a trail of wreckage in its wake.
> "The Hickerson and Murphy hangar was demolished with a loss of about $300, according to Carl Hickerson. Strangely enough an auto stored in the hangar was not even scratched. Manuel Guitterez' [Gutierrez] stucco hangar was lifted four or five feet off its base and otherwise damaged. As luck would have it both planes usually occupying these hangars were off the field at the time. Several spectators had narrow escapes from flying debris."
>
> "Hangars Damaged By Sudden Gust."
> *Prescott Evening Courier,* June 6, 1938: 2

Undaunted, Carl earned his limited commercial pilot license the same month.

Hickerson resigned as Yavapai County School Superintendent in August 1938 to accept the position of principal at Clarkdale High School. A year later, he earned a master's degree in education from the University of Arizona. While at Clarkdale, Hickerson, in partnership with Rue Marshall, operated a flying school at Clemenceau Airport (now Cottonwood Municipal Airport).

The summer of 1940 found Carl providing flight instruction in the CAA Civilian Pilot Training Program sponsored by the Arizona State Teachers College at Flagstaff. Ground instruction classes were held on campus, while flight instruction was given at Flagstaff's Koch Field.

The London Blitz, an intensive bombing campaign by the German Luftwaffe, began in September 1940. The following month, at the age of 40, Carl enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He served as a flight officer with the RCAF's ferrying command, moving a wide variety of aircraft types across the wilds of Canada for more than three and a half years.

In February 1941, it was reported that Hickerson was in a Toronto hospital "recovering from injuries sustained a short time ago when his plane was wrecked." His leg was "broken in eight places above the ankle."

Near the end of 1942, Hickerson was in a formation flight of Hawker Hurricane fighters when he was forced to drop out and land on a frozen lake. An account of the subsequent search and rescue effort appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen* on December 22 and was reprinted in the *Prescott Evening Courier* on January 7, 1943:

TELLS RESCUE OF HICKERSON

"Flying a ski-equipped Norseman airplane in poor visibility, Squadron Leader H. O. Madden, officer commanding the R.C.A.F. ferry command at the Ottawa air station, Rockliffe, made a dramatic rescue yesterday of one of his pilots who had been forced down on a tiny lake 25 miles from Halleybury.

"The pilot, Flying Officer Carl Hickerson, a Texan with the ferry command at Rockcliffe, had been bound for the north country late Monday, flying a Hurricane in formation. He was forced down on Lake Evelyn and the formation arrived at Kapuskasing without him. He was immediately reported missing.

"Sqdn. Ldr. Madden, a Victoria, B. C., man who has spent some time in Ottawa, makes a regular practice of leading the search when any of his men are missing. Monday night was no exception.

"FO Hickerson was reported missing at 9 o'clock that night. Sqdn. Ldr. Madden hurriedly borrowed a Lockheed from the communications division and, since it was to be night flying, he also borrowed a pilot, FO T. E. "Dannie" Daniels, an American with R.C.A.F. The squadron leader did the navigating, set a flight plan for North Bay and mapped a wide range from there to allow for considerable reconnoitering.

"The weather was bad, but it was scarcely 11:30 p.m., two and a half hours later, when, flying low, they sighted a fire burning on the lake surface near the shore. FO Hickerson had the presence of mind to detach one of the landing lights from the Hurricane and was using it to signal to the craft in the air. His commanding officer's comment later was, 'a sensible lad.'

"Since his plane was not equipped for landing under existing conditions, Sqdn. Ldr. Madden ascertained that while the plane was badly damaged, FO Hickerson was unhurt, and returned to Kapuskasing after dropping a sleeping bag, emergency rations and an axe.

"Yesterday morning, the ferry command chief flew by himself in a 'Norseman' equipped with skis, back to the lake. (The 'Norseman' is kept for such emergencies.) However, the weather was still too thick for a landing, and he returned to Kapuskasing after determining FO Hickerson was safe.

"Later in the day, Sqdn. Ldr. Madden flew back in the Norseman and although visibility had improved only slightly, he made a safe landing. He described his rescue of the Texan with extreme modesty. 'I just went out and picked him up. It was a lot of fun!'

"He was proud of FO Hickerson though, who had managed to keep his head – and use it – and was in good condition, having built himself a brush bed and shelter. His commanding officer said last night, 'He wasn't excited a bit. It was just as if I had met him on Bank street.'

"Sgdn. Ldr. Madden flew the Texan to Earlton, Ont., 200 miles south of Kapuskasing and 50 miles from Cobalt, where they both had a long, welcome sleep last night.

"Sgdn. Ldr. Madden credited FO Daniels with the success of the exploit, but his navigation and subsequent solo flying was apparently no small part in the dramatic venture. A bush pilot now with the R.C.A.F. in Ottawa described it last night as 'an amazing job,' particularly since the actual locating of the crashed ship and pilot was done at night in bad weather."

Prescott Evening Courier, January 7, 1943: 1, 2

Hickerson gave an account of the rescue in a letter to his sister in Odessa, Texas. The story was published in the *Odessa American*:

"Hickerson is a pilot with the Royal Canadian Air Force, and is with the ferrying command. Flying formation in a Hurricane, he had been bound for Montreal when he was forced down on Lake Evelyn. The formation arrived at its destination without him.

'We were bringing four Hurricanes this way and the boys were pushing

them a bit too hard for the good of the machines, so I was lagging back trying to slow them down when I got an oil leak that gradually reduced pressure and sent the temperature up,' Hickerson wrote.

'I nursed it along until the temperature went up to the limit, then picked out a lake and scooted it in on its belly as there was over a foot of snow on the ice and I thought there was even more. As I was not sure just what the propellor [*sic*] would do to the ice, I put it in close to the shore so that if it cut through I'd be in shallower water.

'Unfortunately, I hit a snag in the ice and mowed a wing off. I got busy, built a fire out of driftwood, then knocked the landing light out of the busted wing and hooked it up to the battery for signaling.

'Later I made a little shelter out of the engine cover and got some spruce and made a place to lie down, for you just can't imagine how tired you get just standing with no place to sit down except in the snow.

'About 11:15 I heard motors, so I rushed out to the plane and got my searchlight going. Pretty soon I saw a couple of navigation lights coming in from the south and knew it was some of the boys, so I signaled that I was O.K. and that the snow was too deep for wheels. They came over several times and kicked out food and a bed roll and then flew all around the lake to see if they could tell where they were. They went off shortly.

'The boys had good luck finding me as they picked up my campfire and signals on the first drag. It was nice of them to start looking for me so soon, as there was bad weather following us down from the West.

'It started snowing about 2 a.m. and really kept it up until about 4 p.m. the next day. As soon as it stopped they brought the Norseman down from Kapuskasing and took me out. The Norseman is a high wing ski equipped plane that I took up to Kap just two weeks ago for such jobs.' "

Odessa American, January 8, 1943: 5



Hawker Hurricanes (Sea Hurricanes) of the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm. (*Wikipedia*)

The RCAF released Hickerson in 1944, so that he could join the U.S. Army's Air Transport Command. He flew for an additional 15 months, separating in December 1945 with decorations, an honorable discharge and the rank of Captain.

Returning to Prescott, Hickerson ran for the office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1946. He flew his little single-engine airplane to campaign engagements across Arizona and was said to be the only candidate to do so.

Hickerson Is Ex-Army Flier

"Carl W. Hickerson, a candidate for the Democratic nomination for state superintendent of public instruction, was in Tucson today in the interest of his candidacy. Hickerson has, in the course of his campaign, visited every town in Arizona.

"He served three years and seven months as flight lieutenant with the Royal Canadian air force before being transferred to the U. S. air transport command, serving a year and three months in the ferry service on the run to Alaska and the Pacific. Hickerson enlisted in the Canadian air force Oct. 15, 1940. He was separated in December, 1945.

"Hickerson served as county superintendent of Yavapai schools for six years, was principal of Clarkdale high school for two years, and served two years on the state board of education. He resigned his Clarkdale post to enter the service.

"Hickerson received his master's degree from the University of Arizona and is a member of the Phi Delta Kappa honorary society."

Tucson Daily Citizen, July 12, 1946: 2

Hickerson Campaigning By Air



Carl W. Hickerson of Prescott is shown in the above picture with an Aeronca plane in which he is making a tour of Arizona in his campaign for the Democratic nomination for State Superintendent of Public Instruction. He served in the recent war as a pilot. He is believed to be the only Arizona candidate piloting his own plane in the present campaign. Hickerson arrived at Nogales Tuesday and left Wednesday for Douglas and Bisbee.

Nogales International, June 28, 1946: 1

Carl's campaign for state office was unsuccessful, but in 1948, he was elected to his old post, Yavapai County Superintendent of Schools. After serving a term in that office, he became a tax researcher for the Arizona School Coordinating Council.

In 1953, Hickerson was caught up in a statewide investigation that focused on World War II surplus property that had been transferred to state educational institutions and then passed to private parties. The charges against him were soon dismissed, but the damage was done and any aspirations for future public office were effectively extinguished.

For the remainder of the 1950s, Hickerson operated his own consulting firm. According to one report, "He established an American school in Tocuepala, Peru, for the Southern Peru Copper Corp. in 1958, and worked with the U.S. International Executive Service Corps in Columbia in 1970" (*Bryan-College Station Eagle,* May 9, 1990: 3).

In 1960, Carl moved to Odessa, Texas, where he worked for Permian Brine Sales and Service, "working on brine wells and LPG storage projects." He moved to College Station, Texas, in 1976, where he passed away in 1990 at the age of 90.

Hickerson was an active member of the American Legion, the Quiet Birdmen and the Democratic Party.


CARL W. HICKERSON

1946

Carl Hickerson

COLLEGE STATION — Carl Hickerson, 90, of College Station died Monday at Humana Hospital. He was born March 14, 1900, near Ryan, Oklahoma.

Mr. Hickerson came to West Texas in 1907 by covered wagon from McGregor. He was a U.S. World War I veteran and a pilot in the Canadian Air Force in World War II. He was a recipient of the Royal Canadian Flying Cross. He was a teacher in Oklahoma and Arizona and the county superintendent of schools for Yavapai County, Ariz. He had lived in Odessa from 1960 to 1976. He was associated with Permian Brine Sales, Inc., working on brine wells and LPG storage projects.

Survivors include his wife, Tess; a son, Lee Hickerson of Hesperus, Colo.; two sisters, Mrs. Hugh Foreman of Duke, Okla., and Mrs. George Carter of Lubbock; four brothers, J.A. Hickerson of Oakland, Calif., A.L. Hickerson of Odessa, Herbert Hickerson of Carlsbad, N.M., and Harry Hickerson of Opp, Ala.; six grandchildren; and four great-granchildren.

The family suggests memorials to the Carl Hickerson Scholarship Fund at Southwestern University in Weatherford, Okla.

Callaway-Jones Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Odessa American, May 10, 1990: 14