

Marion Leigon

Marion Leigon spent much of her early life in Florida though as young girl she did live in Asheville for a time, when her dad worked for the newspaper. She was living in Miami, Florida working for the People's Water and Gas Company when the news of the Pearl Harbor attack came over the radio. She remembered that "it was horrendous." She had a cousin, a recent Naval Academy graduate, who was killed aboard the battleship *Arizona* during the attack. Later the navy named a destroyer escort, the *Robert S. Booth*, after him.

Leigon soon found herself volunteering to work at the local USO dances. A nearby airfield at Coral Gables, Florida was used as a training base for British pilots of the Royal Air Force and the USO provided activities every day for the cadets there. It was at one of the USO functions that Leigon met Vivian "George" Lower, he was training to be a navigator in the RAF. They dated and were soon engaged. Unfortunately RAF restrictions would not allow the cadets to marry American women so that had to remain engaged till the war was over.

Lower completed his training and returned to England while Leigon moved to Jacksonville, Florida where she initially worked in Ship's Services at the Naval Air Station. Ship's Services was a type of general store for naval personnel, it allowed them to get a lot of items that were not available to civilians during the war.

Leigon and Lower exchanged letters for two years while he was gone. He sent many photos of places in England where he was stationed. He described the locations and what he was doing at the time. It was while she was in Jacksonville that Leigon had a premonition that Lower would be killed. When he left he had given her his RAF wing insignia, she wore them constantly but one day realized she had lost them. She was frantic at not being able to find them she knew that when she lost them Lower would not be coming back. There came a long absence of any letters from Lower and not long afterwards she received a letter from Lower's father stating that he had been killed.

Losing her fiancée was very hard on Leigon but she felt that having the premonition had helped her to handle it. In a way she had already accepted that he was not going to live when she finally heard of his death. She tried to move on and casually dated some of the Naval Aviation cadets that were training at Jacksonville. However they were a hard drinking lot and Leigon, not being a drinker, tended to shy away from them. In fact they drank so much that she "wondered how they ever got in their planes and flew".

One day while working at Ship's Services she met two sailors and formed a quick friendship with them. They had been friends for a while when one of the men, James, a Pharmacist in the Hospital Corps, asked if she would like to go on a date. She agreed, much to the consternation of the second sailor who felt he had met Leigon first and that she should go out with him!

The two struck up a relationship very quickly and engaged within a year. They got married on December 5, 1943, her mother's birthday. Shortly after they were married he was transferred to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina to train with the U.S. Marines. In March of 1944 her husband was promoted to Chief Petty Officer but was found out that he was to be shipped overseas to the

Pacific. Leigon had a car that she and her husband had borrowed from a friend and she saved enough rationed gas to drive from Jacksonville to Camp Lejeune to see him before he left.

While he was gone Leigon wrote to him every day, sending photos, packages and food. She was quite surprised to learn that all of them had made it to him! James returned in the spring of 1945, shortly before President Roosevelt died and before the war was over. While on his way back he had a short stay in Samoa where he was promoted to Warrant Officer, he also received a promotion to Lieutenant but had left for home by the time the orders arrived in Samoa. Because he missed the orders were cancelled and he remained a Warrant Officer.

During the year that James was gone, Leigon had gone to work for the American Red Cross as the secretary for the director of the local office. She lived near the coast at Neptune Beach and remembered having to drive with her lights out at night. There was a fear that lights on the shore could be used to guide German U-boats that were landing spies on the Florida coast.

Despite having to revert back to his previous rank of Chief Petty Officer after the war, James, who had actually joined the navy before Pearl Harbor, decided to stay in the service. He had many years of experience, including a tour with the US Marines in Shanghai, China before the war, and wanted to stay in and ultimately retire from the navy.

So right after the end of the war the couple transferred to Palm Beach and then Key West. James ran the base commissary at both locations. Leigon was quite grateful that the Red Cross, in an unusual move, agreed to transfer her to their local offices in each city.

After Florida was a tour in Texas which then led to a tour aboard the destroyer escort *Jack Wilke*. While James was at sea Leigon moved to Washington, DC and continued working for the Red Cross. Later she moved to Norfolk to be nearer to James, whose ship's base was there. It was there that Leigon and James had both of their daughters.

James ultimately stayed in the navy for over 26 years and ultimately he and Leigon settled in Asheville.

Leigon has very powerful memories of her experiences in World War Two, it was a time where she experienced both the good and bad that life has to offer. Despite some very traumatic personal experiences she never lost her faith in the God and always knew that James would return from the war. Also despite the fact the U.S. had "been devastated" by the Pearl Harbor attack she always felt like the nation had complete confidence in President Roosevelt and that ultimately the US would prevail.