

Field Guide to Coronado History:

Babies and Ferries

By Bruce Linder



When it is time for a baby to be born, it is time for a baby to be born and little babies pay absolutely no attention to such worldly cares as ferry schedules.

Back in the days when ferryboats plied the waters of the bay between Coronado and San Diego, mothers-to-be paid strict attention to any remote sign of labor as no hospital stood in Coronado until 1923. Expectant mothers usually tried to take lodging in San Diego just before due dates to make sure of making the hospital. In 1922 a drive began for an obstetrics hospital but it failed for lack of city backing.

There are many stories of young Coronadans being born while sailing aboard our ferries but those colorful occurrences only tell part of the story.

Coronado ferries did not run in the wee hours of the morning complicating midnight labor and, although the City provided a community nurse, she was hard to find after working hours and on weekends. Worse, the road along the Silver Strand was not fully paved until the mid-1920s so there was literally no emergency alternative for expectant mothers.

One of the more unusual stories of unexpected arrivals occurred to the wife of Lieutenant Ralph Alexander, a destroyer officer living on Encino Row. Mrs. Alexander went into early labor in the middle of the night on August 1, 1922.

LT Alexander was assigned as flag lieutenant for an admiral's staff and he frantically called the flagship for help, despite the fact that it was moored in the middle of San Diego Bay. The ship dutifully

dispatched the admiral's barge to meet the mother and father-to-be at the Coronado Navy Landing on First Street.

The instant that the barge pulled alongside, the party was quickly bundled aboard and the coxswain swung the bow toward San Diego and pushed the throttles to max. Despite the speed of the barge, Richard G. "Dick" Alexander was born only minutes later in mid-channel well before the San Diego shore was reached.

Dick Alexander would serve aboard seven destroyers during his long Navy career including action during the Battle of Leyte Gulf in World War II. He retired as a captain after commanding battleship *New Jersey* – quite a distinguished career.

Those who knew him well said that Dick always kept the details of his birth under wraps to avoid what he feared to be unwanted notoriety.

And his birth certificate? At least one story has it that the official recorded "place of birth" wasn't just "Coronado" but something much more representative of Captain Alexander's mid-channel legacy: "Coronado-San Diego, California!"

Genealogist Rebecca Baker assisted with this article. Photo of Captain Dick Alexander, USN courtesy U. S. Navy.

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