

## **Bertha Moore**

In December 1941, Bertha Moore has just finished Nursing School at Johns Hopkins and had gone to Fort Pierce, Florida to be with her family. Until recently her parents and two brothers had been missionaries in Japan. The rising tensions had forced them to close down the missionary and return home to Florida. Once there the family was struck again when Moore's father suffered a severe heart attack. She had actually returned to Florida to help care for her father.

They were at home when a friend called to tell them to turn on the radio. It was then that they heard the news of the Pearl Harbor attack. The Japanese attack was a difficult time for the Moore family, they had been missionaries in Japan and had many friends there and in the Japanese community in Hawaii. They knew "the Japanese had done a treacherous thing in the name of the emperor" but found it hard to reconcile this with the friendship they shared with the Japanese. The situation was further complicated because Moore's brother, Lardner, had been in Japan closing down the missionary property when the Japanese attacked. He was taken prisoner but was fortunately exchanged with other civilians early in the war and returned home. He was well treated by the Japanese while there. He had many friends in the Japanese Christian community who brought him food and saw to his well-being.

In early 1942 Moore decided she would join the Army Nursing Corps. As she put it, "we were going to war so...it seemed the thing to do." Her parents understood and supported her desire to serve. She was inducted into the military in February 1942 at Camp Blandin, Florida. Initially she was inducted as an Army private making \$21 a day. Later the military decided to commission all its women members, including the nurses and Moore received an officers rank and pay raise. After joining the army she stayed in Florida taking private duty assignments to allow her to continue caring for her father.

In March 1943 she was sent to New York City and there boarded a troopship for assignment overseas. She soon found herself at sea in a ship with nurses for three other army hospitals. They were in a convoy headed to North Africa. The trip had a bit of excitement as two troopships nearly collided. Later, one of the escorting destroyers spotted a u-boat and called for planes from an escorting aircraft carrier to drop depth charges on it. Moore never found out what happened to the u-boat but it definitely caused a bit of excitement for the nurses.

They arrived in Algiers, Algeria about the time of the German surrender in Tunisia, just to the east of Algeria. The nurses debarked and were set up in a camp on a place they called Goat Hill, to await assignment. Soon Moore found herself transferred to a hospital in Jean-Bart, Algeria. At this time there were many soldiers moving back to the front as the fighting in North Africa was winding down and the pace at the hospital was slower than it would be later. In fact life in Jean-Bart wasn't all that bad according to Moore. She lived in a tent with four other nurses and ate at the officer's mess, which had pretty good food. With the Tunisian campaign winding down they found they only had to work regular eight hour shifts. They were also relatively secure behind the lines. As Moore puts it, "there were plenty of men between us and the Germans." The hospital could have been a target for German bombers but was never attacked. However, one evening a single German plane did get close. It circled high overhead and the staff watched the

searchlights of the anti-aircraft batteries try to locate the plane. The German avoided them all and eventually flew off without doing any damage. The staff were still keenly aware that they could be attacked. The patients were even more aware as Moore found out. One night she and a medical orderly were making the rounds of their ward when she heard the very faint sounds of an aircraft engine. Before she could say a word the patients had all gotten underneath their cots. At first she didn't know what to think until the orderly explained that it was a German plane and they were taking the only cover they could. He also explained that the men were veterans from the front and could tell a German engine from an American. It didn't take a great deal of noise from a German engine to make them react!

Other than the occasional aerial snooper things were pretty quiet in Jean-Bart. The hospital was on the coast but did receive a dry hot wind that blew sand in from the inland desert. Fortunately they could go swimming and Moore found the spring in Algeria to be quite nice. Besides swimming the nurses also socialized with the officers, who threw 2-3 parties a week. Moore enjoyed these parties but was quite happy that there was an unwritten midnight curfew for the nurses. This ensured they could leave the parties when they needed.

This idyllic life would not last for the entire war. Moore was transferred to the 59<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital in Sicily. This hospital was set up on the grounds of a medical school and handled casualties from the fighting in Italy. The hospital also handled malaria cases and in fact half of their patients were malaria cases. The work was a bit more intense since the campaign in Italy was going strong and Moore found herself working twelve hour shifts. There were still lighter moments such as when Moore remembered that one night they felt "zany" enough to dance without music when they couldn't find a record player.

The hospital was designated to receive lightly wounded casualties that were treatable by the staff. Moore found that many soldiers would AWOL (Absent With Out Leave) in order to rejoin their units at the front. As she put it, "it sounds like they were stark raving mad" for wanting to go back to the fighting. However the men felt a certain camaraderie with their fellow soldiers and didn't want to let them down. Moore was deeply impressed with this selflessness. As she remembers, the soldier's "bravery was incredible...they were always thinking about their buddy in the foxhole."

From Sicily the 59<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital moved to mainland Italy where they initially fell under the command of General Mark Clark's 5<sup>th</sup> Army. They continued to treat wounded from the fighting in Italy. In the last half of 1944 the hospital was tasked with helping to staff three hospital ships that were sailing to the south of France to pick up wounded from Operation Dragoon, the landing in southern France in August 1944. Later they were loaded onto landing ships and transferred to southern France. There they came under the command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army and supported that unit's drive through north to Germany. They were loaded onto trucks in France and commenced driving north to catch up to the fighting troops. At one point on the journey the trucks were ordered to side of the road and the hospital staff was ordered into a field by the side of the road. The Allies were experiencing a shortage of gasoline and General Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army needed the gas in the trucks transporting the hospital. The staff had to wait a good bit of the day at the side of the road waiting for additional transport to be arranged. They did

eventually reach the Alsace-Lorraine region where they set up shop and began receiving casualties as the Allied forces drove into Germany itself.

Moore and the 59<sup>th</sup> would spend the winter of 1944-45 in Alsace-Lorraine where conditions were not quite as pleasant as they had been in Jean-Bart in the spring of 1943. The hospital was set up in a large field and the coming and going of large trucks had reduced the roads in the field to muddy ruts. Many of the shorter nurses found they could not negotiate these muddy lanes without losing their shoes. Fortunately there was no lack of soldiers willing to carry them across! As Moore remembers “they didn’t mind that!”

Things were all dreary though. A friend of Moore’s had met a soldier in a tank destroyer battalion, they “had quite a romance” and ended up getting married in France. Shortly after that her friend found out she was pregnant and had to be shipped home.

Later, as the Allied drive continued, the 59<sup>th</sup> followed them into Germany, setting up hospital in another field. Soon the war ended and some staff found they were assigned to go back to the southern France for transport to the Pacific fighting. Some staff were distraught at having to leave their comrades and friends. One doctor, in fact, broke down in tears at the thought that his nurse girlfriend, who was going to the Pacific, would be unfaithful.

Most of the 59<sup>th</sup> was scheduled to return home in two groups. Moore’s group sailed from Le Havre, France for the United States. Moore immediately traveled to Washington, DC to see her mother and older sisters. During the war Moore’s father had passed away and Moore wanted see her family, who she hadn’t seen since leaving in March 1943 for North Africa. The next thing she did was to go shopping. She “had to get clothes” since all she had was her Army uniforms.

Once she had been reunited with her family and properly fitted out in civilian clothes, Moore began considering her future. She had decided to go to medical school while in the Army and began filling out the paper work to take advantage of the G.I. Bill. This would allow her to attend medical school with the Army footing the bill. She completed the paperwork and, after completing a few undergraduate courses at the University of Virginia, was accepted to Cornell Medical School. There she found that the class was divided into two halves. First were the veterans who were going to school on the G.I. Bill. The second group were youngsters who had been accelerated through undergraduate studies and into medical school in case they were needed for the war. Both groups got along well though Moore did notice a distinct difference in the maturity level of the two groups; the veterans had seen a lot of action in the war. They tended to be much more mature than their younger counterparts.

Moore had two very distinct memories from her service in World War Two. The first was a sharp sense of alienation. She recalls that even in the better times, such as at Jean-Bart, she had a feeling of not belonging. She was there to do a job and get home and never felt totally at peace wherever she went. This feeling didn’t affect her job and she wasn’t necessarily unhappy, she just felt disconnected. To her the “war situation was temporary” and “didn’t relate to life at home”. She wanted to do her duty but she was also anxious to return home when that duty was completed.

Her second memory was the absolute bravery of the American fighting man. As she had seen in Sicily, U.S. soldiers were willing to break Army regulations to return to the fighting in order to be with their comrades. She felt like the U.S. military really handled the training of its soldiers very well. It ingrained a sense of camaraderie in its members that motivated them to illogical, brave acts in order to help their fellow soldiers. She had and still has nothing but “admiration for our fighting men.”