

## **FLORENCE GALING, NURSE, WIFE OF PRISONER OF WAR**

**INTERVIEWER: It's the 5th of February 1997. We're in Washington DC and this is tape 10482, interview with Florence Galing. Thank you very much for contributing to our series. So the first question I wanted to ask you is where you were and what you were doing at the time when the Korean War started in June of 1950.**

FLORENCE GALING: Well, I was an army nurse at Fort Lewis, Washington which is part of the huge home of the Second Division and I was.. let's see, I'm gonna get lost (laugh)

**INT: You were.. just about to get married? What was the situation?**

FG: Well, I had met this young lieutenant about 6 to 8 months earlier and Bernie and I had been dating and his brother came to Washington on leave. We took a weekend around the Olympic peninsula and when we got back we found out that the Second Division had been alerted. I was a nurse at Madigan Army Hospital and Bernie was a young lieutenant with the 9th Infantry at Fort Lewis and I guess everybody was, you know, agitated, getting ready to go overseas, families were worried, Bernie was saying 'we're leaving soon, I can't tell you how soon, let's get married.' And I said, 'well, let's not get married now. Let's wait until you come back.' Because we had talked about getting married and we were going to get married after he went to Communications School at Fort Benning. Well, of course that was out now and so I said, yes, I can't say reluctantly because it was the best thing I ever did, but I wanted to stay in the army and go over with the 10th station hospital. They were asking for volunteers and Bernie said 'if I have anything to do with it, you're not going.' (laugh) So we got married on Tuesday which was the 11th of July and he shipped out on the 17th for Korea. In the meantime, my mother had left New York to visit me. We were going to take a tour of British Columbia so on the 17th of July, Bernie sailed for Korea and I sailed for British Columbia! (laugh) That's about how it was...

**INT: Now what.. you were saying it's an army base, people know maybe a little bit more about the situation than in.. a non-army location. Can you remember the kind of atmosphere, that a war had broken out in Korea and how people were enthusiastic or how they felt that here was one Communist country attacking a non-Communist country and was this considered to be a good thing, that the United States should be involved with the UN in stemming the flow?**

FG: Well, I think there was quite a feeling of wanting to stop the Communists from taking over anywhere in the world. They wanted to stem the tide of Communism and I think the men were, you know, ready for a war because they hadn't, you know, nothing had been going on since World War II. Families I think dreaded it. As far as being an army nurse, I was looking forward to it. I really thought I'd like to get into that scrap and help out over there. A lot of my friends felt the same way. Because it was an army town, troop town so to speak there were all sorts of feelings trepidation expectancy I don't know what else but there was this huge build-up and before we knew it, the Second Division had left and those that were at home were constantly reading newspapers and in those days, there wasn't much news. We had the morning news and the afternoon news. There was television but it was timed. We didn't have television all day long as you have today and there was a scarcity of news. I think Bernie had a radio in his car he would've known he was alerted while we were on the peninsula but he didn't have a radio. We didn't see a newspaper we saw no television so we didn't know that the Second Division had been alerted, for 2 days. I think that's generally how it was. There was very little news. All we knew was that the Second Division was going to Korea. Bernie thought perhaps they'd stop at an island off Japan and train because they left with a lot of untrained troops, green troops, men that came in from the Reserves, the National Guard nurses that were drawn up that we met who had never been in the army before, so to speak, were learning how to shoot a rifle before they went over. And that was where I was. I was in the middle of all this, so to speak, and I really don't know what it was like in a town a hundred miles away.

**INT: You say.. you knew something had happened. When and how did you get the news that he was missing in action?**

FG: Well, as I said, we were married, we were married 6 days and he left for Korea and I became pregnant in that period of time (laugh) and I had to get out of the army myself so December 1st I was discharged from the army and we had made plans for me to go to Texas to be with his mother and father, at their home. When we got to Texas I still hadn't heard from Bernie. It was now around Christmas time. The 29th of December, the doorbell rang. It was on a Friday, I had just washed my hair and I opened the door and there was a boy delivering a telegram and he turned on his heels and left and I knew the telegram was gonna tell me either he was dead or alive, either he was missing or killed and when I opened it, I just thanked God that he was missing and that was when I knew that he was missing. As far as knowing when he became a prisoner, that wasn't for another year, when the prisoner of war lists were exchanged. There were two military broadcasts, one in February of '51, in which Bernie's name was mentioned. I received a telegram, I think it from the Department of the Army, saying that this broadcast had coover, his name had been mentioned but I wasn't to put much weight in that. In June, there was also another broadcast in which his name was mentioned. So it gave me a little hope that he was alive somewhere, even in prison camp and there was a grapevine with the wives, those who had husbands who were missing in action, who would write each other and telephone each other and support each other and we would find out news that way.

**INT: When you eventually got the announcement that he was a prisoner of war, was that a high point, with your reservations, that he.. was alive somewhere in North Korea?**

FG: It was and it wasn't because I was at my sister's house and we were waiting to hear the names of the prisoners and Bernie's name.. it was 11 o'clock at night and I still had not heard Bernie's name so I went to bed in tears and his name came through about a half an hour or an hour later and my sister woke me up. But yes, it was exhilarating to know that he was in a camp and that he wasn't dead, lying somewhere in a field, you know, because that would have made him missing in action too. But the fact that he was in a camp somewhere and we knew that he was.. his name was on the current list, I had some hope, a lot of hope.

**INT: When the truce talks were still dragging on, there was a presidential election. Can you recall how you decided who you were gonna vote for and why, in the fall of 1952.**

FG: Well, I think the public a lot of us were disenchanted with President Truman. I somehow blamed him for the war and Bernie said no, he was one of the greatest presidents we've ever had but he relieved MacArthur and MacArthur was ... he was a man that all of us respected. Regardless of what he did militarily we thought he was a wonderful person and when he was relieved, we kind of blamed Truman for that also. So when the elections came up in 1952, I couldn't wait to vote for Eisenhower. I felt being a military man and his pwas that he would see what he could do to end that war, that he was the man I wanted in office and I think that was the general feeling. He certainly diget in so the vast majority voted for him. But I think whether or not Truman was to blame, I don't know, but it was Eisenhower I think that ended that war, in my opinion! (laugh)