

Out of the Archives

a newsletter from the Washington State Archives

August 2016



SOS

Office of the Secretary of State

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.



Notarized photograph of applicant to be attached here.

Photostatic copy of diploma from school of nursing to be attached here.

Ruth Venemom

Ruth Venemom, RN, 6-14-41

Saint Elizabeth Hospital
School of Nursing
Conducted by the Sisters of Charity of Providence
Yakima, Washington

This Certifies That

Ruth Elizabeth Venemom

has completed the regular course of three years training in Theory and Practice in this institution, during which time her conduct has been satisfactory, and she has passed the required examinations, entitling her to this

Diploma of Graduation

In Witness Whereof we have hereunto set our hands and affixed the seal of the Institution this *5th* day of *August* one thousand nine hundred and forty-one

Lillian Bonifant, R.N. State Supervisor
Mary C. Leonard, R.N. Superintendent of Nurses

Charles J. Ginn President of Staff
Christine Haag, R.N. Instructor

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