

Lead in for article

Jacksonville is a military town. No doubt about it. The city's recent Military Appreciation Luncheon affirmed the high esteem in which we hold our service men and women, at present and historically. The Professional Women's Council was honored to host a special guest for the recent celebration, former Army nurse, Jean Warren. Jean served in the Pacific theater in 1945 and 1946. We recently asked Jean to share some of her memories with us.

MEMORIES OF THE MILITARY**An Interview with Jean Warren, U.S. Army Nurse*****Elaine K. Anwander******Qualitative Research Services***

When the Second World War was declared on December 7, 1941, Jean Warren had been in nurses training only a few months. "But," said Jean, "once the war was declared, all I wanted to do was go into the service. My dad, who had served in World War I, was very proud of his only 'chickie'."

Nursing was a natural calling for Jean. She says she had no role model, and really no contact with anyone who was in nursing, she just knew she wanted to be a nurse when she grew up. As a child, she was always bandaging animals. And she loved the Girl Scouts because they learned how to tie knots and apply bandages. In high school, she enjoyed physics, chemistry and biology. Jean studied nursing in New Jersey where she had been raised by her father and grandmother. Right after graduation, she took a course at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, which gave her a stronger background in surgical nursing. From Baltimore, Jean went directly into the armed forces, stationed first in Cape Henlopen, MD and then in Waco, TX. The year was 1944. It was in Waco that the Army started forming the 232nd General Hospital, which was a large amputee center. Here she saw amputations of all kinds, and many, many sad cases. From Waco, Jean was shipped to Guam and then to Saipan where her hospital was set up.

"There was no such thing as a 'typical' day," says Jean. "We always had a ward full of wounded. We were there from 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, and sometimes didn't leave until 7:00 or 8:00 at night. The day was endless." At the hospital, four or five nurses covered a double ward that accommodated 80 patients. Nurses had to work quickly, especially when following the ward doctor who ripped off bandages while flashing orders as he moved from one wounded soldier to the next. It was the nurses who were there to treat the wounds, reassure the men, and reapply the bandages.

The hospital was swamped with patients in early 1945 from the Iwo Jima campaign. The Second Marine division was in Saipan waiting to go Okinawa for the next campaign. While waiting, the Marines sent medical staff to the hospital to help with the wounded. One was a 19-year old Navy medic named Richard who was on standby with the Marines. When Richard and Jean met, "it was love at first sight," she says, "truly a wartime romance." Both were from New Jersey, and Richard's mother had graduated from the same hospital as Jean. They soon became engaged. But in May, Jean had to ship out to Iwo Jima. While Jean spent the next six months in Iwo Jima, Richard went on to Okinawa. He had already served on the beaches of Normandy during the D-Day invasion. As a medic, he was one of the young men whose charge was to pick up the dead and the remains. "It was a life-changing experience for Dick, one he would never tell

his parents about.”

One of Jean’s most poignant memories of the war was of a quiet young man who was terribly injured on Iwo Jima. He had been sitting on the beach when a rocket blast hit him. Jean paused briefly, as she remembered that he was alive and very coherent, but there was no hope for him. “He knew it as well as the doctors and nurses did. The doctors put him in a cast and, through special orders, flew him home immediately. “ There were many other stories, Jean recalls, but this was the most dramatic and one of the saddest.

Jean and Dick were apart for one year after their engagement. They married as soon as they returned to the States. Their union brought two children and 55 happy years of marriage. “We had a wonderful, good life together,” Jean told us. “We enjoyed each other and when life’s problems would come along, we worked them out together.” After Richard’s passing in 2002, Jean moved to Jacksonville and closer to her daughter, Dorothy. One grandchild and, very recently, a new great-grandson, named Richard IV, live in Nevada.

For Jacksonville’s Military Appreciation Luncheon in June, the Professional Women’s Council of the Chamber of Commerce contacted the Women in Military Service Association (WIMSA) in Washington, D.C. to request the name of a local World War II veteran. Jean says she was moved and surprised from the minute she got the call from Washington. Then, at the Military Appreciation Luncheon, Jean was surprised at the huge turnout, and very touched when “so many young women kept coming up to me and saying, ‘Thank you for everything you did.’ The whole thing was quite an emotional experience.”

Memories of war carry poignant feelings, regardless of the years that have passed. As the U.S. World War II Memorial was dedicated in Washington, D.C., Jean was drawn back in time. “I watched it on television as long as I could,” she said, “but it got to me emotionally. I had to stop watching.” She recalls seeing her father in their kitchen at home. “I can still remember that on Armistice Day, dad would be sitting there listening to the radio, and he would break down. It was the only time I ever saw my dad cry.”

Asked for a key piece of wisdom she could pass along to young men and women who might be considering military careers, Jean offered the following advice: “Before you make any rash decisions, really think about it, pray about it. Have a real deep feeling that you want to help your fellow man enough that no matter what happens, you can be there. No matter what part of a military career you select, you have to be there for your fellow man. It all hinges on being your brother’s keeper.”

Once again, thank you, Jean for your personal service to the United States of America, and for the safety and freedom we have today.