

Bataan Nurse Survivor Trains Here For Return

Lt. Moultrie Was One Of Last To Leave Before Final Surrender

First Lt. Mary G. Moultrie of Woodburk, Ga., an Army nurse, is going overseas again — where she doesn't care, just as long as it is overseas.

But should the Army extend itself; break precedent by leaning over backwards to give her a choice, she'd like to be in on the show when the Yanks take over the Philippines from the Japs.

Her reason is simple: Lt. Moultrie is one of the small surviving band of American Army nurses who were evacuated from the Philippines only a few hours before the final surrender.

Now assigned to a general hospital in training here at Devens, Lt. Moultrie has been in this country for more than two years since the night on the 3rd of May, 1942, when she boarded a submarine with a small group of nurses from the bomb-battered docks of Corregidor.

UNDER BOMBING ATTACK

The Japs were mounting their final offensive against "The Rock" as the nurses left the tunnels of the Pacific Gibraltar for the two submarines awaiting them at the docks.

"The Japs were bombing the docks when we got there," she said, "but we were all too tired and exhausted to realize any danger. In fact, few of us realized anything that was happening."

Boarding the subs, they went below where they could still hear bombs exploding in the harbor and on the Rock. They were aboard only a few minutes when the submarine carefully began to make its way through the debris-littered harbor for the sea. Somehow, despite persistent attacks from Jap planes they made it.

"We were at sea about two days when we heard by wireless that Corregidor had fallen," she said. "Then I guess most of us realized what we had escaped. We all felt badly because of the surrender and we worried about the friends we had to leave there, but no one had anything to say. We were still too exhausted."

EXHAUSTED BY SIEGE

Exhaustion was understandable. For behind them lay five months of the battle for the Philippines — the heroic 90-day defense of Bataan; the undaunted stand at Corregidor.

For Lt. Moultrie, that battle began less than a month and a half after she arrived at the islands; five months after she signed up in the Army Nurse Corps.

Arriving in the Philippines on October 23, 1941, she was assigned to the hospital at Fort Stotsenburg, 60 miles north of Manila. She was there when the Japs struck on December 8th (the 7th here in the states).

"We could watch them bombing Lingayen Gulf and could hear the sounds of fighting there, but we couldn't see any more than that. We had no way of telling just what happened. But after the first day or two we started to receive casualties; not many at first but more as each day passed.

"We stuck it out at Stotsenburg until the 24th of December when we received word we were going to be evacuated to Manila. We still didn't know the Japs were as close as they were until they evacuated us from Manila. We had been

there only a few days, but had been under constant bombing."

EVACUATED FROM MANILA

Evacuating Manila, the nurses and other hospital personnel fell back to the jungles of Bataan and set up a temporary hospital.

"We didn't have much to work with, and the wards were just set up in a clearing. Some patients were on beds we managed to bring with us; others were on bamboo beds and still others were placed on the ground. Casualties kept coming in in larger numbers, mostly from malaria."

There were about 89 nurses in all caring for the wounded and sick on Bataan, Lt. Moultrie said, 70 of them Americans. They had no hours, working until they were through, or more frequently until they were near exhaustion and had to rest. The shortage of food was particularly extreme and nurses had to live on "mostly rice and horsemeat, when we could get it," she said.

They held out on Bataan until April 9th when they were told they would be evacuated just two hours before surrender. When the fall came, however, signals were reversed, for the nurses were not evacuated until two hours after the surrender.

FORCED TO LEAVE PATIENTS

"The hardest thing any of us had to do on the islands," Lt. Moultrie said, "was to leave our patients behind. Some of them were able to hobble about and planned to attempt a crossing to Corregidor, and others planned to take to the hills to fight the Japs from there, but there were some who couldn't leave bed. We know some got through to the Rock, but we'll never know what happened to the others."

The trip across the harbor from Bataan to Corregidor ordinarily took about 45 minutes. The day they left it took nearly four hours; the river boat being forced to circle in the harbor until the bombardment of the Rock let up before going into the docks.

"On the Rock living conditions were much better. We had a variety of canned goods and were not rationed too severely. Then, too, we did not have quite so much work. Mostly all we had to do was keep from underfoot.

"We spent most of our time in the tunnels, except an hour or so a day when the bombing would have quieted down enough to allow us a chance to go up top."

LEAVES IN SUBMARINE

Up on top, things weren't so pretty. A look around showed the carnage of the bombardment and the gulf was littered with shattered and overturned boats that had attempted to carry refugees and surviving fighters across from Bataan to Corregidor. You could also see the bodies of those who tried, in desperation, to swim across.

The decision to evacuate the nurses on the 3rd of May came when commanders of the Rock realized the fight was just about up. Actually, the Japs had launched their furious final offensive.

Lt. Moultrie was among the last nurses to leave Corregidor. Earlier two planes had carried 20 of them out, but it was learned later that only one managed to get through. Both groups leaving by submarine made Australia safely, however, and remained there for three weeks before being returned to the states.



LT. MOULTRIE