

## Saluting Our Brave - A Veteran's Tale



### Aunt Ruth

*as told by Emily Venemon, Research Assistant*

Like so many of her generation, my great aunt Ruth Venemon Lewis volunteered to serve in World War II. Ruth was one of the thousands of women who served in the Army Nurse Corps during the war. At the age of 23, she made the decision to leave her position as a hospital pediatrics department nursing supervisor in Yakima and enter Army Nurse Corps basic training. This decision would soon take her farther from home than she had ever been before: Nome, Alaska.

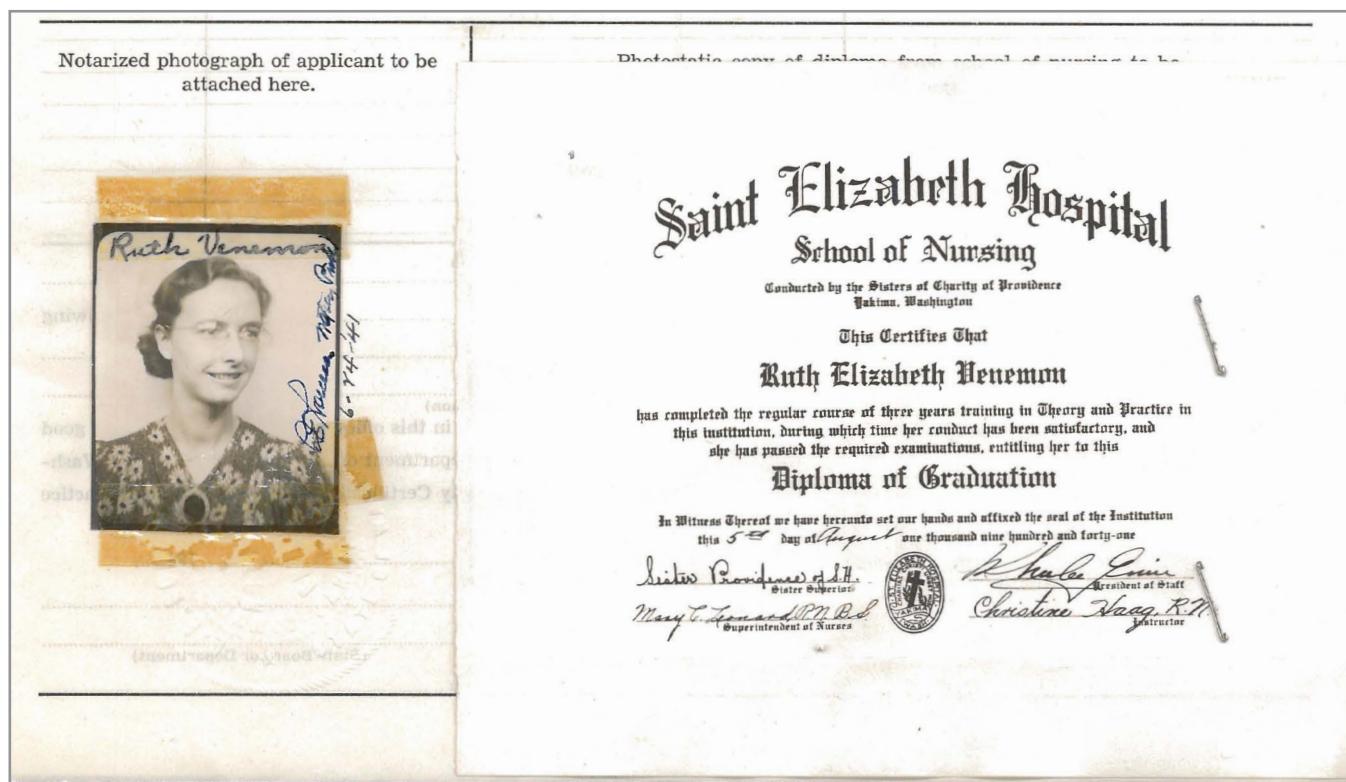
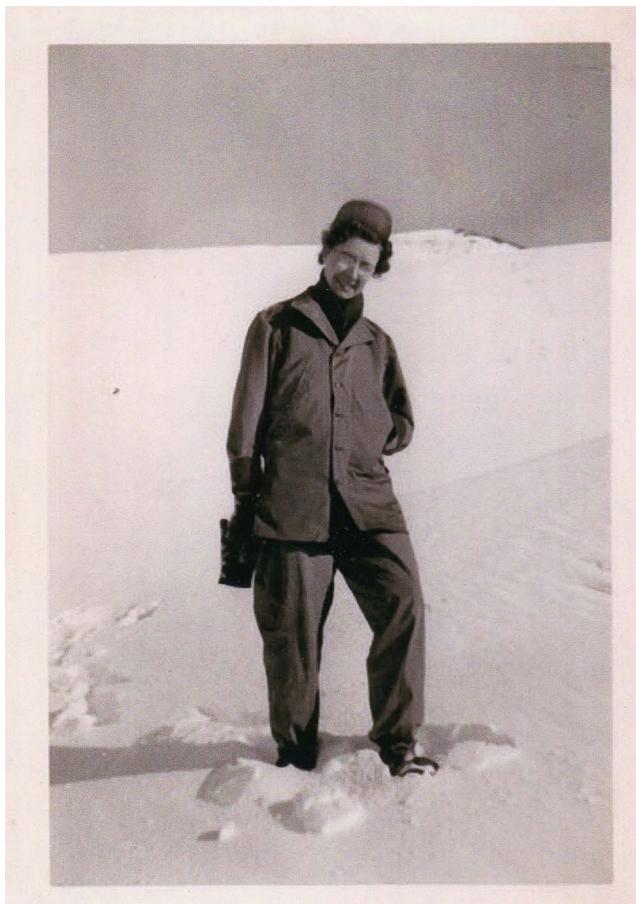
Ruth arrived at Marks Air Force Base in Nome in 1943. She had the considerable challenge of shifting her professional practices from treating children in a civilian setting, to treating servicemen during conflict. She never spoke at length about her experiences there, so it is difficult to know how she adjusted to these changes or what her daily work consisted of. Being away from the front, she might not have experienced the traumas of direct contact with war. However, living in subarctic Alaska brought its own trials. The winter nights in Nome would last as long as 21 hours. No one

was permitted to go outside during that time. She once recounted to her daughter a story of a minister who lost his way in the darkness one night. When daylight finally came, they found him frozen to death 50 feet from the barracks. Despite the hardships, Ruth found her work very rewarding. She was able to



forge relationships with members of the local population, some of which lasted for many decades afterwards.

Ruth served in Alaska from 1943 to 1945. This time was a brave sacrifice for both her and her family. She was the youngest of three children, and the only daughter. During the time she was in Alaska, both of her brothers were serving in the military as well. My great grandparents displayed three stars in the window of their home in Tieton. However, this risk also brought remarkable opportunity. Before World War II, Army nurses only held quasi-military status. Changes in legislation during the war allowed Ruth to enter the Army Nurse Corps as 2nd Lieutenant and be promoted to Captain upon exit. She also was granted the ability to travel to places and have experiences that were largely unattainable to many American women before the war. Following 1945, Ruth returned to Washington to continue her nursing career. She married in 1950 and raised two children. She passed away peacefully in 2014 at the age of 94.



Aunt Ruth's licensing application, from Department of Licensing, Registered Nurses Application and Licensing Files.