



Merrill's Marauder's wife did "wear combat boots" in Burma

This is part of a longer story written by Kitty Delorey Fleischman about her parents, Lt. Donald Delorey and Lt. Mary Jane Healy. Kitty is editor of "Idaho Magazine."



Both Lt. Donald Delorey and Lt. Mary Jane Healy were volunteers who went to war without being called. They were my parents.

Dad signed up for the Army in July 1941. He was in Panama on Dec. 7, 1941, when news of the Pearl Harbor attack arrived. He and another soldier were immediately sent on horseback to map the coast of Panama. The Panama Canal would have been a "plum prize."

Mom was 22-years-old when she shipped overseas, a registered nurse who didn't quite meet minimum Army standards requiring that women be five feet tall and weigh 100 pounds. But they weren't checking nurses too closely in those days. Dad always told us, "Yes, kids, it's true. "Your mother did wear Army boots. They were size four and a half."

Mom and Dad met on the USS General H.W. Butner, a troop transport on its way to India. Dad was assigned to the 5307th Provisional, and Mom was a member of the 44th Field Hospital. Their unknown destination was Bombay. Dad spotted Mom instantly and proposed to her on the second day he knew her. Dad always claimed Mom said "yes" on the third day, something she vehemently denied until just a few months before she died, then adding, "Well, one of us had to keep our heads!"

Their first date was in Cape Town, South Africa, when Dad escorted a group of nurses into town for the day and bought Mom a warm Coca-Cola. When the ship landed in Bombay and they parted company, Dad promised he'd find her again.

When they took off from Bombay, Dad's pack weighed 75 lbs., which was half of his body weight. Mom carried 40 lbs., which was 40 percent of her body weight. Dad was wounded three times. The third time Dad was shot, he was 15 yards from the Japanese machine guns. His upper right leg was

shattered. So Dad began his long trip home on a Piper J-3 Cub.

Following a plane crash that killed a number of the nurses from the 69th General Hospital, Mom was transferred from Bhamo to Ledo. There was never a shortage of work for the nurses, and Mom helped train nurses for Dr. Gordon Seagraves, "The Burma Surgeon." Mom's unit remained in Burma nursing the troops.

Eventually her unit was sent to Okinawa, preparing for the invasion of Japan. When the bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima ended the war, Mom was sent home, but not before Typhoon Louise, classified as a "Perfect Storm," slammed the island, damaging, sinking or grounding 265 ships and leaving 83 men dead or missing. Mom spent three days huddled under a butcher block with two other nurses after everything they had was blown away.

Mom said the admiral cried when he came ashore and found the nurses with nothing—no food, no dry clothing, not a comb nor a toothbrush—nothing but the wet, filthy clothes on their backs.

Shortly after that, the nurses were evacuated. Mom, a non-swimmer, refused to ride up in a basket like those who were too afraid to climb the ship's scramble netting. Mom proudly climbed the 40-foot scramble net up the side of the ship, satisfied with the knowledge that she had done her part in the second "War to End All Wars." She had helped to make the world safe for democracy. She and Dad had both done their parts to assure a peaceful world for their children.

Twenty years later, almost to the day, my older brother, Don, set foot on Okinawa, a young Marine on his way to Vietnam.