

## Dorothy Myles

Dorothy Myles was only eight years old when her talent was recognized. She was asked to sing on the popular New York radio show "Kiddie Hour", sponsored by Horn and Hardart. At nine she was taking voice and dancing lessons, by twelve she sang at Carnegie Hall, winning the Lily Pons Gold Medal. At the same time she racked up gold medals for her art work ! Radio shows on both NBC and CBS invited her to sing her songs. By the time she reached 17 she had been on the stage as a singing-showgirl in a short-lived Broadway show "Dancing in the Streets", and had fulfilled professional singing engagements in Syracuse, New York and Key West, Florida.

On Sunday night, November 8, 1942 the teenager was hired to fill a 3-week singing stint at the Cocoanut Grove nightclub in Boston ( in spite of being underage to appear where liquor was served ). She had received word that the nationally-known bandleader, Jimmy Dorsey, was interested in adding the vibrant young singer to his orchestra as a featured vocalist. He planned to audition the young lady sometime during her stay in Boston. All was going well for the rising young star !!

On the final night of her Cocoanut Grove engagement, Saturday, November 28, 1942, the bubbling young singer arrived at the club at 9:15 P.M. and quickly changed into

her stage gown. She sat quietly in the Ladies Lounge awaiting the strains of the house orchestra playing the 'Star Spangled Banner', which was signal for the start of the nightclub floor show.

As Dotty came from the Lounge into the Foyer she noticed, to her right, from the direction of the stairway to the downstairs Melody Lounge, a "light was growing brighter, with a flicker behind it. Suddenly a terrific explosion let loose somewhere downstairs. There was a blinding flash and I was knocked flat on my back". She was never really sure whether or not she lost consciousness but when she picked herself up and started through the doorway to the main Dining room all the lights went out !!!

As panic swept throughout the crowded dining room, screaming patrons milled around in total confusion, smoke and flame now swirling about them. Dotty was knocked to the floor smashing her face into an overturned dinner table. Her nose was broken and bleeding. She was being trampled upon by men and woman desperately seeking refuge from the flames ! She alternately crawled and stumbled : was swept by the hysterical mass towards the far side of the dining room where a patch of light seemed to indicate an exit to the safety of the street. But even as she neared the doorway she was buried under dozens of people, many falling unconscious, and dying from the heat, smoke and fumes of the ghastly fire now sweeping throughout the entire nightclub.

Burned and bleeding she lay, helpless, pressed under the weight of inert bodies upon her, hardly able to breathe, unable to scream for help. The fire in the dining room, seeking more oxygen, was roaring through the doorway above her. Suddenly a bright light was shining in her eyes and she tried, but failed to call out. In desperation she wiggled her hand which was free of the mound of humanity. And then she heard the calm voice of a Boston fireman saying " O.K., sister. Take it easy. I'll have you out of there in a moment". Grasping her wrists he accomplished the difficult task of freeing Dotty from the grisly heap and he dragged her out to the cold night air of Shawmut street and to safety.

Except for a pair of panties and the shreds of a little wool bolero jacket all her clothes were gone ! A serviceman by-stander helped the dazed girl to a nearby police patrol wagon which was almost filled with other fire victims. As the wagon sped towards Boston City Hospital the police officer riding in the back of the vehicle covered the girl's shoulders with a raincoat. Although the trip to the hospital was short and swift, Dotty was totally shocked to learn that she alone of the fire victims in that patrol wagon arrived alive !

Medical evaluation of her condition upon admittance to the hospital revealed that Dotty had sustained burns over 45% of

her body, suffered a broken nose and the estimated chances of her surviving her injuries were but 50%.

In the weeks and months that followed she was subjected to ten skin-graft procedures to cover open areas subject to infection. From her normal weight of 120 pounds she dropped to 98 pounds. Although, at the time, she didn,t quite understand why, she was fed meal after meal whether or not she was hungry and she ballooned from her normal weight to 165 pounds. The added pounds provided her surgeons with more skin area from which further grafts could be gleaned.

Over the excruciating suffering of the next months more and more public attention was focused on the plucky young singer, fighting her lonely battle. Prayers were offered in her behalf, flowers arrived almost daily. It became common knowledge that, in spite of her suffering and disfigurement, this little girl would not give up. From these published accounts of her struggle came the nickname "Dauntless Dottie", the name Lt. Col. Robert Morgan ordered lettered on the fuselage of his B-29 bomber flying missions against the Japanese in the Pacific theatre of operations.

On May 20, 1943, nearly six months after the Cocoanut Grove fire, Dorothy Myles was allowed to leave Boston City Hospital. Her hands were terribly twisted, her face red, raw, and with webs of skins extending from cheek to neck. She wore a large hat with a veil covering her entire face and neck.

## D. MYLES PART 3

With the aid of by-stander Dotty Miles was half-carried from the cold sidewalk behind the burning nightclub to a nearby police patrol wagon already filled with other fire victims. She was wearing only a pair of panties and the shreds of a wool bolero jacket ; the remains of her clothing had been totally burned from her body ! As the patrol wagon sped towards the Emergency Ward of the Boston City Hospital a police officer, riding in the rear of the vehicle, covered the girl's shoulders with a raincoat. Although the trip to the hospital was both short and swift Dotty was shocked to later learn that only she, of the wagon-load of victims, was alive when the emergency ward was reached.

Initial medical evaluation of her condition upon admittance to the hospital revealed that Dotty had sustained a broken nose plus second and third degree burns over 45% of her body. It was estimated that her chance of surviving her injuries were but 50 %.

In the weeks and months that followed she was subjected to ten skin graft procedures just to cover the open areas subject to infection. From her normal weight of 120 lbs. she dropped to 98 lbs.! Although at the time she didn't quite understand why she was being urged to eat meal after meal whether or not she was even hungry. Her weight ballooned to 165 lbs. providing her surgeons with more skin area from which further grafts could be gleaned.

During her excruciating suffering during next months more and more public attention was focused of the plucky young singer as she fought her lonely battle. Many prayers were offered in her behalf, flowers arrived almost daily. It became common knowledge that, in spite of her pain and disfigurement, this little girl would not give up ! From many published accounts of her struggle came the nickname "Dauntless Dotty" and it was, in tribute to her courage, this was the name that Col. Robert Morgan ordered lettered on the nose of his B-29 Bomber flying missions against the Japanese in the Pacific Theatre of operations.

On May 20, 1943, nearly six months after the Cocoanut Grove tragedy Dorothy Myles was allowed to leave Boston City Hospital. Her hands horribly twisted, her face red-raw with webs of skin extending from cheek to neck. She wore a large-brimmed hat with a veil covering her entire face and extending down to collar level.

Over the next two years Dotty was operated on countless times. Drs. Kazanjian, Burnett and Marble exercised their skill and expertise in repairing her damaged face and hands. She remained in Boston to be immediately available should the surgeons call her to the hospital for one more procedure. During this period she provided for herself by singing professionally on the Boston radio station W.E.E.I. in the program entitled "Melody in the Sky" and ,later, on station W. B. Z. with her own program "Styles by Myles".

In the late 1940's after all that could be done surgically in Boston for the young entertainer she returned to her family home in New York City. Over the next years she pursued her professional career locally and on a limited basis. The tremendous physical battle she had waged against the devastating injuries to her body had taken a toll on the strength of her heart and, weakened, it ultimately did what the fierceness of the Coconut Grove fire could not do !