

OBITUARY

WWII Navy flight nurse put her fear aside to serve

By Virginia Culver
The Denver Post

It was a terrible job: poor working conditions, low pay, hard work and little sleep.

But Omi Jensen, who died on Aug. 25 at Exempla Lutheran Hospital, took to it instantly.

She was one of only 112 women chosen to be Navy flight nurses in World War II, flying in rickety planes to pick up the injured prisoners of war and the wounded from island battlefields.

"I didn't lose a patient," Jensen told a Rocky Mountain News columnist in 2008.

Jensen had been in good health until very recently, when she suffered a blood clot, said her daughter Julie Jensen of Arvada.

A service for Omi Jensen, who was 89, will be at 5 p.m. Sept. 19 at the Lutheran Hospital Chapel, 8300 W. 38th Ave.

The spunky Jensen, who stood about 5-foot-2, was stationed in Guam (living in a Quonset hut) and made regular flights to pick up the wounded. She traveled in the seaplane with a pilot, co-pilot, radio man and corpsman, said Julie Jensen.

Often the landing place was a dark, makeshift airfield. Sometimes the wounded had been taken to a cave or other semi-safe place until medical help arrived. She often went without sleep for 24 or 36 hours, said a friend, Maryann Meighan-Riebe of Centennial, a retired Navy nurse who served on the ground.

The two worked together at Lutheran Hospital after the war.

Jensen and the corpsman loaded 20 to 25 men on each plane and took off.

They saw horrific injuries, as well as severe emotional



Omi Jensen was stationed in Guam for part of her naval service. She was a "comfortable-to-be-with, elegant woman with a sharp wit," said a friend who worked with her at Lutheran Hospital after the war. Photo courtesy of the family

problems.

"All those nurses had a box with bandages, IVs, morphine and some sandwiches," Meighan-Riebe said.

During one six-week battle, the Navy nurses evacuated 9,600 wounded, according to a 2008 story in The Denver Post.

She did nursing and cheering up.

The nurses used subterfuge when a patient died among other wounded men. With no noticeable concern, two nurses would carry the body out of the room, talking to the man as if he were still alive, she told The Post.

Meighan-Riebe said Omi Jensen "just put her fear aside, and in an unaccustomed way she became accustomed to it."

The other side of Omi Jensen was "a comfortable-to-be-with, elegant woman with a sharp wit," Meighan-Riebe said.

Omilo Mary Halder was born March 2, 1921, in Marshall, Mich. She went to Xenia (Ohio) High School and finished her nursing degree at the University of Michigan. Soon she was off to the Navy.

She married Robert L. Jensen, a naval officer, in January 1946. They moved to Denver in 1966. He preceded her in death.

In addition to her daughter, she is survived by two other daughters, Kathy Cramer of Corpus Christi, Texas, and Karen Neal of Albuquerque; her son, Kevin Jensen of Caldwell, Idaho; seven grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; a sister, Martha Klover of Pullman, Wash.; and a brother, Rusty Halder of Xenia, Ohio.

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