

## **Major Robert W. Aschenbrener and Ann Middleton: Married in the South Pacific in 1945, at the end of World War II**

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It was August of 1945. The war in the South Pacific was over. They were in love. After a whirlwind courtship of three months, they decided to marry and sail home to the United States as husband and wife.



On August 20, 1945, Robert (Ash) Aschenbrener and Ann Middleton were married in uniform at Clark Field, Fort Stotsenburg. Robert was the son of George B. and Marietta Aschenbrener of Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin, and Ann, the daughter of O.R. and Sibyl Middleton of Gibson City, Illinois. The base, now closed, was located on Luzon Island in the Philippines, just under Mount Pinatubo and about 40 miles northwest of Manila. A small thatched church was the setting for the marriage and Father Muldoon, a Catholic chaplain, officiated at the ceremony. The bride carried a bouquet of fragrant gardenias. Simple gold wedding bands were exchanged.

Following the marriage, Ann's Red Cross friends held a reception for 125 guests of the couple. The hall was decorated with masses of flowers. Gin punch and open-faced sandwiches were served. A native baker produced a huge, square cake of three (mismatched) layers, with gray, green, and blue frosting. Not the prettiest cake, Ann later recalled!

The wedding cake was cut with the sword the Huk natives had given Robert for protection against the Japanese, when he was shot down on Christmas day of the year before. Many years later, this would become a family tradition, with most of the children and grandchildren using the sword to cut their wedding cakes. The couple had a week's honeymoon on Lingayen Beach, northwest of Clark Field, in a cottage on the ocean. Ann wrote home that the accommodations were "primitive but wonderful." They enjoyed a couple of meals at local Filipino restaurants, where the chop suey and chow mein dishes were delicious, "unless they put carabao [water buffalo] meat in it." As a part of her trousseau, Ann had a beautiful cream-colored



negligee that a Filipino seamstress had designed for her from Robert's silk parachute. On one of the days, the newlyweds took a jeep up to Baguio, in the Cordillera Central Mountains, in the north of Luzon Island. This beautiful resort city, located at 6,000 feet altitude, had been reduced to ruins during the war. They got caught in the rain, in a jeep that broke down, so it was quite late before they made it back to their honeymoon quarters, but Ann wrote home that she wouldn't have missed it for anything.



The newlyweds then drove back to Manila to stay until a ship was available to take them back to the States. They returned to America in the Fall of 1945 in an "old tub of a troop ship." There were few amenities. Much of the fare on board was "awful-tasting" powdered food. However, the ship, including the meals, must have seemed heavenly to many of the skeletal passengers who had been taken prisoner of war by the Japanese and were survivors of the Bataan Death March.

Robert and Ann landed in San Francisco, California on October 17th and stayed at the elegant and historic St. Francis Hotel. Within a few days, the Major was mustered out of the service. The couple moved to Columbia, Missouri and Robert completed his college studies, obtaining a degree in journalism at the University of Missouri located there. Robert and Ann raised a family of four sons and four daughters in Ohio, Texas, and California. In 1978, they retired to Cameron Park, east of Sacramento in central California. They celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary there in 1995, with all of their children present. Ann died on May 15, 1998, and Robert passed away on July 2, 2009.



*Robert and Ann Aschenbrener  
St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco, CA; October 17, 1945*

(Sources: Ann's letters home at the end of World War II, her photos, and her personal recollections, as shared with her family)

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