Milton Leroy Cook

Childhood and Life before WSC

Milton Leroy Cook was born on 17th October 1917 in Nyssa, Oregon, to Charles and Annette Cook. Milton and his twin sister Mildred were the second and third children of the Cook family. Mildred and Milton had an elder sister, Cora, born in 1914, and an older brother, Albert, born in 1916. Milton and Mildred's younger sister Lois was born in 1919 and was the Cooks' last child. Milton's father, Charles, was born in 1899 in Smith Center, Kansas, and relocated with his family to a homestead in Keating, Oregon.[1] During this time, Milton's grandfather Thomas C. Cook transitioned from his role in Keating as Deputy Sheriff to Justice of the Peace in Baker County, Oregon.[2] Charles met and married Annette Cook (nee. McNee) in 1913, and promptly relocated to Annette's hometown of Malheur, Oregon, where they lived until after Milton and Mildred's births.[3] Between 1920 and 1930, the Cook family relocated to Clarkston, Washington, where Milton's father transitioned from farming to mechanics and worked in radio repair. After Milton's death, the family eventually moved back to Baker, Oregon, where Charles opened his own business.[4]

While in Clarkston, Milton attended Charles Francis Adams High School between 1931 and 1935. There, Milton achieved membership in the school's Letterman Club through his participation in varsity basketball.[5] Milton rose through the athletic ranks through the school's

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[1] *Idaho Daily Statesman*; Publication Date: *10 Jan 1933*; Publication Place: *Boise, Idaho, USA*; URL: *https://www.newspapers.com/image/722868508/?article=3f4126c8-50b8-4c34-9fd1-b6a86d32b67f&focus=0.7276482,0.4362626,0.8454473,0.62320155&xid=3355*

[2] Ibid.

[3] https://gw.geneanet.org/step0504?n=cook&oc=&p=charles+leroy&_gl=1*15kbnlv*_gcl_au*NDcxODA4MzcxLjE2ODQ4NTc1MzE.

[4] Ancestry.com. *1940 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012. Year: *1940*; Census Place: *Clarkston, Asotin, Washington*; Roll: *m-t0627-04331*; Page: *4A*; Enumeration District: *2-4*

[5] Ancestry.com. *U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-2016* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. *"U.S., School Yearbooks, 1880-2012"*; School Name: *Charles Francis Adams High School*; Year: *1935*

physical education program and was particularly noted for his participation in a game against Lewiston High School in the 1935 winter season.[6] His nickname at school, as documented by his senior yearbook page, was "Cooky," while his sister Mildred was "Cook."[7] As a part of Milton's Letterman Club duties, he participated in the original play: "Born Lucky," which was produced and directed by Clarkston High instructor Miss Meagher, who taught Latin. Milton was also a member of the school's Latin Club. While Milton was athletically inclined, his sister Mildred excelled in music and student government, serving in multiple school bands and orchestras and serving as class secretary in 1935. After high school, Milton worked as a truck driver for a private company before eventually enrolling in Washington State College.

Experience at WSC

Milton graduated from Washington State College in 1942 and enlisted in the United States Navy not long after. Milton registered for the draft in 1940, listing his occupation as a student at Washington State College. At WSC, Milton worked toward a science degree, focusing on his Chemistry Major. Milton is registered as a member of the 1942 senior class. He was not listed as participating in any cocurricular activities. Milton walked in his graduation service on June 1st, 1942, where he received his diploma.[8]

Military Service and Death

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] WSU 86, WSU Publications Collection: Commencement https://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsu001_999.htm at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) https://libraries.wsu.edu/masc

Little information is available about Milton's basic training. However, after achieving the rank of Ensign, Milton Leroy Cook participated in naval aviation training. For this, he relocated to Texas and trained at Fort Worth Army Airfield. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, the airfield, which had previously been known only as the "Tarrant Field Aerodrome," was formally incorporated into a Fort Worth base to be used for training US Army and Navy aviation recruits.[9] Today, the airfield is part of the Naval Air Station Dallas, where, since 1994, the US Navy has assumed host command of the base.[10] A Navy Register published in January of 1943 documents Milton as qualifying for specialist duties under an A-V(T) classification.[11] This classification, reserved for former civilian or army pilots, implied that Milton had prior flight training by the time he was reassigned to Fort Worth.[12] However, no records remain of where Milton may have previously received flight training. It is possible, given Milton's sparse co-curricular record at WSC, that he was engaged with one of Whitman County's civilian pilot training programs. The records for these are few and far between, but this may explain both Milton's relative absence from the college community and his receipt of a Navy pilot classification so soon after enlistment.

On May 30th, 1943, Milton was involved in an airplane collision over Grand Prairie, Texas.[13] Investigators deemed the collision a training accident; a plane piloted by an independent student flyer collided head-on with the vessel Milton was piloting. Both Milton and his aircraft instructor, Albert Henderson Birdsong, were killed on impact. The independent flyer was

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[9] https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/in-depth-overview/naval-air-station-joint-reserve-base-fort-worth#:~:text=As%20part%20of%20the%20Base,1941%2C%20as%20Tarrant%20Field%20Airdrome.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ancestry.com. *U.S., Select Military Registers, 1862-1985* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013. This collection was indexed by Ancestry World Archives Project contributors. Original data: United States Military Registers, 1902–1985. Salem, Oregon: Oregon State Library.
[12] Ibid
[13] Texas Department of State Health Services; Austin Texas, USA; Texas Death Certificates, 1903–1982

unharmed. It took several days for news of Milton's accident to reach his family in Oregon. In the interim, obituaries published for Ens. Birdsong and notices of the accident were unable to publish Milton's name. Milton's body was interred back in Oregon with his family.

Postwar Legacy

Milton's family maintained his memory, and he is mentioned as a preceding relative in the obituaries of his older and twin sisters, mother, and brother. Today, Milton appears on several active online family trees and in records of his accident, which have been updated since the release of his name in the June 1943 document, which documents more of his story.