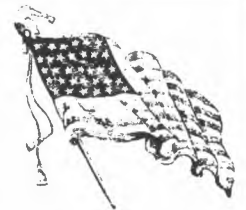


FROM THE TRENCHES



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Executive Director & Editor: Warren E. Motts

Director's Message

How time does fly. There is so much going on every day at the Museum it is hard to keep up with it. With the holidays upon us, our parades have begun. All our events are scheduled a year in advance because of the large number of requests we receive. Some of our equipment is WWII vintage and **Bob Burns and Isaac England** have a monumental job just keeping the vehicles up and running. In some cases, we must split our equipment up so we can cover all the bases. I don't want to do this as we need our mechanics on hand to take care of any problems that may arise.

I am so sorry to report that **Don Wagner**, who donated his ordnance collection to the Museum, has passed away. Don was a preserver of history and now we will carry the torch and tell his story to visitors that tour the Museum.

Navy Lt. **Dr. Dana Robinson Street ret.**, the chairperson and **Renee Frey** the vice chairperson of the **Ohio women veterans advisory committee**, recently had a tour of the Museum. Then after the tour they held their meeting in which they received training in the use of Narcan. A great group of Veteran women. Thank you all that attended.

Warren E. Motts
Founding/Director



Photo by
Andrew Jenkins

FOCUS FEATURE CAPT SALLIE DURRETT FARMER, RN, ANC U.S. ARMY NURSE FORMER AMERICAN PRISONER OF WAR OF THE JAPANESE, WWII



By Capt. Mary Farmer Rogers U.S. Army

Sallie Phillips Durrett was born on October 3, 1914 in Louisville, Kentucky. After high school graduation, she entered Saint Mary's and Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing. She graduated as a Registered Nurse (RN) in 1935. The United States was in the midst of depression and jobs were hard to find. Sallie stayed on at St. Mary's and Elizabeth's Hospital as a general duty nurse for the next two years. After that time, she wanted more for herself and for her career, so she entered the Army Nurse Corps. Her first assignment was Fort Riley, Kansas. At Fort Riley she advanced her career and eventually became an operating room (OR) specialist.

It was at Fort Riley that Sallie met another young officer, Jerry Burnett. They fell in love and became engaged. Jerry was transferred to the Philippine Islands in 1941. Sallie also asked for a transfer of duty station and early in 1941 she moved to Luzon, Philippine Islands where she was assigned to Fort Stotsenburg Station Hospital in charge of the operating room.

Life was good at this assignment. The nurses worked hard, but they also had time for golfing, horseback riding, swimming, and romantic evenings at the Officers' Club. And Sallie's fiancé Jerry was there.

Early on the morning of December 8, 1941, Sallie reported for duty in the operating room. It was there that she learned that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor the day before. Sallie's team spent that morning preparing extra sterile bandage packs "just in case" they might receive some wounded. Around noon Sallie heard the drone of planes

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overhead. She softly whispered a prayer that they were American planes, but it wasn't too long before there was nearby bombing. The Japanese were bombing Clark Airfield, which was only a few miles



from Fort Stotsenburg hospital. The OR team quickly prepared to receive wounded. Around 1 o'clock the wounded began to arrive at their hospital. Sallie learned that about one hundred had been injured and many more had been killed. The nurses worked non-stop over the next 12 hours. They had to rest

because the generator which supplied their electricity was only good for 12 hours. That night the nurses slept underneath the porch of the hospital building because they were afraid to return to their nurses' quarters.

The next three months were spent evading the Japanese. Sallie stayed at Fort Stotsenburg until Christmas Eve. On Christmas Eve the nurses entrained their patients and headed south to Sternberg General Hospital in the city of Manila. They weren't there very long when they were ordered once again to move the patients by ships across the Manila Bay to the peninsula of Bataan. On Bataan they set up a jungle hospital—cots and mosquito netting in the open air. Sallie was assigned to the operating room tent. It was a makeshift structure, but the doctors and nurses did the best they could to care for the wounded. By the end of March, 1942 there were over 7000 patients in this jungle hospital.

Because of their depleted position, General King decided to surrender Bataan to the Japanese. On the seventh day of April, 1942 Sallie was ordered to Corregidor, an island across the bay from Bataan. She boarded a bus enroute to Mariveles dock where a ship was waiting to take the nurses to Corregidor. On the way they were delayed by troop movements. When the nurses reached Mariveles dock the ship that was supposed to take them to Corregidor had already left. Sallie and the other nurses spent the night wondering what would happen to them when daylight came.

A rowboat and three private vessels were found to transport the nurses to Corregidor. Sallie was assigned to the Malinta Tunnel. One of the lateral tunnels had been made into a hospital. This is where Sallie would work taking care of the wounded over the next few months.

By the end of April, 1942, food, ammunition and medicine were depleted. General Wainwright made the decision to surrender Corregidor rather than sacrifice the 13,000 military personnel that were house there. On May 6, 1942 the Japanese came ashore dressed in asbestos suits and carrying flamethrowers ready to torch anyone who resisted. The military personnel had been advised to lay down their weapons and conduct an orderly surrender.

Sallie in POW Camp



The Japanese took the fighting troops from Corregidor at once but the patients and the medical personnel remained in the Malinta Tunnel until July 3, 1942. On that date, the nurses were loaded onto vessels and traveled across the Manila Bay to Manila City. This was the lowest point in the war for Sallie because the nurses were separated from the soldiers.

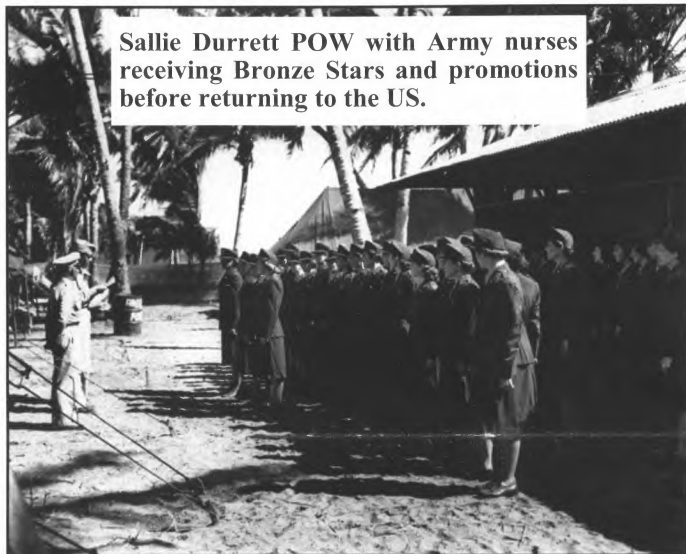
The nurses were incarcerated at Santo Tomas POW camp. This camp housed over 4000 allied civilians who had not left the Philippines in the summer of 1941 when they had been advised to leave. There were 77 nurses altogether (66 Army nurses and 11 Navy nurses). These nurses set up a hospital to care for the people in the camp. Sallie's "job" during her three years as a POW was working as a nurse in this hospital.



LIBERATED LOUISVILLE NURSE, 1st Lt. Sally Durrett, left, chats on Luzon with Royal Arch Gunnison, radio war correspondent, and 1st Lt. Clara Mae Bickford, Austin, Texas, while awaiting transportation to the United States. Lieutenant Durrett, a graduate of SS. Mary and Elizabeth Hospital, enlisted in the Nurses Corps in 1938 and was captured at Corregidor in May, 1942.

On February 3, 1945, approximately three years after her capture, Sallie heard a commotion at the main gate of the camp. She looked out of her dormitory window and saw a column of armored tanks with American insignia. The prisoners had no idea how this large mass of equipment had traveled the 50 km to reach them without being intercepted by the Japanese. The Americans quickly took control of the camp and heavy fighting broke out in the city. The American casualties were brought into the camp where a temporary military hospital was set up. Sallie worked in the hospital until another American Army Nurse came and relieved her.

Sallie was evacuated from Santo Tomas and reached her Louisville, Kentucky home in March



Sallie Durrett POW with Army nurses receiving Bronze Stars and promotions before returning to the US.

1945. On her arrival home she learned that her fiancé Jerry Burnette had survived the Bataan Death March and had been a POW in a camp about 60 miles from Manila. However, in December, 1944 Burnette was put on a Japanese ship to be taken to the Japanese mainland. Because the Japanese did not mark the ship with a Red Cross denoting POWs on board, the Americans bombed and sank the ship. He was a victim of “friendly fire.” Sallie recovered during six weeks of R&R and then returned to duty at Fort Hayes, Columbus, Ohio.

One day a young reporter came to interview Sallie for the local Catholic paper. He had been in Europe during World War II. His name was Joe Farmer. Joe conducted the interview and took some pictures of Sallie. The next day he called her and told her the pictures didn’t come out very well, would she please come to his office for a retake. Sallie went for a photo session at Joe’s office. After the pictures were taken, Sallie asked if Joe would call a cab for her. But he said “Oh no, I’ll take you home!”. They became friends and then fell in love. Joe and Sallie were married on October 26, 1946. Their marriage was blessed with five children in seven years—Hugh, Joe, Mary, Sallie, and Stephanie.

When all of their children had entered school, Sallie went back to work at Columbus Children’s Hospital as a burn specialist. She worked in this capacity for the next 15 years. After she retired from nursing, Sallie continued using her nursing skills by volunteering at Red Cross blood drives. She also traveled with her husband Deacon Joe Farmer making sick calls for the homebound in their church community. Sallie loved her family and spent much of her time with her children and 14 grandchildren. She was very proud that her three daughters and two of her grandchildren followed her into nursing careers.

Sallie died peacefully in her home on January 7, 2003. She is buried with her husband at Saint Mary Cemetery, Lancaster, Ohio.

Sallie received many honors due to her position during WWII:

- Bronze star medal
- Distinguished unit badge with two clusters
- American campaign medal
- WWII victory medal, Army commendation medal
- American defense medal with one star
- Presidential citation with two stars
- The Philippine defense medal and
- The Asiatic Pacific campaign medal with two stars.



Sallie Exhibit in Motts Military Museum

She was inducted into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame in 1994. One of her letters was selected for the Ohio Veterans Plaza in August 1998 and she received the Women in American History Award in 2024 by the Elizabeth Sherman Reese DAR chapter.

The Angels of Bataan and Corregidor were:

- The first American military women to wear fatigues on duty
- First American military nurses sent onto the battlefield for duty
- The first large group of American women in combat
- First group of American military women taken captive and imprisoned by an enemy.

Editor’s note: I and my family had the honor of spending many hours with Sallie. She was a kind and gentle person and I am so glad I can continue to tell her story for those who tour the Museum.