

No longer strangers

Women from foreign places making a home in Hoke Co.

By Sonja Falls

It probably all began in some ancient war when a lonely foot soldier found himself smitten with a local girl.

While many soldiers in his position would choose to remain in that foreign land, many others would opt to take their new bride to their native country. The girl, then, was immediately faced with leaving all of her family and past behind and adjusting to new languages, people, foods and customs.

It's interesting to note that times really don't change that much. Armies still are stationed in foreign countries and men many times still seek foreign women for marriage.

Living in Hoke County are many such women. The county, close proximity to Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base, in many cases, has helped to draw these families here. Adjustments to, and acceptance in Hoke County must have had its difficulties.

For Mrs. Stephan Janos, Hue, (pronounced "Way"), the adjustment was probably greatest. Hue, a friendly, smiling, petite woman, explains that her problems began with attempts to get married. Marriage between a Vietnamese woman and an American serviceman was very difficult. Permission had to be sought from both American and Vietnamese officials and the paperwork was astronomical. Once Hue and Stephan were married, they then had to begin more proceedings for her to be transported to the United States. After eleven months, Hue finally was able to join Stephan in Oklawaha and they were then transferred to Bragg. They chose to move to quiet Hoke County rather than settle in busy Fayetteville.

Hue admits that she was very homesick, at first, especially when her husband was in the field and she knew no one. "I would look out the window and see nothing but pine trees and sand," she says, with a laugh. "It was difficult for me, because I was so far from home."

Although Hoke County experiences mild winters, Hue says she was not prepared for the cold weather here. What she misses most of all, however, are the fresh food markets in her village where she enjoyed purchasing delicious foods and bargaining for them. She and her husband laugh about her attempts at bargaining in American grocery stores. Nowadays, her family enjoys American style cooking and Vietnamese dishes that she prepares. Son Stephan says her rice is best.

Keeping busy with their three children, Debbie, Wendy and Stephen, her friendly personality and her ability to speak English all helped Hue adjust to America

quickly. She and her husband also have friends at Bragg with Vietnamese wives. She misses Vietnam and the rest of her family but is quick to admit that she and Debbie, her first born, would not have survived Communist rule, had she not been able to leave Vietnam. "We would have been killed, because Debbie had an American father," she explains.

Now comfortably ensconced in Hoke County, her children safe and happy, busy with their own lives, schools and friends, Hue feels that she and her family are now part of the community. "I know everyone, and everyone knows me," she laughs.

Rosemarie Godwin, a native of Melrichstadt, West Germany, is another Hoke County resident who accepted an American serviceman's proposal. She says, above all, the landscape of North Carolina was, at first, difficult for her to accept. "At home, everything is greener, the pines, fuller and larger. I am from a hilly area in Germany." The Sandhills, with its flat, sandy fields and turpentine pines must have looked strange to her.

However, Rosemarie admits that she is happy here and this is her home now, in the county. Her husband, Alton, is an avid coon hunter, "heart and soul," says Rosemarie and because of the number of dogs he keeps, country life suits the Godwins and their four children, Alton, Jessica, Becky and Melissa.

Like Hue, Rosemarie misses her native foods and marketing customs. She explains that it was difficult to learn to buy in quantity, from the commissary, as many Army wives do, because she was used to shopping every day. "In my hometown, everything is within walking distance, the butcher, the bakery. You took your bag and walked everywhere." She thinks getting accustomed to buying bread in the United States groceries was hardest, "especially when I was raised in a bakery!"

Although she has faced many obstacles in her new life, there are many areas of American life that she appreciates. The sense of freedom implicit in our life style is something that she relishes. Life in Germany is more formal, with more emphasis on social positions of individuals and families. Here, she says, you can be yourself.

A patient, but firm parent, she shares with Americans, a loving and sometimes indulgent, attitude toward children. German children are not esteemed quite as much as are American children. Rosemarie uses an example to explain. She was delighted to note that American restaurants have booster chairs and high chairs readily available for customers. They are rarely present in German establishments.

This love of children helped her choose the profession of teaching. Although she taught kindergarten in Germany, the red-tape involved in becoming certified to teach in North Carolina has baffled her. "I have just about given up, but I resent not being able to teach. I miss it."

Meanwhile, she helps her husband in his fur business and seems content that she can be at home for her children when they arrive from school. This is where her energies will be directed for the next few years, she says.

Carol Davis, from Grove, England, probably has had less of an adjustment than any of the three women.

Language and to a great extent, customs, of Britain and the U.S., are the same. And Carol married a native of Hoke County.

Having relatives here really helped her adjust to her new life and to meet people, Carol says. "I've always felt at home here. The people are nice."

Carol met her husband, Jimmie, at a barbecue given by a mutual friend. He was then stationed at the Air Force base at Upper Hayford.

Unlike Hue and Stephan, Carol and Jimmie found little problem in marrying. Of course leaving her home and family was the most difficult part for Carol. She tries to visit every two years and feels "very fortunate to be able to do this."

Interestingly enough, Carol also finds grocery shopping odd in the United States. She usually shops once a month at the commissary, but says that "British women shop every two or three days because most don't have the freezer space many Americans have." She finds the American cost of living is cheaper and she enjoys sales. In England, sale items are sometimes of lower quality.

If she could select one thing that she most enjoys about life in Rutherford, she would pick her involvements in her church. She and her family are members of the First Baptist Church. She describes her church and its people as "most loving" and an especial factor in her happiness in this community.

Carol and her husband have two children, Susanne and Patricia. This summer, Carol and the girls hope to revisit England, renewing old friendships, and enjoying Carol's mom's cooking, "the best cook in the world," according to Carol. But they'll be back, because this Rutherford, is their home now.

These three women are just a few who decided to leave everything near and dear to them in order to start a new life and country with their men. In many ways, they are not unlike our own ancestors, who also sought a new life in a new place. Certainly, they share their bravery. Hoke County welcomes them.



Looking over past life
Hue Janos, stands by mementoes of her native Vietnam.



Searching for bargains
Carol Davis and her daughter Patricia scan the newspaper for current sales. Carol enjoys bargain hunting, American style.



Keeping track of fur
Rosemarie Godwin keeps tabs on the fur business she and her husband, Alton, operate.