



HELEN HALSETH LELAND, AMM 3/c

My name is Helen Halseth Leland. My military nickname was “Corky.”

I was born in Kendrick, ID, December 2nd, 1922. I am one of eight children, five brothers (one set of twins) and two sisters. I grew up on a farm, so we had plenty of food, but times were very hard with such a large family. I went to a one-room school on Big Bear Ridge through the eighth grade. I then moved into town to attend high school and graduated in 1941.

After graduation I moved to Lewiston, ID and had several jobs. I was in Lewiston for about a year then moved to Spokane, WA, to work for Sears Roebuck & Co.

When Pearl Harbor was bombed, my two oldest brothers left for war. That’s when I decided I should go too. All five brothers and one sister served in the Army. I chose the Navy. Seven of us served in the military and we all returned home. My youngest sister stayed home to help on the farm and then later moved to Spokane.

I enlisted in Spokane, but was sworn in in Seattle, WA, on June 8th 1943. Then I returned to Kendrick, ID and waited to be called for duty.

When I received my call for duty, I was to board a train in Spokane and travel to New York. It was a somber day leaving my family, but it later turned out to be quite an adventure. I met a girl from Montana who, too, was sworn in in Seattle. Her name was Ruth Ator. We traveled to New York together.

We discussed what we should do when we got to New York. When we arrived at Grand Central Station there were so many military officials there to meet us, along with hundreds of other girls, that the decision of what to do was out of our hands. They took us to Hunter College in the Bronx. We were one of the first regiments there. When “taps” were played that first night, there were a lot

of tears because some were homesick already.

From Hunter I was sent to Memphis, TN. This is where I was informed I would be serving in the Aviation Department. Six months later I was sent to Norman, OK. It was called the AMM Department and ACU. It was our job to learn the names of all the airplanes and all about the engine and what each thing was for. Our instructor and some of the fellows would take the engine apart and we had to diagnose the trouble and reassemble. When I graduated from the school at Norman, OK, I was sent to Terminal Island at San Pedro, CA. I spent the rest of my Navy life at that base.

My sister was a lieutenant in the Army as an Army nurse. She was stationed at Birmingham General Hospital in California. We were close enough so we had a great time on our days off riding the trolley to Los Angeles and dancing the night away at the Palladium with many name bands. While stationed at the Birmingham Hospital, she met a fellow in the Air Force who was a sergeant. They later married and she had to leave the military.

While my sister and her new husband were stationed at the hospital they became friends with Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez. She also met Frank Sinatra and has a picture of them together. Lucille and Desi had us out to their beautiful home for dinner one evening. Desi entertained us by singing and playing the guitar and drums. Lucy was cutting up as usual. We had a fun evening!

I was discharged from the Navy in San Diego on November 28th, 1945, as an Aviation Machinists Mate Third Class.

My sweetheart was a hometown fellow and he left for the Army on November 15th, 1942. He spent his time in the South Pacific, Australia, and the Phillipines. His name was Boyd Leland and he was discharged November 15th, 1945. I never even sent him a "dear John" letter. After our discharges from the service we were married on December 26th, 1945.

We settled in Clarkston, WA. I was employed by the school district for seventeen years in the food service. He was an automobile mechanic. We have two daughters and four grandchildren. Boyd passed away on November 16th, 1995. We missed having our 50th wedding anniversary by a month and a half.

As I write this letter, I am still living in our home in Clarkston. I am proud to think I served in the Navy, met great people, saw a lot of my country, and had some exciting experiences.

A group of retired military women meet in Spokane, WA every month and have a great time together telling their “war stories.” The group consists of some local women and some that originally lived in the east where they met their future husbands while they were both in the military and moved out to the west coast.