



George & Frances Wilkerson

1943



GUAM
1945



Guam
1945





Fran (Perreault) Wilkerson

4th Class

Ela Martinson Mildred Chickler Jobell Daugherty Mattie Brown Patsy Champion Daisy Spaulding
Sourness Wallaughlas **co data** Janet Self Betty Spademan Alice Owen Edith Bogie O'Dunbrock

NAVAL AIR STATION
Honolulu, T. H.

OFFICIAL U. S. NAVY PHOTOGRAPH

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Lowell Flight Nurse Serving In Honolulu

By HELEN HILLS HAYNES.

One of Lowell's most beloved nurses, Frances Perreault, is spending her entire time in the air throughout the Pacific theatre of war as a flight nurse with the U. S. Navy. Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Perreault of 44 Royal street, Frances trained at the Tewksbury State hospital, with graduate work later at the Massachusetts General hospital in Boston, where she specialized in eye, ear and throat. Joining the



LT. FRANCES M. PERREAULT

Navy Nursing Corps, she spent some time at the Chelsea Naval hospital and also at Philadelphia.

Following her navy training Frances took a course at the Navy Flight school at Alameda, Calif., where she received her wings on June first.

For a while she served as flight nurse in this country, caring for the casualties brought back on the air transports from the Pacific area—and flew often to Mexico, Fort Worth and Memphis, carrying wounded en route home.

Frances has been at Pearl Harbor, Kawcoke, Pali Pass and now makes her headquarters at the Station hospital in Honolulu. With her flew the entire class with which she graduated from the flight school at Alameda—about 20 in number. The trip to Honolulu was made in an "Admiral's Luxury Liner," which Frances describes as being far more wonderful than a Pullman.

Flying constantly with an evacuation squadron, Frances goes every few days to the Philippines, to Kwayalien, Samar and

Guam has changed more in the past year than any one could dream possible. Once a remote and neglected island it is now the key island of the Mariannas. But 32 miles long and 4 to 10 miles wide, it has been transformed, the navy announces, into the most powerful stronghold of the Pacific—greater even than Singapore. Since the American Marines and soldiers surged over the beaches of Guam on July 21, 1944, the navy reports, completion of eight air fields, including war strips from which B-29 bombers aim their missiles at Tokyo. Six million cubic yards of coral have been removed which has provided the largest forward military port in the world.

One hundred and fifty miles of highways—(one a four-lane road running the length of the island along the western coast) have been constructed, whereon many thousands each of jeeps, trailers, and trucks consume daily 150,000 gallons of gasoline.

So completely have the Seabees removed all the old landmarks on Guam, that even old residents who have spent their entire lives upon the once jungled island become lost a short distance from their homes.

On that important island have been erected headquarters for Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz and Vice Admiral John H. Hoover as well as for Lt. Gen. Barney Giles, commander of the new B-29 Strategic Air Forces, and Maj. Gen. Henry L. Larson, commander of the island.

Eight military hospitals—four each of the army and the navy—have been built there, with 11,819 beds and supervising them 600 medical and dental officials, 500 nurses and 5000 corpsmen. Eventually, the hospital will expand to include 13,000 beds.

Everything connected with the navy in evacuating casualties is carried out with 100 per cent efficiency. This type of work has been conducted by the navy for over three years and a most complete training is given each nurse before she is appointed to a naval air evacuation plane.

When at Honolulu the nurses room in huts, and go swimming nearby on the lovely beach at Oahu, where the huge waves roll in on the white sand beach almost up to the tall palm trees.

Frances writes of attending a recent dance at the Officers Club at Barbare's Point, Honolulu, where the Hawaiian musicians played for dancing at an outdoor pavillion with the tropical Hawaiian skies for a roof. Instead of a corsage Frances was given a string of 50 beautiful great gardenias to wear around her neck.

Frances' brother, Vernon Perreault, after serving with the U. S. army for 38 months in Australia, New Guinea and the Netherlands East Indies, is now stationed in the Philippines and before long the two hope to get together.

Frances, who possesses an unusually sweet and winsome personality, is loved by all who work with her. This new photograph, received this week, shows a more mature Frances than the sunny young nurse who left the Lowell General staff in 1943 to enter Chelsea Naval hospital. There is a development of character in the face—as one who has met life's most tragic problems and served unselfishly in every kind of emergency.

When a flight nurse is not present, the flight nurse must herself perform emergency operations, also know what type of medicine to give in various altitudes, administer blood plasma en route, etc. Many lives depend entirely on the courageous flight nurse in each plane and many a navy man owes his recovery to her bravery.

Wherever Frances goes, she leaves a trail of loving friends behind her, whether at the naval hospitals, or patients, nurses and Grey Ladies with whom she has worked here in Lowell. Perhaps the nicest tribute to her comes from her mother, when she tells how proud she is that Frances chose this career.

10:08 AM 5/31/98

Mary Lu Ward query

WOMEN WHO WON THE WAR

I avoid public speaking, especially about such grandiose claims. But the subject caused me to recollect on a distant time. Why did I join the Navy against the advice of family & friends? It was simply an emotional patriotic response to a dreadful war threatening my country.

My brother was in the Army in Australia training to defend Australia from the oncoming Japanese. My younger brother would later join the Navy as soon as he graduated from high school.

I had a job I loved: Registered Nurse at Massachusetts Eye & Ear Hospital. It only paid \$70 month plus board & room in the nurses quarters. But it was the most money I had ever had, and the work was easier and more satisfying than the 12 hour days, 6 days a week in training at Massachusetts state hospital in Tewksbury .

But the war news was grim and Navy recruiting was persuasive. Meaningful professional health care for military people and their families, plus more money. In February 1943 I was commissioned an Ensign and assigned to the Chelsea Naval Hospital just outside Boston.

Within a year I was sent to the Philadelphia Navy Yard Hospital. It was my first trip out of commuting range of my home in Lowell Mass. I worked in the burn ward. Our boys suffered horrible burns in seagoing accidents and battles. The most memorable duty was responding to a terrible explosion and fire on a battle ship docked in Philadelphia harbor. We were on emergency room status for several days caring for hundreds of casualties.

After a few months I was offered a chance to volunteer for a new nursing opportunity. The Navy was starting a school for flight nurses to go closer to the combat areas and evacuate critical patients to full service medical and surgical facilities. It sounded exciting, needed, and ego bolstering because it was an elite group and hard to be chosen. And we received flight observer's bonus pay. I believe there was never more than 126 Navy flight nurses during WWII. I am sure the Army had many more.

Navy nurses took their flight training at the Alameda Naval Air Station in California. The emphasis was on airborne nursing in cramped space. But we had drills in unlikely things like *swimming in burning oil, *administering tracheotomies with available tools, like a penknife and a fountain pen cylinder, *ditching at sea using a survival raft, *digging foxholes. Sort of mental toughening for any contingency. Fortunately I never had to ditch in the ocean, during air raid drills I used sand-bagged foxholes that were already dug.

My only airborne accident that I recall occurred after I had prepared food trays for wounded sailors and marines, from vacuum-sealed containers. The

plane, an R4D [that's navy nomenclature for a Douglas DC4] hit some rough air and the portapotty went airborne & crash-landed among the food trays. All hands skipped meals the rest of the flight.

Our flights were long. I flew patients from Guam to Oahu, with fuel stops at Johnson, Eniwetok, and Marshall islands. From the Philippines to Guam, from Okinawa to Guam. Eventually our base was at the Agana Naval air station on Guam. Because our flights were long,- up to 17 hours,- we did not do ward duty. Between flights we were free to rest which consisted of sleeping odd shifts and relaxing at the beach. We slept and ate in sheet metal Quonset huts, collected rainwater in barrel to wash our hair and rinse off the salt water. With perhaps 100,000 military men spread across an island only 21 miles long and 7 miles wide nurses were treated as royalty.

Although the island of Guam was declared secured in August 1944 there were still small units of Japanese marauding when we moved our base camp to Guam in June 1945. The marines were still patrolling. Any time we dated we were required to have two armed males as protection from possible Japanese stragglers.

It may seem bizarre now, but it was comforting then.

Incidentally that is how I met my future husband. About 20 flight nurses were invited to the 2nd Battalion, 12th Marines, 3rd Marine Division officers club for dinner and dancing. Wilk's date was called out on a flight so he rode shotgun, "emptyhanded" i.e.,

the 2d-armed male. He was a better dancer than my date and rather assertive about acing out his double date pal. We dated next day - Sunday at Tumon bay. And soon began going steady.

I had been to other officers club's near our Quonset huts on the west coast of Guam. They were quite civilized as befits rear echelon types. But we had never been to a Grunt-combat outfits club. It was deep in the jungle closer to the east side near Talafofa bay. It had native atmosphere: built by native chamarros with coconut log frame, palm frond roof, sand floor. The ladies head was a special tent with a barrel of sand and an old chic sale [outdoor toilet] seating arrangement.

Whiskey sours were made with lemon powder abstract from K rations; rum was used in place of bourbon because that was what was obtainable. I don't remember the food, but of course it was not as good as we were used to.

Wilk had been wounded on Iwo Jima in March 1945 but was returned to ~~full~~ duty by the time that I met him in July 1945.

The 3d MarDiv was training to invade the Japanese home islands. So I never had any regrets about reducing total casualties and ending the war with the use of nuclear bombs.

A few of the soldiers who were with me during the war were not allowed to see their families until after the war. I remember seeing many of them in the hospital in Japan. I have used some of the things that I saw in the hospital to write this book. I hope you will enjoy it.

After the war ended I was transferred back to ward duty at Bethesda Naval Hospital just outside Washington D.C. Back to regular nursing, which I still loved - but marriage and conventional mother and homemaker was my next career. We were married in 1946- over 52 years- and have 3 boys and a girl and 8 grandchildren.

I have maintained contact with Nurse comrades for over 55 years and feel a depth of friendship that is beyond explanation. A few made a career of regular Navy but most of us returned to civilian life with steadfast love of our country and a full appreciation for women's contribution to the war effort whether in or out of uniform.

I developed further appreciation for wartime women homemakers when George was called back by to fight in 1950 with The 1st Marine Division in Korea, from the Inchon-Seoul landing to the Chosin Reservoir . I nursed a 3-month-old son while driving from Camp Pendleton in California to Lowell Mass.

In addition I witnessed the stress and turmoil of military families when the husband was rushed to combat. The women were truly admirable contributors to the country's effort.