

This Week's Guest Writer
December 6, 1951

Rhoda Fulton and Robert S. Riddell, now Lt. Col. in the U. S. Marines, were married a week before the Pearl Harbor disaster ten years ago. As a bride she faced the terrors of the bombing and the uncertainty of her husband's whereabouts and safety. The couple now have three children, two girls and a boy. Lt. Col. Riddell is stationed in Hdqtrs., USMC, Navy Annex, Arlington, Va. Mrs. Riddell is spending the winter with the children in Alpine. She is a trained Red Cross water safety instructor, a Gray Lady in the Red Cross, and is an accomplished knitter and a writer.

When the bombs fell at Pearl Harbor our reaction, seeing it happen, was not so different from that felt by those who first heard the news over the radio. There was a moment of stunned disbelief ("Look, the Rising Sun!") and then a surge of fighting mad, up-and-at-'em spirit. We, however, had the feeling that we might soon be going to die with our boots on because it was obvious we had been caught, to put it gently, sans the nethermost garment.

I went back to Wheeler Field on the ninth. We, the few secretaries that reported back to work, were given transportation by the Army for the first few days. We had to leave the Field by three to be home before dusk and the blackout. We ate in the mess at noon and wore old clothes for the not infrequent air raid alarms that sent us flying for the ditches. Invariably it had rained the night before an alarm and the Hawaiian hill red mud was worse than clay.

There were many men missing from the office for the 72nd Pursuit Squadron was hard hit. They had been sleeping in tents; sleeping late because it was Sunday. The planes strafed them and then the lucky ones—those who had gone to breakfast—came back and began the job of carrying their buddies to the hospital. The hospital soon filled and the overflow was put on the grass in front of the building. The enemy got them on their return attack, flying low to finish the wounded lying on the lawn, as well as some of the bearers.

The first men reporting back for work were dressed in torn khakis. Not from the heat of battle, these tears. The clothes hanging on the line had been neatly shredded in the strafing. The next appeared in old blood encrusted shirts for in the emergency the laundry was not doing business as usual and men left the hospital in the clothes they wore upon arrival.

The rumors abounded. We heard first that Panama was wiped off the map, every American ship was sunk and that we in Hawaii were being invaded, we would be invaded, or we had been invaded and the enemy was hiding in the pineapple fields till night. We heard there were three hangers with planes in only one. That was the one hit. We heard that every Japanese of any prominence was a spy, that the planes had been directed by arrows cut in the pineapple fields, that there was a short-wave radio in our milkman's truck, that the Lurline which left the Friday before the 7th was sunk and that the reservoir was being emptied, not because it was a landmark visible from the air at night but because (a) the water was poisoned, or (b) there was an enemy two-man submarine in it and the reservoir had to be emptied to find and destroy the sub and its crew. Finally the talk turned to evacuation.

No one could, or would tell me where my husband's ship, the Pennsylvania, was but Chaplain Miller advised me to go home. With no word of my husband I followed the chaplain's instructions.

One bright day I said my goodbyes and went up to my room after feeling my way along

the black corridor to the fifth floor on the left. As instructed I did not communicate with those I had left just as we had no heard from those evacuated earlier. Only those concerned would know when the ship departed.

One evening I was called to the telephone and a man's voice, on being assured I was the party he called, directed me to go to a certain pier the next morning at 8:30 with my bags. He warned me to secrecy and I asked innocently, "Is there a password?" "Harrumph, no!" he said.

The ship was a small Danish freighter and the 24 passengers, mostly women and children, were crowded in the cramped, spartan quarters. We did not sail for two more days, nor left the ship, but watched the loading with impatience to be leaving.

The trip itself took ten days, twice the length of the normal run because we zigzagged our way across. We were convoyed the first few days and met by our planes the ninth day. On that day too, we signed slips that we could not divulge the time it took us to cross or where we landed. We did not know until the end of the trip whether we would land in Seattle, San Francisco, or San Diego, although shivering in our thin tropical clothes the last days we wondered if it might not be Sitka.

We had a submarine alarm one night during dinner and when the captain hurried off we thought of lifeboats at night. This led to a party our last night out, each of us producing what we would most have wanted for the lifeboat, nothing serious allowed. There was only one box of hard tack and it went down easily with the Greek brandy brought by a gayer and more imaginative soul. We exclaimed over the chamois bag of uncut diamonds worn around the neck of another and ended with a treasure hunt which, I remember, was won by the Danish captain and his partner, with the majority of the 20 incongruous articles necessary. The crew, unable to speak English, watched in bewilderment as we raced through the ship on our search.

We took each other's addresses, promised we would keep in touch and said elusive good-byes. The next morning we saw the Golden Gate, one of the very young children thought he saw a pineapple factory and I saw the USS Pennsylvania in San Francisco's harbor. Our "yachting cruise" as we had called it, was over. My husband waited on the dock and this was wonderful in more ways than one, for I had \$2.17 in my purse.

Mrs. Robert S. Riddell