

## **Norah Helen Alsterlund**

*By RICIGS member Betty Hagberg*

"Breaking News!

January 14, 1929

Amelia Earhart missing and feared lost near Albuquerque. With her in the plane is her secretary Norah Alsterlund."

Who was Norah Alsterlund? And how did a Moline girl end up flying around with Amelia Earhart?

The next day Norah wrote the following to her mother in Moline: " ... yesterday heard that papers and even a radio had reported Amelia and me lost. Would have wired you immediately that of course this was not so, but did not hear the rumor before it was denied. We went up for an hour at Albuquerque but found passes closed and could not get through, so came back and sat down. Apparently Field Manager did not report us in to the various stations he notified."

Norah Helen Alsterlund was born June 4, 1905 in Moline to William and Louise (Jamieson) Alsterlund. She graduated from Moline High School in 1923 where she was class president.

After attending the University of Michigan for one year, she enrolled at Smith College, in Northampton, MA majoring in English. While at Smith College, she organized an innovative furniture exchange to help low income students. She graduated with honors in 1927.

After college she was hired by Cosmopolitan Magazine where she was assigned to work with Amelia Earhart who had a regular column on aviation. She left Cosmopolitan to serve as private secretary and assistant to Amelia and followed her to work for several years at the Transcontinental Air Transport Company, a predecessor to TWA. This company was the first to offer transcontinental air service from New York to Los Angeles and marketed its services to businessmen. Norah explained that one of Amelia's jobs was to make women more comfortable with flying so that wives of businessmen would not discourage their husbands from flying.

About 1933 Norah went to work for the U.S. State Department, first at the U.S. Consulate in Buenos Aires Argentina, and later in Bogota, Columbia. She left the State Department for a time in the late 1930's to get a master's degree from the

University of Michigan. Norah spent World War II at the U.S. Embassy in London and was named vice consul there in 1950, one of the first women to hold such a position. In 1955 she testified before Congress on the scope of Soviet activity in the United States. Later she worked in Genoa, Italy and at her retirement she headed the consular office in Athens, Greece.

After nearly 30 years with the State Department, Norah retired and taught English for a number of years at Millersville State College, Pennsylvania. She died in 1996 and is buried in Riverside Cemetery, Moline. A scholarship has been established in her name at Augustana College, Rock Island.