

There's no doubt many paramount women have emerged from Indiana. These heroines have conquered great feats, embracing their rightful place in history. I have a Hoosier heroine who quelled a myriad of struggles, but those challenges didn't engrave her name in time. Instead, they forever instilled her legacy in the hearts of those who loved her the most. She is my great-grandmother, Jessie Asher Newman.

Born the youngest of ten kids and with one of the most severe forms of cleft palate, Jessie knew strife at a young age. Blessed with parents who understood the severity of her condition, she received treatment at age five. But, due to the family's poverty, Jessie was sent to a hospital out-of-state and her parents could rarely visit. While at the hospital, Jessie found a toy soldier that helped to fight away her loneliness during her five months of treatment. Jessie kept the toy soldier the rest of her life, but, eventually, she had another soldier that she held even dearer.

Jessie Asher married Howard Newman on April 7, 1938. The new Mrs. Newman did not have long with her sweetheart before he enlisted in the Marines and was deployed. After spending one year in Bremerton, Washington and another two years in Shanghai, China, Howard was on his way home when Pearl Harbor was bombed. To prevent the ship from being seized, it was redirected to the Philippines and ordered to stay there until further notice. The Battle of Bataan broke out while the ship was stationed at the Island of Corregidor, so Howard and his fellow soldiers took part in the fight. On April 9, 1942, American forces were forced to surrender the Philippines to the Japanese, and Howard, along with thousands of others, was taken as a prisoner of war.

Howard was held prisoner by the Japanese for over three years. While he was beaten and starved by his enemies, Jessie was tortured by her emotions. A letter telling her of the high casualties caused by the movement of American soldiers from the Philippines to Japanese prison camps, known as

the Bataan Death March, and the rate of which soldiers were dying at those camps, also said that Howard's commanding officers presumed him dead. Despite the letter that spoke against her intuition, however, Jessie knew he was still alive. Accompanied by her sister Wilma, a fellow military wife, she packed her things and moved to Anderson, Indiana. Jessie and her sister worked at Delco Remy, a factory that had changed its production from car parts to airplane parts that were needed by the military. Jessie and Wilma worked tirelessly, always saving for their husbands' long-awaited homecomings.

Howard Newman was released from Camp Cabanatuan on September 14, 1945 and returned home soon after. Upon his arrival, though, Jessie's happiness turned sour. With a broken back and a broken spirit, Howard was not the same man. Anger and bitterness flooded the once happy soul and those around him were forced to approach him with great caution and patience. Despite the struggles the couple faced, Jessie still loved the man she had married and she stood by him as he fought a great personal war at home. They went on to have three children, seven grandchildren, fourteen great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren, but he was never the same.

My great-grandmother is my heroine because she was a brave woman who persevered. Whether it was overcoming a birth-defect, having faith in her husband's return, or standing by him as he fought a war at home, she never backed down. Howard was honored with a Purple Heart for his bravery through war and injury, but Jessie was never acknowledged for her fight. She is only one of many influential and decisive Hoosier women who have gone unnoticed. Jessie, like many others, served the United States of America, enlisted or not.