

# Veterans Say Goodbye to Colonel Maggie

On Oct. 19, 1994, American veterans lost a true comrade-in-arms when Martha Raye, affectionately known as Colonel Maggie, died of complications from a stroke in Los Angeles. She was 78 and had appeared in 26 films during her career.

From WWII to Vietnam, she had always been there for the troops. Whether on stage in front of thousands or one-on-one with a wounded soldier in a hospital ward, she made them laugh to her boisterous antics. Col. Maggie spent countless hours, far from the limelight and the press photographers, just letting "her boys" know they weren't forgotten. She brought news from back home, or played cards with them, just being a pal.

As a registered nurse, Raye would often finish a performance, then go straight to the aid station to help out wherever needed. Sometimes battle casualties were actually arriving. Rather than simply stand by as a concerned observer,

she would jump right in and care for the wounded.

"I'd do it all over again without hesitation," said the native Montanan in 1979. "The love and gratitude of our wounded cannot be expressed in words."

(Raye herself was wounded in both WWII and Vietnam.)

For her efforts in Vietnam, Raye received the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award (an Oscar) from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1969.

An honor she cherished even more was given by the 5th Special Forces (Airborne) Group — the Green Berets — when she received an honorary commission as a lieutenant colonel in 1964. And in case anyone felt she didn't qualify to wear the Green Beret, Col. Maggie climbed aboard a troop transport and successfully completed five parachute drops in 1967.



**Martha Raye was adored by three generations of war veterans. Courtesy USO**

As her last request, she asked to be buried at Fort Bragg, N.C., home of the Special Forces. On Oct. 22 of last year, her flag-draped casket was carried by a Special Forces honor guard to the post cemetery where she was laid to rest. Colonel Maggie had come home to stay.