Martha Morris Durfee

(June 8, 1871 - August 11, 1958)

By Jo Ellen Heil

One of Tent 22's Founders was Martha Morris Durfee. A native of Dassell, Minnesota, Martha proved elusive until her wedding announcement and obituary in the Santa Barbara Independent came to light. A delightful person emerged from the shadows.

Born on June 8, 1871, Martha was the first of five children to James Henry Morris and Florence Jane Williams. During the Civil War, James Morris, served as a Private in Co. E, 137th Ohio Infantry and was promoted to 2nd. Lt., in Co. F, 10th New York Heavy Artillery (May 1864 - July 1866). He filed a veteran's invalid pension in Minnesota 1895; Florence filed a widow's pension in California in 1906.

Single and 27 in 1898, Martha Morris traveled to California to teach at Casitas School in Carpinteria. She later joined the faculty at Serena School on Toro Canyon Road and Washington School (renamed Dolores School).

In 1907, 36-year-old Martha married Santa Barbara resident Edward Cole Durfee. Edward was 24 years her senior. His first wife had died three years earlier.

Their wedding announcement in The Independent (Santa Barbara) on May 8, 1907 read: "Miss Martha Florence Morris and Major Edward Cole Durfee were married quietly at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon at the home of Rev. Benjamin J. Davis, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, in the presence of relatives. The bride wore a traveling gown and was unattended. Immediately after the ceremony Mr. and Mrs. Durfee left for the southern part of the state, where they will spend their honeymoon.

"Mrs. Durfee is the daughter of the late Captain [sic] J.H. Morris of Carpinteria, and the wedding was simple because of her father's death several months ago. She has been a teacher in the Santa Barbara schools for several years and was appointed Supervisor of Drawing in place of Miss Lehner, who was elected County Superintendent of Schools. Last night at the regular meeting of the Board of Education, Miss Morris was granted a leave of absence for a year.

"Major Durfee is a veteran of the Civil War and is well known in Santa Barbara, where he has lived for years. When the couple return to the city, their home will be at the Major's old home, 1725 Anacapa Street."

Edward was a Civil War veteran. He served in the 7th Vermont Infantry. His pension records list him as a Private; In public he styled himself "Major."

By the time she helped found Tent 22 in 1921, Martha was already a community activist. She was a member of Trinity Episcopal Church, the City Club, the Star King Chapter of the Woman's Relief Corps and the Santa Barbara Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

(Membership number 279648). Her DAR Patriot was William Woods, Jr., an Ensign in the U.S. Navy.

When Edward died in 1930, Martha was only 49. She remained busy. Family members had already migrated to California. Her brother Richard Morris and niece Frances Morris lived in Carpinteria.

Martha Morris Durfee died on August 11, 1958 in Ventura "after an illness of two years." Her funeral was held at the chapel of Welch-Ryce Associates in Santa Barbara. Dr. Richard Flagg Ayres of Trinity Episcopal Church officiated, and the Woman's Relief Corps displayed flags at the service.

Martha was buried in the family plot in the Santa Barbara Cemetery.