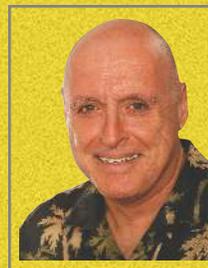


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



774 Martha Raye Made a Difference for Many

She wanted to make a difference, and she did in a most unexpected way. I'm Jerry Roberts and the story of Margy Reed comes next, on The Extra Point.

She was Margy Reed, born in Butte, Montana in 1916. The world would come to know her by the name of Martha Raye. She began her career as a big band singer in the 1930s, then got into the movies, developing into a comic actress, drawing laughs and starring with many of the biggest names of her day, including Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, and Abbott & Costello. She also starred in many Broadway stage productions.

Eventually, Raye made her way to television, with a variety show of her own, as well as guest roles on *The Love Boat*, *Murder She Wrote*, and others. She was best known for the size of her mouth, which was large in proportion to her face, earning her the nickname *The Big Mouth*. She even referred to herself with that name in TV commercials.

Today, we're here to talk about another role Martha Raye played. She was a patriot, and let that be known at a time when most of Hollywood lined up against the Vietnam War.

She was outspoken about her love for America, and she showed her dedication by visiting the troops in Vietnam, and putting on shows for them.

For her service and going to Vietnam, she was called a "hawk," if you recall that label, and was blacklisted by the Hollywood power structure for more than 10 years. I caught a story a few days ago about Martha Raye's service to the troops, that speaks volumes about her, as told by an old Army aviator.

"It was just before Thanksgiving in 1967, and we were ferrying dead and wounded from a large area west of Pleiku. We had run out of

body bags by noon, so the 'Hook' (term used for the CH-47 CHINOOK helicopter) was pretty rough in the back.

All of a sudden, we heard a 'take-charge' type of woman's voice in the rear. There was the singer and actress, Martha Raye, with a Special Forces beret and jungle fatigues, helping the wounded into the Chinook, and carrying the dead aboard. She had been visiting her Special Forces heroes.

We took off, short of fuel, and headed to the USAF hospital pad at Pleiku. As we all started unloading our sad cargo, an Air Force Captain said to her, 'Ms Raye, with all these dead and wounded to process, there won't be time for your show.'

To all of our surprise, she pulled on her right collar and said, 'Captain, see this eagle? I am a full 'Bird' Colonel in the US Army Reserve, and on this is a Caduceus, which means I am a nurse, with a surgical specialty. Now, take me to your wounded.' The Captain, obviously wasn't expecting that response from the entertainer. He responded, 'Yes ma'am, follow me.'

Several times at the Army Field Hospital in Pleiku, Raye covered a surgical shift, giving a nurse a well-deserved break.

In all, she spent 25 months in Vietnam. Initially, it was an honorary "gig," something an entertainer would normally do. Except, she took it seriously, because she took her service to the troops seriously. Raye often traveled to the furthest outposts to entertain and talk with the men in uniform.

She was never a huge movie star, like those idolized by the masses. It didn't come that easy for her.

(Con't.)

She threw herself into her work and sweated to squeeze every bit of talent out, and to prove she belonged. She took her military involvement the same way, putting herself in a position to serve in a meaningful way when needed most.

She wasn't perfect. Married seven times, her private life was a bit of a mess. Away from the public eye, she had it tough. Late in life, she had severe health problems, eventually losing both legs and suffering Alzheimer's Disease. As she declined, President Clinton presented her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, in 1993.

Raye died the following year, and was given consideration to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery. However, that was not her final wish. Martha Raye is the only woman buried in the Special Forces cemetery at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

Former Special Forces troops came out in big numbers to support her request. She'd proven herself to them, and they wanted her there.

Martha Raye, Margy Reed, from Butte, Montana, wanted to make a difference with her life. She did.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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