

MAYFIELD'S JAMES T. FULLER, M.D.

Evelyn Fuller Williams

Little did I realize on the afternoon of December 7, 1941, what an effect the bombing of Pearl Harbor would have on my family. That night my father, James Tufts Fuller, volunteered for the US Naval Medical Corps. By March, he had been commissioned a Lt. Commander in the Naval Reserve and was on his way to Corpus Christi, Texas. In May he sailed from San Francisco for the South Pacific.

In November 1942 Captain Eddie Rickenbacker and his crew were rescued after three weeks adrift in life rafts; they were taken to the tiny island of Funafuti, in the Ellice Islands group, where my father was the commanding medical officer. When word was received that Rickenbacker and his companions were on their way to Funafuti, there was only one small frame building for operating purposes on the island and the tent facilities were inadequate to hospitalize such a group of people. By working day and night the medical corpsmen were able to erect a twenty-four bed frame hospital while the group was on its way to the hospital. Captain Rickenbacker called my mother in December to wish her a Merry Christmas and to tell her that my father was "on a beautiful island, working hard, and was in the best of health."

After an enemy air raid on the island, my father wrote, "If you could have seen these boys of mine it would make the heart swell with pride. They are tops, with hearts like lions and ready to go wherever I send them. I am proud of every boy in my outfit and only wish everyone could know what wonderful work they do."

In August 1943 my father returned to the States; he was stationed in Long Beach and then Inyokern, California. We moved to Los Angeles to be with him.

In the early fall of 1944 I was asked to christen the *USS Mayfield Victory*, which was being built in Richmond, California. The people of Mayfield had bought enough War Bonds to pay for a Victory ship; hence the name *Mayfield*. Various civic clubs and other groups raised additional money to send books, records, games, and other recreational equipment to be used by the crew. On October 4, 1944, I had the great honor and privilege of christening this ship. What fun for a school girl to break a bottle of champagne on its prow!

In 1945 it was back to the Pacific for my father, this time aboard the *USS Rixley*, an evacuation transport (a ship to carry troops into battle and then to treat and evacuate the wounded). A few days out of San Francisco word was received that Japan had surrendered. Despite this, they proceeded on to the Philippines and then to Okinawa, where they rode out one of the worst typhoons of the China Sea. They left Okinawa in September headed for the States with 1,100 recently liberated prisoners of war and patients from base hospitals.

In a letter he described these prisoners:

They are 30 to 50 pounds underweight, suffering from malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies. They have all been forced to work in coal mines eleven hours a day and a great many have mal-united fractures and other injuries suffered during their imprisonment. To hear them tell how they were beaten by children, civilians, and soldiers alike makes your blood boil.

He received his separation papers on October 20, 1945, and returned to Mayfield to resume his practice of medicine. Among other decorations he received the Purple Heart and the Silver Star. [Ed. note: In a letter accompanying this article, Mrs. Williams states, "I did not put in that Capt. Rickenbacker visited Mayfield in August 1950 as the honor guest at Rickenbacker Day at the Purchase District Fair."]

