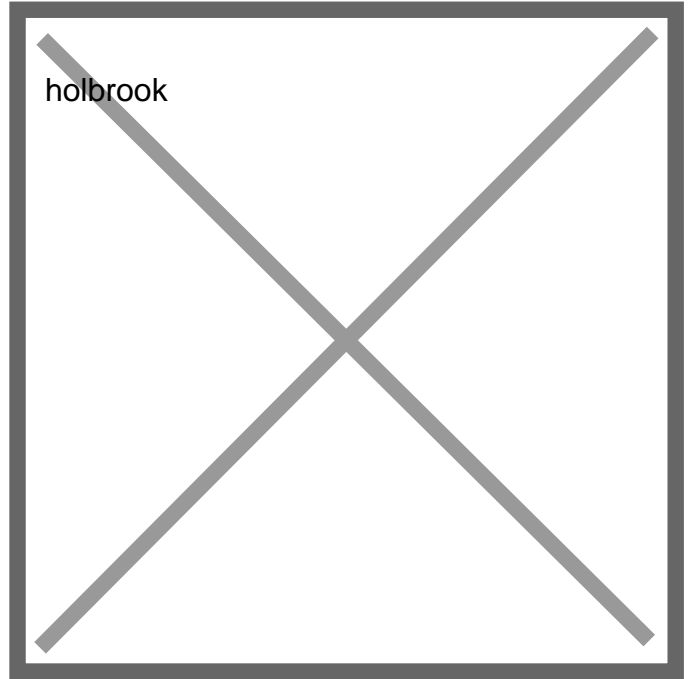


## Holbrooks give memorable service in two wars



**LOUISE HOLBROOK during her service in World War I**

BY FRANCES DINGMAN

Salvation Army officers Alva and Louise Holbrook had the distinction of giving service during both World Wars, providing a compassionate, caring ministry to those on the front lines of battle.

After being accepted for Salvation Army officership in 1915, they served in Sheridan, WY., and Missoula, MT, before being assigned to Camp Logan in Houston, TX, for war work.

When Commander Evangeline Booth was handpicking Salvationists for overseas work, they were an outstanding choice. Alva, 39, was not of gunbearing age and Louise was 24.

### **Needs were many**

The armed services in those days did not provide many of the homely comforts now available to soldiers. Supplying writing paper, cough drops, safekeeping of cash...so many ways to serve appeared to the Salvationists who were sent overseas.

The original plan had been, if possible, to put a worker and his wife in charge of each canteen, or "hut." The woman was to do the motherly duties, and the man to make himself useful in any way that presented itself. Captain and Mrs. Holbrook arrived in February 1918. From the Hindenburg line to the town of Marlaine, they were assigned to the First Division, but worked with 13 other divisions during their months there. Being infantry workers, they were stationed first in front of the artillery, passing out doughnuts and coffee close to enemy gunfire. At the little town of Cheppy, Louise was wounded by the explosion of a three-inch high explosive shell and buried up to her waist in rubble. She limped for a few days, but did not report the injury for fear of being sent back to a safer area.

The Holbrooks went on to exemplary service between the wars. Daughter Roma Louise, adopted in 1921, filled their lives with much joy. Mrs. Holbrook was a gifted musician, playing the guitar, mandolin piano and cornet.

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## holbrook

**BRIGADIER HOLLAND FRENCH (right)  
welcomes Major and Mrs. Holbrook and  
daughter Roma to the Hawaiian Islands.**

### **Another time, another war...**

In 1940, with the war breaking out in Europe and in the Far East, it was felt that something should be done for the men of our armed forces. At that time, Schofield Barracks, on Oahu, was the largest single post of the U.S. Army and "This Rock," as they called it, was selected as the starting point. The commanding officer, Major General William Wilson, thought The Salvation Army could make a contribution. So did Western Territorial Commander Lt. Commissioner Donald McMillan.

### **Right for the job...**

The Holbrooks arrived in July 1940 to help with the ever-increasing numbers of servicemen. Though the post had numerous entertainments such as movies, off-base recreation for single enlisted men was a different matter. Nearby Wahiawa had only one place where a man could sit and have a soft drink without being urged to drink liquor and dance. When Divisional Commander Brigadier Holland French escorted the Holbrooks to General Wilson's office, Wilson said to Louise, "I remember you, over in France in the last war." Louise agreed that many Salvation Army people had been over there. "No," he went on. "It was you! You practically saved my life. We hadn't had food for a long time when we came upon your canteen, and I filled up on your doughnuts and coffee till I was ashamed to eat more." Looking much as she had then, Louise was pleased to be remembered, but of course couldn't recall his face from the soldiers she had met. "There were 50,000 of you, sir, and only one of me."

General Wilson gave them into the care of the Special Service officer for the post, Colonel Febiger, saying, "If there is anything you need, just tell him; and if he doesn't get it for you, you come and tell me, and I'll see that he does."

### **New "home"**

With help and encouragement from Febiger, they were able to move into their new "home" in ten days. They laid in a supply of games: chess, checkers, dominoes, jigsaw puzzles, Chinese checkers and others, got the materials for cold drinks, and put up their sign.

An off-base club like this was a new thing at that time, and the men were slow to come. A few began coming again and again, but would never bring anyone else with them. Finally they found that the men were carefully keeping the secret of where they were spending their evenings, because they were afraid that if more came there would not be room. "We kept open from 2 p.m. to 11 p.m., which was the latest they could stay and still be back in time for 'lights out'." Eventually the word got around.

### **Aid and comfort**

Often, the boys were troubled by events at home, and a Salvationist nearest to their Stateside relative would be dispatched to help with the situation.

Even in peacetime, the hospital at Schofield was always full and busy. Mrs. Eleanor Latham, the Red Cross Gray Lady in charge of recreation in the hospital, had been there many years, and the men loved her. Because of her interest in the men, the Holbrooks had access to all wards and were able to meet many of the men that way. After the men were well, they would come over to the club to visit, and many kept coming because they found it to be a home.

The sick men were often sent back to the States, and Alva felt it was too bad that they should have to leave without notice being taken of their departure. He consulted the chaplain and arranged that he should receive a list of departures before the ship sailed. Then he designed a special lei in Army colors. When he appeared with his armful of leis, he made a colorful picture and left happy men behind. Sometimes the sight of Holbrook with the leis was the first word they had that they were going home.

### **Functions with USO**

When the USO was formed early in 1941, there was much publicity about the setup as it was to function, and many articles appeared in the papers on the subject. "One day we received a visit from the chaplain of the 21st Infantry Brigade. He sat down and visited, and then asked 'Are you having any trouble with this new USO setup?' We told him there hadn't been any trouble. 'Well,' he said, 'I'll tell you why I came. Yesterday a delegation of my men called on me and insisted that I come over and see if things were all right. They said, they're not going to have the USO pushing their Salvation Army around.' We assured him that our status had not been changed, and that it was merely that they had misunderstood the newspaper publicity. But it made a warm spot in our hearts when we thought of it."

In 1943, the Holbrooks returned to Vallejo, Calif., where they retired from active service, having served both God and man. Alva was promoted to Glory in 1955, and until 1980 Louise made her home in the West. She was loved by all who knew her, and remembered by the thousands who had enjoyed their ministry. Major Pat Boyd (R) is her niece.

Promoted to Glory from the Christian Rest Home in Grand Rapids, Mich., in 1991 at the age of 98, she was the last surviving Western Doughnut Girl.

*Sources: Holbrook Memoirs; newspaper articles, obituary. Photographs courtesy of the Western Territorial Museum.*

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