

Interviewee: Mildred Martha Strohschein Ryan

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 7 November 2002

Location: living room of Martha Ryan's apartment, St. Paul, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, November 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, January 2003

Mildred Martha Strohschein Ryan was born on 3 February 1922 in the small town of Lydia, Scott County, Minnesota, and she grew up here and in Webster, Rice County. Martha graduated from Northfield High School in 1939, and after a year working in Watertown, Minnesota, she entered the nurses training program at St. Joseph Hospital (later Health East), in St. Paul. Martha completed this program in 1943 and worked one year as a nurse before enlisting in the US Army in March 1944.

Following Basic Training at Camp Carson, Colorado, Martha was stationed until November 1944 at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri, where she performed various duties. At that time she was transferred to the 119th Evacuation Hospital and shipped to England. The unit moved to France in early 1945, and Martha spent the remainder of the war at locations in Belgium and Germany. Her primary duty was in the recovery room of a first-echelon hospital facility; combat casualties were operated on here, while others were stabilized for shipment to rear area hospitals. It was demanding and emotionally exhausting work. After V-E Day, Martha was stationed at several facilities in France before being rotated back to the US in December 1945.

Rather than leave the service, Martha re-enlisted; she spent all of 1946 at Percy Jones Army Hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan, and was only discharged from active duty in 1947. She did stay in the Reserves, though, and was called up for twenty-five months during the Korean Conflict. Martha finally retired from the Reserves in 1954, but worked at VA hospitals until 1957. Martha and her husband James Ryan (married 1955) lived in Vancouver, Washington, and Richmond, Virginia, before returning to Minnesota permanently in 1973. Jim died shortly thereafter, but Martha kept busy with worldwide travel and numerous other interests.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

M = Martha Ryan

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is the seventh of November 2002, and this is our interview with Martha Ryan. First Martha, on the record, thanks very much for taking time today to talk with us.

M: You're very welcome.

T: We've been talking for a few minutes now, more than a few minutes, and here's some of what I've already learned from you. You were born on the third of February 1922 in the farming community of Lydia in Scott County, Minnesota. When you were eight your family moved to Webster in Rice County. Your dad was a butter maker at that time, is that right? Did he work pretty much by himself or was he in a small workshop or factory?

M: It was a Farmer's Cooperative creameries they had. Farmers in the area would bring all their milk and cream but they really owned it. This was about 1939. In 1940 Land O'Lakes started buying up many of these creameries. That was the end of that.

T: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

M: I have twin brothers.

T: So you have memories of growing up in farming communities during the 1930s in Minnesota. What kind of memories do you have?

M: Really positive. You made your own entertainment. You played games. A lot of pretend. You used your imagination. Lots of cowboy and Indians.

T: Did you go to country schools, Martha?

M: Yes.

T: What kind of experience was that for you?

M: I went a couple of years to the parochial school which was two and half miles from where we lived. In the wintertime a farmer east of town would come through

with his team and a sled. All the blankets and his kids in there and they'd pile me in under more blankets and he would take us to school with the team and a big sled.

T: It was that or walk I guess, wasn't it?

M: Yes.

T: Did you like country school?

M: Very much.

T: Now is this at Webster?

M: Yes.

T: How many kids were there at that school?

M: Public school downtown had about forty-five in all eight grades. The parochial school I went to had less. We had about twenty.

T: So you got to know the kids.

M: Very well.

T: Your dad and mom. Did your mom work outside the home in those days?

M: No.

T: Would you say, from your impression as a young person growing up, were times tough for your folks in the 1930s?

M: My dad was unemployed in 1939. You didn't waste any food. I also didn't go hungry. We had a garden. That was during the Depression.

(1, A, 60)

T: Was your dad out of work because of Land O'Lakes buying up these small cooperatives?

M: Yes.

T: What did he do then when that happened?

M: He was able to get another job in a creamery in Watertown [Minnesota]. That one hadn't been bought up yet. When they bought that one, then mother and dad opened a Red Owl grocery store. They moved to Howard Lake.

T: Howard Lake is out near Watertown, isn't it?

M: Yes.

T: Did they stay in the Howard Lake area then?

M: Yes.

T: You didn't, though. You graduated from high school in Northfield, Minnesota, in 1939, and then after a year out of school, waiting to turn eighteen I guess, you started nurse's training at what was then St. Joseph's Hospital here in St. Paul. So you were living away from home then. Was that the first time?

M: I left home.

T: How was that, being away from home for the first time?

M: I guess I got homesick at first, but you also knew you had to do it.

T: What made you decide to go to nurse's school?

M: My mother and dad thought I should be either a teacher or work in an office. I tried working in an office and I knew this wasn't what I wanted to do. I decided all by myself I was going to go into nursing.

T: Was there a question for you of how to pay for schooling?

M: It wasn't a problem because all I needed was forty dollars, which bought the first set of uniforms and my books. After that you worked for your room and board. Literally.

T: But that took care of the costs of the training.

M: That was all the cost I needed.

T: What do you remember about nurse's training here at what was St. Joseph's Hospital in St. Paul?

M: I think we were given a lot of responsibility as young people. We learned a lot. Worked very hard. The sisters for the most part were very good instructors. They were very strict.

T: What kind of living accommodations were there for the nurse's training?

M: We had very nice nursing home. Nurse's home.

T: Were all the nurses quartered in the same place?

M: Yes.

T: So you lived with people doing exactly what you were doing?

M: Right.

T: Were these classes all women?

M: Yes. I knew of no men in nursing at that time.

T: And even today it's still overwhelmingly female.

M: Mostly women, but more and more men are going into it. And with the nursing homes, with the elderly people it would be nice if there were more men.

T: That's true, because if not for the reason for some of the heavy lifting and things.

M: And I think the older men patients are more comfortable if a man could help them.

T: That's a good point. Yes. Martha, what was the most difficult thing for you about your nurse's training?

M: *(pauses three seconds)* I guess studying for the State Exams. I hate tests.

T: Were they largely written exams?

M: To get your RN. Long written exams.

T: Was there kind of a sense of nervousness or...

M: Yes.

T: That you might not make it?

M: Very much so.

T: I imagine you were pretty elated when you passed.

M: Right.

T: How often did you get home to see your folks?

M: Not very often. I had my dad give me an allowance. He gave me an allowance of five dollars a month. Out of that, I would save enough to get the bus out. We couldn't be gone more than maybe every four or six weeks.

(1, A, 128)

T: So it really kept you in St. Paul.

M: That's right.

T: How long was it before you got over that initial homesickness do you think?

M: A couple of weeks I guess. You kept very active. You made friends with the rest of the girls.

T: Were most of them from this area?

M: Yes.

T: You were in your second year of nurse's training when the United States became involved in the war. Specifically through the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, on the seventh of December 1941. I'm wondering, Martha, if you remember what you were doing when you first heard that news?

M: I was a student nurse on night duty, and I remember a lot of the patients had radios and they kept them on all night. We would go from room to room to find out how things were going. Patients had their radios on.

T: So you heard the news then when you were actually on duty.

M: Whatever came over the radio.

T: What was your reaction?

M: It was very, very shocking. We couldn't believe they could do such a thing. Of course we didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was. We found out shortly after that it was in Hawaii. But at first we didn't know.

T: How about the people around you? The other trainee nurses, the sisters? How were people reacting to this?

M: Disbelief. They just couldn't quite comprehend that a country could do that to us. Then you started getting the numbers of casualties. The other destruction. It just was mind-boggling.

T: How soon was it before you noticed your life changing as a result of the war?

M: Oh, I think immediately. Shortly after that the girls, everyone had relatives that were being called in and were going to war.

T: You had two brothers.

M: They were younger than I was.

T: Did they go into service ultimately?

M: They did. They went in the Navy but it was after I was in.

T: So you were the first of the three of your family to go and serve?

M: Yes.

T: Did you think then about possibly going in the service or was this a decision that came to you later?

M: Not until after I finished training. I was working and I just felt it was something I should do.

T: You used the words "something you should do." How would you explain that in more detail?

M: Well, they were asking constantly for more and more nurses.

T: So you knew there was a demand and need?

M: Yes.

T: Did you talk it over with other people or with your folks before you made the decision to join the Army?

M: I did with my dad. I told him that I really felt this was something I wanted to do. And at the time I was working in a doctor's office and he said, "You have to be very fair to him." So I talked to him and more or less gave him my notice. The young girl he got to work with him in the office was not a nurse. So before I left, I had her giving herself hypos to practice so she could give hypos for him.

T: Could he not find another nurse to replace you?

M: Nurses were very hard to find. He didn't. He was afraid the same thing would happen. He would get somebody, and she'd decide that this is what she should do [join the military].

T: So the shortage of nurse was really impacting that medical practice.

M: Very much so.

T: Before you went in the service, you didn't go in until March of '44, did you continue to live at the nurse's quarters until you finished nurse's training?

M: I had an apartment downtown. I shared it with classmates of mine.

T: When you were finished with nurse's training did you stay at that location, at that apartment? Or did you move again?

M: No. I had two different apartments. There were three of us in the first one and there was a little bit of a conflict between two of them, so we split up that one. Then a friend of mine that I had known before, that took training with me, she and I shared an apartment.

T: So you had to go out on the economy and find an apartment. How difficult was that when you decided to go out and look for a place?

M: There were apartments around the hospital. This wasn't too difficult.

T: Do you recall, maybe not the exact dollar amount of the rent, but do you remember the rent you paid being a lot of money, or thinking it was fair, or thinking it was cheap?

M: I know that none of us thought we could afford an apartment of our own.

T: Even though you were working as nurses.

M: You shared it. And I remember how excited we were when our salaries went up to a dollar an hour.

T: The apartment was something you had to share with somebody else, or you wouldn't have been able to afford it, is that right?

M: True.

T: I'm wondering about the impact for you as a single woman living on your own of things like rationing of certain products, or of shortages?

M: We weren't rationed at that time. In fact, I didn't get into rationing until I came home on leave when I was in the Army, and they gave me a book of coupons to bring home.

T: Really? So until then you had no experience with rationing.

M: No.

T: Why was that?

M: I think I was in the service before they were doing it.

(1, A, 214)

T: Some of the rationing started as early as 1942 and 1943. Things like certain meat items or sugar. Things like this.

M: I don't remember any rationing.

T: It sounds like you're saying that getting the food you needed for two or three of you...

M: It was no problem.

T: Did any of you have a car at that time?

M: No.

T: So gasoline wasn't an issue.

M: No.

T: Did you talk to or see your folks much at all after you finished nurse's training? It was almost a year there.

M: I would go out. I stayed close to them. I went home by bus. By that time there was a train. I could go from the Twin Cities. There was a little train that stopped at Howard Lake. There was a train that went to Watertown, too. I remember coming in on that train to see the film *Gone with the Wind* with a friend of mine.

T: When you went to see your folks, was your dad working by that time?

M: They had the grocery store. They ran the store together. And I was really very proud of them, because neither one of them had gotten as far as eighth grade in school because they grew up on farms where you had to help with the harvest and went to school in your spare time. They made a go of the store.

T: How were they doing financially? Did they seem to be doing okay?

M: Yes.

T: So the war years were treating them okay, you would say?

M: Yes.

T: How long did they keep that place?

M: Until my brothers got out of service and they found out that neither one of them was interested in having the store.

T: Did they move on to something else then?

M: Dad became a salesman for a feed company in town. And this was rather ideal, because he loved to visit with farmers and he would go around his route.

T: That was good for him.

M: It was really very good for him.

T: Did your mother work outside the home?

M: No.

T: So once they gave up the store she was a homemaker?

M: That's right.

T: Did being in a grocery store mean that they didn't have to worry about food shortages either?

M: They had to keep track of all these coupons, which I guess was really quite a hassle.

T: All the people buying things, you mean?

M: Buying things.

T: Do you know, were they responsible for, did they have to make an accounting of that to some kind of rationing board?

M: I think so. I think so.

T: That's very interesting. I'd like to hear about that actually, because I never thought of it from the perspective of the shopkeeper.

M: I'm not sure just how this worked.

T: They had to collect those things, I bet. Martha, your brothers, how much younger were they?

M: About four and a half years.

T: Were they still in high school then?

M: Yes.

T: And then they went in the service, but after you.

M: Yes.

T: When you were living in St. Paul, until March 1944, from your perspective, how did St. Paul seem to be changing as a result of the war being on?

M: I remember the streetcars. I know the train depot was very, very active. A lot of people coming and going on the train.

T: Did you ride the streetcar yourself pretty regularly?

M: Oh, yes.

T: As you rode on a daily basis, did you often get a seat or did you have to stand?

M: Both. Sort of like the bus—sometimes.

T: Did it seem to be more crowded than before the war maybe?

M: I don't know.

T: I am wondering if you noticed people relying more on public transportation than their own cars, and whether you noticed a difference between pre-war and during the war.

M: Even before I don't think people drove like they do now. They sort of accepted that they took the streetcar.

T: In early 1944, you did join the service. What finally caused you to go out and sign up? You had thought about it, you mentioned you thought it was something you should do. What finally prompted you to go out and sign the papers?

M: I just had made up my mind that this is what I must do. The same as going into nurse's training. I made up my mind this is what I was going to do.

T: How did your folks, you mentioned you talked about it with your dad, how did they take it when you finally told them, okay, I'm actually...

M: I guess they were used to me being quite independent.

T: You had been out of the house now for a while, anyway.

M: Yes.

T: Did either one of your folks take it, was more concerned or more nervous than the other that you were going to be going?

M: I don't believe so. And I tried to write home often and keep in touch.

T: Were you a regular letter writer when you were away?

M: Yes.

T: You went for Basic Training to Camp Carson, Colorado, where I guess a lot of nurses went. Was that a new part of the country for you?

M: Very much so.

T: What did you make of Colorado?

M: The first sight of the Rockies was tremendous.

T: Did you go out on the train?

M: On the train.

T: What kind of feelings did you have arriving there?

M: You felt very lost. You were expected to get into uniform, our nurse's uniform, and go work in the hospital. The GIs were saluting us.

T: Because you were officers.

M: But nobody had told us how to return salutes. They knew this. We had no instruction whatsoever. But they were very friendly. They all knew this and they all laughed at us.

T: How did that feel, seeing men in uniform saluting you?

M: It was an odd feeling. Rather odd.

T: Did you have kind of a [standard] Basic Training experience, a physical training, this kind of stuff?

M: Yes. We went out and we had a small plane that would strafe us, but we could hit the ground, and the poor thing went up and came down and crashed.

T: A plane crashed?

M: There were two men on it. And they both had broken legs, and I can remember them carrying them off and their legs were hanging down where they shouldn't have been. They weren't killed, but they were badly hurt.

(1, A, 297)

T: How do you recall the time at Camp Carson? You were there for a number of months.

M: We were kept very, very busy. I was there at Easter time and I remember they gave us a bus so we could go out to the Garden of the Gods for sunrise service on Easter morning, which was a very impressive thing.

T: How well did you adjust to the Army way of life?

M: I think I did pretty well. I remember when we cleared the post they had three or four of us that cleared for the whole group of basic trainees, and we had a lot of mileage to cover on foot going to different places to get the signatures. And a GI and a vehicle offered to take us, so we got in and someone came very excited--we had the general's car (*laughs*). We didn't know that.

T: Now being a woman in uniform, the majority of people around you were men in uniform.

M: True.

T: How did you perceive yourself being treated by men in uniform?

M: With respect, I think. As a person.

T: Did you feel you were treated any differently because you were a woman in uniform?

M: No, I don't think I was.

T: You were a second lieutenant?

M: Second lieutenant.

T: Do you feel that the treatment you received from superior officers, was the same pretty much?

M: I believe so.

T: Martha, when you were in the service, segregation was part of the US military.

M: That we didn't understand. We didn't understand that we couldn't be speaking to the corporals, to the sergeants.

T: Can you explain that a little more?

M: You could speak to them but they were... You were superior to them and we never felt this way.

T: Were you told you were superior or just...

M: The officer, enlisted personnel. It was explained. By that time we had that much basic training.

T: Was this something that was generally kept in place like it was supposed to?

M: I think it was. There was always somebody that was doing it their way, but I think we pretty much did as we were told.

T: Did you find that difficult having to consider some people in a different way than other people? Officer, enlisted?

M: I guess I did, but it was sort of the way the Army went.

(1, A, 333)

T: At the same time, the officer-enlisted difference was enforced there was also racial segregation in the Army. That is, in the military, the Army, Navy. I'm wondering in what ways you encountered blacks, for example, in the military.

M: I don't think there were any. I don't remember any there at Basic.

T: So the nurses you were in with were all white.

M: Yes.

T: Were there Mexican-Americans, or Native Americans?

M: I don't think so.

T: So when you looked around yourself, it was uniformly white.

M: Yes.

T: Did you encounter blacks when you were overseas? Things like truck drivers or corpsmen or any other ways as you moved to different hospital facilities?

M: I'm sure there were, but I guess I was never really aware that there was a difference. I know one place in Germany they brought in prisoners from a camp...

T: These were American POWs?

M: No, they weren't Americans. All I know is that they were wanting to wear turbans on their heads and we didn't have anything to give them, so we gave them towels and they were very happy to wrap towels. They were of a different nationality, but I'm not sure what they were.

T: They didn't speak English to you?

M: No.

T: So in general it sounds like you...

M: I don't think we had any blacks in our unit.

T: In any capacity?

M: I don't remember that there were any at all.

T: You dealt with casualties in a number of different places too...

M: Yes.

T: Did your units have black casualties come in among the wounded?

M: There must have been, but they were all treated the same. There were a number of German prisoners of war that came in that had been shot.

T: Really? So you treated everyone.

M: And we treated everyone the same. And some of our patients were objecting to this and we just... they were all patients.

T: That's interesting. You spent a number of months after Camp Carson at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Essentially doing hospital nursing duties.

M: Right.

T: What stands out in your mind from those months you spent there?

M: I remember D-Day.

T: So in June of 1944 you were at Fort Leonard Wood?

M: Yes.

T: How did that impact you in Missouri, something that happened in France?

M: We were all quite sure that this is where we were going to be going, so we were all quite interested. I think in the back of my mind we felt maybe this would all be over with by the time we were ready to go.

T: That's interesting. Now when that thought came to your mind, did that frustrate you, that it was going to be over before you got there?

M: Yes. If we had gone in earlier, we would have been able to help more.

T: So you were anxious to actually move closer and to help in that way.

M: Yes.

T: Was that a feeling that most of the nurses around you had? That, "Look, we got into this to go over there." Or was there a, "That's a little serious. I'm happier here."

M: No, I think we all pretty much felt the same.

T: You wanted to get over there.

M: Yes.

T: Mentioning D-Day. Does that imply that you and others around you followed the course of the war fairly closely?

M: Yes.

T: Both Europe and the Pacific?

M: Not the Pacific as much as Europe. I'm not sure why.

T: Because you had no idea where you were going. You could have gone to the Pacific just as easily.

M: That's right.

T: But the European war attracted your attention, or your interest, more.

M: Yes. Maybe it's because I've been there. I remember that part of it more.

T: By the time at Fort Leonard Wood people were going to the Pacific and to Europe, so you could have gone either place.

M: Right.

T: But you thought Europe was something that caught your interest more?

M: Yes. Much.

T: Martha, when did it become apparent to you that you were actually going to be going overseas?

M: When I got the orders to report to Camp Polk.

T: Camp Polk, Louisiana. And that was the place, you knew you'd be shipped out from there?

M: Yes.

T: At that point did you know that you were going to Europe, or were you still not sure?

M: I don't think we were too sure. Except that we assumed that, it was on the East Coast, you were going to Europe. I think the others were going to the West Coast.

T: I see. That's a way of trying to figure out what the Army's going to tell you before they tell you.

M: True. *(both laugh)*

T: When it became clear you were going to Europe to be part of the war effort against Germany, what did the Army do to help you understand--

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

T: What did the Army do to bring across to you what kind of people the Germans were?

M: We had already run into German prisoners of war that were over here in America.

T: At Fort Leonard Wood you'd seen them?

M: We knew about them by the States here. At least I wasn't aware of what Hitler was really doing, of their camps. I wonder if very much of America comprehends what he was doing to the Jewish people.

T: Sometimes things are incomprehensible until we see it, and even then we don't want to believe. How did you perceive the enemy? You know where you're going, but in a larger sense, what did you make of the war you were going to, or of the German people?

M: We felt very sorry for the German people. At least the girls I was with. We frequently had German prisoners over there that helped unload our luggage and helped with the manual labor.

T: So opportunities to see Germans in maybe a positive light?

M: We also saw them going through our garbage to get food. This always bothered me.

T: Why did it bother you?

M: I guess the idea that people go hungry, when there is food.

T: Martha, do you remember the trip across the Atlantic in December of 1944?

M: Yes.

T: What do you recall about that?

M: I remember the ship breaking down the first night. We woke in the morning, we could barely see the end of the convoy that we were supposed to have with to protect us, because the Germans were still active in the North Atlantic.

T: What kind of ship? This was the *Santa Paula*, is that right?

M: It was used in peacetime as a cruiser among the islands, Caribbean Islands. In nice weather, not in the North Atlantic in December (*laughs*).

T: Was this a smaller ship?

M: A smaller ship that bounced a lot.

T: So this was a rocky ride over there?

M: Very much so.

T: What kind of an impact did seasickness have on this trip?

M: I was on the ship twenty-four hours, and I was deathly seasick twenty-four hours. And then I worked in sickbay on the ship the rest of the way. It didn't make any difference how rough it got. I was fine.

T: As long as you were working

M: But that twenty-four hours was very miserable. Our bunks were three deep, and I was assigned to a top bunk. I knew I couldn't get up there, so I propped myself in the corner of the room against duffel bags. Someone had said to me, "Stay on your feet. Don't give up. You won't get seasick." The girls found me there. They finally rolled me into a lower bunk. *(pauses three seconds)* That twenty-four hours was just miserable.

(1, B, 449)

T: Now the quarters you were in, you mentioned bunks three high. Was this a larger room you were in, with a number of different bunks?

M: There must have been maybe eighteen.

T: So you're packed in there pretty good. Were there other units going across on the same ship?

M: Yes.

T: Men and women?

M: There were men, and there were other hospital units on there.

T: What did you do on board the ship? From your records, it looks like you were ten, eleven, twelve days on this ship.

M: You didn't have anything to do. Sunday, our chief nurse had informed us that everyone would be in Class A uniforms; which meant you had to dig around in your luggage to get out your skirts and Class A suits. Pull them out for Sunday.

T: It looks like from the information you gave me, you were scheduled to go to France, but were diverted to England instead because of the Battle of the Bulge [in December 1944]. You were then in England for a number of months, or in Wales actually. What kind of impression did England and Wales make on you?

M: We were fascinated by the cemetery. We were in sort of a small town. We used to wander in the church cemeteries and read all these old stones.

T: This is in Aberford, southwest Wales.

M: Southwest Wales. A couple times there must have been a bus... I know we got into a little town to go look around. I remember seeing a Singer sewing machine store in that little town, and I thought that was pretty amazing.

T: Did you have much contact with the local civilian population?

M: No. We were in a camp pretty much by ourselves.

T: What kind of work were you doing in the camp?

M: Nothing. Walking.

T: But there was no hospital facility there?

M: No. We finally went down to London. The nurses worked there to relieve the girls there, because they were getting Battle of the Bulge patients. Many of them had been working around the clock. We relieved in the general hospitals there.

T: It seems amazing, really, that you'd spend really weeks and weeks at Aberford, Wales when there was clearly a need for nurses somewhere else.

M: They had no way of getting us until they made arrangements to get us down to London. We were just parked.

T: How did you handle that? In a sense, you waited in the States, and now...

M: It was very frustrating. It was very frustrating. And it was cold. We had no way of heating our buildings. It was a damp cold. They finally decided that it was all right to let two of us sleep together so we could share our blankets. To keep warm.

T: So a lot of you were simply parked there waiting for something to happen.

M: True.

T: You wait a lot in the service, don't you?

M: You wait a lot (*laughs*). Hurry up and wait.

T: You did leave from Southampton [a port in southern England] and got into Le Havre, France, in February of 1945. And [according to your records] from then on it

looks like you moved around quite a bit as a nurse with your unit, which was the 119th Evacuation Hospital, semi-mobile. What does that mean, 'semi-mobile'?

M: The enlisted men kiddingly said this semi-mobile was the nurses' part. They were only half-moved over. I'm not sure what the Army meant by semi-mobile.

T: I'm just looking at a document that you've provided for me, and you were in France and then in Maastricht, the Netherlands, in February; in Mechelen, Belgium, in March; and in several different places in Germany during March and April. So you really moved around.

M: At the end of the war, we understood we were the most northern Americans [in Germany]. Beyond, north of us, were some British troops.

T: So you were fairly far north in Germany. When you got over to France, were you in what we might call a front line situation rather quickly?

M: No. You mean, did we hear shooting?

T: Let me first ask you to describe the kind of work that you were doing once you got over to France.

M: My assignment in the hospital was to have the equivalent of a recovery room.

T: For after surgery?

M: After surgery. So they limited the number of patients we had. In this tent, this ward, we tied the cots with a rope to keep them from spreading out completely. But if they were narrower, we could just set the stretchers on top of them. The patients stayed right on the stretchers, and then when they were able to be moved they were sent on back to general hospitals.

T: People who come to an Evacuation Hospital like yours, how many stops have they been to before they get to a facility like yours?

M: They wouldn't have had anything except field medics that treated them.

T: So yours is the first main stop these people would make?

M: Yes.

(1, B, 544)

T: What kind of casualties would arrive at an Evacuation Hospital like yours?

M: Almost anything. Amputees. They usually had to be removed. This was one of the most difficult things. We were all very young people, and to have to tell the patient when was waking up, and he wondered, and he would look and you had to tell him, "We had to take it off."

T: So you had people who were badly wounded?

M: Yes.

T: And some who maybe might not have been.

M: Yes.

T: You mentioned amputees. You weren't treating people right when they came off of the ambulances, but rather in the recovery room, after they had been through some kind of surgery.

M: Yes. I didn't work in surgery.

T: What was most difficult for you in your own job, in working in a recovery room?

M: There was only one of you. We had two nurses assigned, and we worked twelve-hour shifts. You worked very hard trying to get everything done. There was always so much to do that you couldn't do. Corpsmen were trying to very much be helpful. However, they hadn't had the training. They weren't through nurse's training.

T: Did you work seven days as well?

M: It depended. If you didn't get any casualties you might not work at all. And then they might have some in other parts of the hospital, but if there were no surgicals and you had gotten rid of all your patients, you might not have any.

T: So it could be a lot of business, in a sense, or none.

M: True.

T: So it really could differ like that. Martha, can you talk about a patient that sticks in your mind for some reason?

M: I remember two German prisoners that we had, and they were on oxygen. The corpsman realized the big tank of oxygen was getting low so he, being helpful, put in a new tank. The doctor came around and decided that maybe they needed a little more because their color wasn't too good, so he turned the supply up a little bit higher. A little later the anesthesiologist wandered through and he looked pale and looked just shaken. And he asked if we knew that he had hooked up a nitrous oxide tank instead of an oxygen tank. And these two patients, these two German

prisoners, had been getting nitrous oxide and they were both sound asleep. Nitrous oxide put them to sleep. It's an anesthetic. It was the first time that they had been quiet since they'd been there, because they were very demanding.

And the poor corpsman. I don't know how many adapters he had to use to make the tank fit, because normally they won't fit. They aren't interchangeable. The doctor that came around, he didn't notice that it was the wrong tank. I hadn't noticed it. Those two patients I'll always remember.

T: So you actually interacted with them, or could interact with them?

M: We tried to, but they couldn't understand. They couldn't speak English, or at least they wouldn't... except that they were just demanding things constantly. We didn't have time to...

T: Did you have Germans on a regular basis come through your facility?

M: Oh, yes.

T: How did that sit with you that you were treating the enemy?

M: It didn't bother me, because they were all patients. But you did try to keep them away from our patients. You put them in a corner, or separated them.

T: Why is that?

M: Because it would upset the patients.

T: Americans and Germans?

M: Yes.

T: Were other people less accepting than yourself of the fact that we were treating Germans?

M: No. I don't think so. I think they were all treated as patients.

T: Were there ever any problems with German POWs that came through your facility?

M: No. Not that I was aware of.

T: Was any kind of interpreter kept on hand to deal with language problems?

M: I could speak a little bit of German, so I could communicate with them.

T: Martha, did people die in your facility?

M: Yes.

(1, B, 608)

T: How do you deal with that?

M: You don't like to see it. It's depressing. You know there are going to be a lot of deaths.

T: Does that mean that one becomes immune to that after a while?

M: No. I think you just accept it. At this time in Germany the planes, we would hear flights of our Air Force going over to bomb northern Germany in the morning, and then at night you'd hear stragglers coming in, and you knew an awful lot of planes hadn't come back that had gone over in the formations. This was always rather depressing.

T: Hearing the planes going back.

M: A few at a time.

T: Did it get easier to handle, or to accept, death of people in your facility as you stayed in this job longer?

M: No. I don't think it ever got any easier. You just hoped there would be an end to it.

T: Did some people handle this more stoically, or with more resolve, than other people from what you observed?

M: I don't know. We all pretty much felt the same. That it should come to an end.

T: You had periods with lots of patients, other times you mentioned with fewer. When you had free time, whether it was in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, were you able to get off the compound at all?

M: Oh, yes. We could go walking.

T: Did you have any interaction with the local population?

M: Not really. I remember driving through a small town and seeing the first German prisoner... I mean a casualty... a soldier laying on the sidewalk. Dead. And the people that lived there were just going by. They weren't doing anything about it. And we knew he was dead. This was almost unbelievable.

T: And yet within weeks or months that you were dealing with wounded people or death on a regular basis.

M: Yes.

T: But the first one you saw made an impact on you.

M: This German laying there... He should have been buried.

T: You went through a number of countries. When you looked around and you passed through towns, what did you see?

M: It was fascinating coming back after the war. You came through a German town that had been badly bombed and the Germans were all out there, if nothing else, knocking the plaster off of bricks and stacking them up. They were busy rebuilding. You got to France and it was just the way it had been, when you went up there. I don't know who they thought would do it, but... *(laughs)*

T: You noticed a difference immediately between France and Germany. According to your records, it looks like you were in Germany for a number of months. You got there at the beginning of March 1945. What kind of impression did Germany make on you during the months you were there?

M: The fields that we saw, the plants... they were very, very industrious, very hard working.

T: Were you concerned more for your own safety when you were in Germany, as opposed to when you were in France or the Netherlands?

M: No. I guess I never worried too much. I just assumed that the Army would take care of us.

T: You were in a number of different locations. What was the most difficult location you were in? Do you remember one that sticks out as being really difficult to handle?

M: Could I show you a picture of it?

T: Please. *(pause to view photographs)* We have looked at some photos. I was wondering about photographs. Did you have a camera with you, Martha, when you were there?

M: Sometimes. I had a camera, but not always film.

T: Was film hard to come by?

M: Yes. And then you sometimes get film and it had been exposed or something. You didn't know.

T: So until you tried to develop it, you didn't know. I notice in some of the pictures there it showed your tents, your facilities. Can you describe your living facilities in these tents?

M: There were four of us to a tent, and you had the Army cots. You put your sleeping bag on the cot. You slept in your sleeping bag, or on top of it. You put your other things underneath the cot. That was pretty much it. We improvised places to hang a hangar.

T: You were pretty much living out of your field bag.

M: Yes.

T: How about the food? Was there a central kitchen facility?

M: Yes.

T: So you had hot meals every day?

M: Oh, yes.

(1, B, 681)

T: So you weren't eating C rations or anything.

M: We sometimes had those.

T: How about the living quarters? What kind of an adjustment was it to living with three other people in a tent?

M: Most of us, I think all the tents, you were divided so that two of you were on duty and two of you were off. Of course you had to respect the other people sleeping.

T: So when you were off duty you couldn't necessarily make a lot of noise in your tent.

M: No. You'd get outside.

T: Was there a place to hang out, to socialize or just to be off duty?

M: You'd like to get together with other people in other tents.

T: Did you do that yourself? Were you a social kind of person?

M: I could be by myself very well. I learned to knit and crochet. I did a lot of crocheting.

T: To keep yourself occupied?

M: Yes.

T: I noticed some pictures in your album there, and it appears you went a number of different places.

M: Oh, yes. I always very much liked to see what was going on.

T: Did you find other people who shared that interest with you?

M: Not always. If I didn't, I'd go by myself. I did this around Paris. There were things I wanted to see, and nobody wanted to go when I wanted to go or where I wanted to go. And I really never got lost on their transportation. I could read the maps. I didn't speak any French.

T: So you just went yourself?

M: Yes.

T: What were you looking for when you went to these different places? Were there certain things you were curious about?

M: I like to visit old churches. I remember going up on a Sunday afternoon and seeing Sacre Coeur [church in Paris], which I think is absolutely a fabulous church.

T: And I think your records said that you were in Paris in July of 1945. I think that's what the caption of your pictures said.

M: That's probably about right.

T: But also you had some pictures in there of places in Germany. You were in Hameln, for example, in Germany.

M: Yes.

T: What about these German towns? What kind of allure did they have for you? What were you looking for there?

M: Hameln was a lovely German town. It hadn't been bombed. It was really very lovely. That's where I was introduced to down, sleeping on the bed. We hadn't had sheets or anything like that for a long time.

T: When you went to these places, did you see many local people or did they kind of keep their distance?

M: No. I think in places like that they were very friendly, because they really hadn't been touched by any bombing or anything like that. There was no destruction there.

T: That would be different than places that had been, had seen something?

M: Yes.

T: As you got further east, did you encounter any Russians at all?

(1, B, 214)

M: Yes. There's pictures in my photo album of the Russians going across the bridge to go home.

T: What did you make of the Russians?

M: That was the only time that I remember them being... and if someone hadn't told me, I wouldn't have gotten the picture.

T: So there they were. We talked about your quarters and about the food. When you were working, how did your job change from day to day? Or was it pretty much the same?

M: You might have more patients. Some days you weren't as busy.

T: So there was a level of work, but the actual work that you were doing didn't change.

M: Pretty much the same.

T: How closely did you work with doctors?

M: They very much wanted to put their patients in that setup because they knew we didn't have as many. It was sort of like putting them in the recovery room, but if we got too many of them, we had to explain that we were only supposed to take the seriously ill. The really bad patients.

T: Are these patients that required a lot of care and a lot of attention from you?

M: Yes.

T: So how many could you realistically take care of at one time?

M: We might have ten or twelve in there.

T: That's a lot of work then.

M: Yes.

T: Can you recall specific people or specific cases that stick out in your mind? Things that would give a good indication of the kind of work you did, or the kind of problems that you faced?

M: I think that the young man that I had to tell that we had to take off his leg stuck with me, because he was such a young boy.

T: So he was injured, and he had his leg when he went to surgery, and when he woke up in the recovery room...

M: It was gone.

T: How do you break that kind of news to someone?

M: You just have to tell them. You hold his hand and you have to tell him that he has to have it taken off.

T: Do you remember how he responded when you told him that?

M: I don't remember that he said anything, except the look on his face was horrible. He felt so bad. You couldn't do anything about it.

T: Was that the case more than once, because you could only do so much for these people?

M: Yes.

T: Were there other amputees that you had to deal with?

M: Oh, yes.

T: So it wasn't the only time that you had to break the news to someone.

M: No.

T: How did people respond? If you can think of some cases of people actually responding to that kind of news.

M: I'm sure they don't want to believe it. I'm sure they wouldn't want to believe.

T: What other responses? Was there ever anger on someone's part?

M: I'm sure they were all angry that it had happened to them. But maybe relief that they were being taken care of. You couldn't spend enough time with them to really...

T: If you have ten or twelve you can't give one-on-one attention, can you? What other injuries or types of injuries did you frequently see?

M: There were burns, but they couldn't do much besides put dressing on them. I guess the amputees stick in my mind mostly. But we also had stomachs that had been shot. We tried to stabilize them enough to send them back to a general hospital.

T: So they would go from an evacuation hospital to a general hospital. Is that a more fixed structure?

M: Yes.

T: That really would be almost like a four-walls hospital.

M: Yes.

T: And they could stay there for much longer.

M: Yes.

T: So regardless of how badly these people were hurt, as soon as you could stabilize them you moved them.

M: We sent them back.

T: Which means that you never really saw people get better.

M: Oh, no.

T: Was that depressing?

M: No. You just hoped that they were well on their way to getting the treatment they needed.

T: The brief period of time that you saw people, and I guess it could have been what, a day, two days, three days, in and out?

M: Yes. It was never more than two days. I would think it was a matter of hours or a day.

T: So they really moved them through quickly.

M: Yes.

T: Did you have a chance to ever get to know any of the people?

M: No.

T: You had all these kind of nameless, faceless people.

M: Oh, yes.

T: Was that a problem?

M: No, because there's always somebody else coming.

T: I'm just thinking, in a general hospital you could almost get to know the person.

M: Oh, it was very different when we worked temporarily in general hospital...

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: I was just looking through some of the documents that you gave me here, and it mentions one case in Germany, in March 1945, that you took over one of the buildings of a hospital that housed crippled children, and insane, and deformed civilians.

M: Yes.

T: Were these patients still in the hospital when you moved in?

M: No, I don't believe so. I didn't see any. I'm sure they had been taken out before. I think the Army made arrangements when they took over the hospital.

T: So you had the facilities, but the German patients were already gone?

M: Right.

T: When you moved to a place, and you moved a number of times, how fast could you get your hospital up and operating?

M: I don't know. We could take in patients quite soon, before they had all the rest of it set up.

T: That would be done first, and that way you could treat people.

M: Yes.

T: It also says on the eighty of April, at Hameln, Germany, you were actually in buildings. You said you had your first chance to liberate German goods. I'm wondering if you recall what that was all about?

M: I don't remember that.

T: One thing about being in a hospital like this, it's close to the front line. Was there a time, or times, that you actually were close to, or came under attack yourself?

M: We weren't actually shot at. I remember going out one evening. We weren't very far from the hospital and we could see the fire from across the river. They were shooting at us. And there was a time when a plane, one of our planes, went down into, actually an ammunition dump that wasn't too far from our hospital, and we got bad burn casualties from that. There were a lot of deaths in that one. I don't know how many men were on the plane but...

T: But you could hear the ammunition dump explosion as well?

M: Yes.

T: What was a time where you personally felt fear, or that you were scared?

M: I think the only time I was really anywhere near being afraid was on the North Atlantic going over. When we were by ourselves in this little boat bouncing around *(laughs)*.

(2, A, 55)

T: That sounds like a miserable trip. When you actually were on the European continent...?

M: I never felt afraid. Even when we crossed the English Channel. I didn't worry about anything.

T: As you look back on it now, was your lack of worrying naïve, or was it justified?

M: *(laughs)* It may have been more naïve than...

T: On the continent, what was the greatest hardship that you faced?

M: I think being cold a lot of the time. I was cold a lot of the time. It wasn't really a hardship. Sometimes getting clothes washed was a hassle. Sometimes the only thing you had to wash in was a metal helmet.

T: How about bathing? Was there regular bathing?

M: Not all the time.

T: So it was an adjustment, it sounds like, to wearing clothes over and over.

M: Oh, yes.

T: And sleeping in a sleeping bag.

M: Yes.

T: And bathing when you could get the chance.

M: When you could.

T: Did some people adjust to this "roughing it" life better than others?

M: There were a few of them that did an awful lot of complaining, but there was really nothing you could do about it so you might just as well...

T: So being stoic was not a bad thing, was it?

M: No (*both laugh*). And you knew there was going to be an end to it. It wasn't going to be the rest of your life.

T: You arrived in France in February, when the fighting was still pretty intense. How long was it before you began to get the feeling that this was going to be over pretty soon?

M: We sometimes didn't get news until a couple of days later.

T: About what was going on with the war?

M: Yes. I seem to remember when [President] Roosevelt died [in April 1945] we didn't know about it for two days.

T: So being right in the middle of things, it wasn't always easy to figure out what was going on around you?

M: No. You didn't know.

T: Was that a good thing or bad thing?

M: I guess you sort of accepted it. This is the way it was. But you wondered. You hoped somebody knew what was going on.

T: You mentioned the death of President Roosevelt. We might as well move to that. Do you remember how you reacted when you heard the news the president had died?

M: As I said, it had already happened, so you just sort of went with it. We didn't know about it.

T: Did you have any reaction to that news when you did hear it?

M: We wondered what was going to happen, but I don't remember that there was a... I knew we were all puzzled that it took so long for us to find out. I think it was at least two days later.

T: At the same time, around April 1945, POW camps and concentration camps began to be liberated by Allied forces.

M: Yes.

T: Did you encounter any of the people who had been those kinds of camps?

M: Yes. I'll show you. Because they're buried there

T: At Gardelegen.

M: Yes. I know they aren't Americans. *(pause to look at photographs)*

T: We were looking at pictures of Gardelegen, Germany, where there was a camp that Martha was close to. And this was the end of April, or beginning of May 1945. Was that your first encounter, Martha, with a camp of this nature?

M: Yes. That's the only one.

T: What kind of emotions did this bring for you?

M: It made us sick to think... When we were told that these people were killed, a matter of a day before our American troops arrived...

T: And there were over a thousand people or something that were killed.

M: Yes.

T: Were you aware of any kind of retribution against the German civilian population?

M: No. Except that they had to furnish a clean, white sheet to wrap the bodies in. We knew what an effort this was for them to come up with something like that.

T: So the population was forced to be part of the burial.

M: To bury a body and care for it.

(2, A, 141)

T: Did you hear about this later, or did you know what was going on at the time?

M: We went to the building, a short time later, that they had been held in. A wooden barn.

T: This was right in, or right outside of, the town of Gardelegen?

M: Yes.

T: Did you look at the barn, or can you describe what you saw when you went there?

M: We could see the claw marks where they had, with their fingernails, scratched on the wood trying to break through, to get out from the inside.

T: Had they been burned inside or shot inside?

M: I think they'd been shot.

T: How did this change or alter your opinion of the Germans?

M: By this time we had already heard about the concentration camps. The tremendous loss of life that had been going on, that we just couldn't quite believe, and this was sort of... it was so close to us. It didn't seem real.

T: A sense of, "it can't possibly be true"?

M: True.

T: From the time you got to Europe to when you left, less than a year, did your opinion of the German people or of human nature in a larger sense change?

M: I guess I found it difficult to blame the German people, because we had been told and told that they couldn't do anything else, Hitler was running things, they would

be killed. We did feel--maybe it was my German background--I felt sympathy for them.

T: For the actual people.

M: Yes.

T: Could you feel sympathy for the German soldier when he came through your facility?

M: I guess I had to sort of take him as a patient. I think I treated them as well as I could.

T: What I hear you saying is, that approaching someone as a patient, once you put them in the category of patient, it didn't really matter to you who they were.

M: No. But if I had to make a choice, if I had only one pill and two people needed it, I'm sure I would give it to the American if he needed it.

T: Were you ever in that situation?

M: I wasn't. But I think that was the way I would react.

T: Were other people as fair as you from what you observed?

M: I think the group I was with were.

T: The patient, the category of patient, was what made the difference for you. Then you became nurse-patient regardless of how they got to you.

M: I did. Yes.

T: That's very interesting. Did ex-POWs come into your facilities, people who had been perhaps captured or interned by the Germans?

M: You mean Americans?

T: Yes. Or anybody else, actually, who had been in a German POW camp. As those were liberated, did any of these people come into your facility for treatment or care?

M: I think this group that I told you about, that wanted the head covers. I think they may have been held, but I'm not sure what nationality they were.

T: And they were not speaking English in any case.

M: No.

T: So you saw different people come through. And this is towards the end of the war too.

M: True.

T: Does this mean that once the war ended on May 8, 1945, that your job basically ended?

M: Yes. We got rid of our casualties. We waited for orders to do something.

T: So unlike people in a general hospital, who may have had people there for a much longer time...

M: They would have them for a long time.

T: Once things were over, your job was done.

M: So we got back to Paris, we caught up with some of these, and helped out with their work in general hospitals.

T: I'm wondering while you were at Camp Carson, or while you were at Fort Leonard Wood, or overseas, how did you stay in touch with your family and loved ones back home?

M: We wrote V-mail. It was all by mail.

T: Were you a regular letter writer?

M: Yes.

T: Who were you writing to when you were away?

M: Mostly my mother and dad. I did write to my brothers quite often.

T: When you wrote to them, what kind of things could you tell them?

M: Well, you couldn't tell them where you were. You had to be very careful about what you put in the letter. Let them know that you were fine.

T: So you practiced self-censorship, in a way.

M: Yes. Because if somebody else opened it, they'd cut it up.

T: So you expected, really thought that your mail would probably be read?

M: True.

T: Did you get a lot of mail from people, too?

M: It came in spurts. You'd get three or four letters, and then you wouldn't get any for a long time.

T: When you got letters did you read them in order?

M: Oh, yes.

T: And how important was mail to you?

M: It was always good to get. We also knew that it took a long, long time and a lot of it didn't get through.

T: So you thought that there was probably more than you were actually getting.

M: What was coming through.

T: What were you looking for in mail? Why was it important to you?

M: Just to know how your family was. This is all I really worried about.

(2, A, 225)

T: Would you say you were worried about your folks when you were overseas?

M: Not worried about them. But the back of your mind you had to think, goodness, if they died I couldn't even go. If they got sick, I couldn't go there and be there with them.

T: Did that bother you that that might have been the case?

M: Yes. You always thought about it.

T: Now your two brothers were home part of the time.

M: They were in the States.

T: So they never left the States, even when they were in the service?

M: No.

T: So you were the furthest one away.

M: Yes.

T: Martha, did you make lasting contacts during your time in the service? People you stayed in touch with afterwards?

M: Oh, yes. The group of nurses. We've gotten together for a reunion about five times, I think. Too many of them have died now or are handicapped. They can't travel. So we have a round-robin letter that goes around. I'm about due to get one now. Just about once a year. There's about a dozen of us still.

T: Did you stay in contact pretty much from the time you left Europe?

M: Yes.

T: Why did you stay in touch with people?

M: These were sort of special years. Special time. You did things together that you wouldn't be doing with anyone else. The girl that I came home with from France, we came home as casuals, we exchange Christmas letters still.

T: So fifty, sixty years later almost.

M: Yes.

T: So these were permanent friendships that you made over there.

M: True.

T: Were they different kind of friendships than people you were friends with in civilian life?

M: After you came home you probably only did this, except for the reunion, you did this by letter, because we were scattered all over the United States.

T: I've wondered, because you moved a lot when you got out of the service too. You were in Minot, North Dakota; Ann Arbor [Michigan]; Vancouver, Washington; Richmond, Virginia. Did you make friends there?

M: I did but there's no one still living.

T: I see. Did you say you had people you stayed in touch with?

M: I did in Vancouver. I had two friends there that I used to write with.

T: Was there a difference in the type of friends you made?

M: Yes.

T: Were the friends you made in Europe closer friends or deeper friendships?

M: Yes. Because we went through more together.

T: So the experience formed the friendship.

M: True.

T: When did your reunions start?

M: The first one was in San Antonio... no, they did one in Colorado. That was the first one, and that was in about 1978. I didn't go to that one. It was too soon after my husband died, and I just couldn't think of how to pack a suitcase to go on a trip. I was having a very hard time. Then we did San Antonio twice. We got up here once. Then we had one set up for Fresno, California, and we found out that there was only the girl that lives in Fresno, myself and maybe one from southern California that were going to be able to come. She wasn't sure. So the two of us decided we didn't need a reunion. The girl in Fresno died the next year. That's when we started the round-robin letter. We've been doing that since then.

T: When you attended the reunions, why do you think you went?

M: To rehash things. That's why my pictures are such a mess. They had gone down to Texas twice.

T: I see. So that album's been around. When the war in Europe ended, Martha, what do you remember about getting the news that the war was over?

M: It was a great relief. We immediately started wondering, "Are we going to have to go to the South Pacific?" Because we already knew about the point system. We didn't have very many points.

T: So the news of the end of the war in Europe was immediately tempered by, "Am I going to the South Pacific?"

M: Yes. And do we need to start getting the shots for the South Pacific, because we understood there were a mess of them to get.

T: As you started to think immediately about going to the South Pacific, what did that mean for you?

M: I think we really hoped that one war was enough. That we didn't have to go to that one.

T: Was it because the war in the Pacific in a sense scared you more, or was it that you'd had your fill of war?

M: I think we were ready to go home.

(2, A, 294)

T: So not necessarily that the war in the Pacific that you wanted to avoid, but just that you had enough of the war itself.

M: Yes, I think we just wanted to go home. I think there was the other confusion. Every day they'd change the points. If you had been told the first day now you're going to go and get your shots and then you move on, this would have been one thing, but now there was this sitting around. Then they changed the points, they upped them or lowered them. And you never knew. Of course rumors were running around. The rumor was, you were going to have to start getting your shots.

T: So this uncertainty was perhaps more troubling than just knowing for sure?

M: I think this was it. I think if we'd been told to begin with that this is what was going to happen we would have accepted it.

(2, A, 305)

T: But you couldn't really adjust for anything.

M: No.

T: You didn't go to the Pacific, because on August 14, 1945, V-J Day came. And you were, I think you told me earlier, you were in a train?

M: On the way back from the Riviera, in the south of France.

T: How did that news strike you? Or how did you react to that news that the war in the Pacific was over?

M: That was like the fourth of July. The friend that I'd gone with, we thought this was marvelous. Now we were all through with this. No more wondering.

T: This is ironic. Having fought the European war, the war against Japan ending had more of an impact on you, I'm hearing, than V-E Day.

M: Yes.

T: Very interesting. What was the reaction of those around you in your unit to this news?

M: We were on this train, so there was only the two of us until we got back to camp. Which was probably the next day.

T: Hadn't you told me that the 119th had moved out already, anyway?

M: They had picked up high-pointers and gone back.

T: Then they were not going to the Pacific.

M: No.

T: You were hanging around because you might be?

M: Yes.

T: And you would have gone with another unit?

M: Be assigned to another unit.

T: It was December 1945 before you returned to the States, so you killed a number of months in Europe.

M: Lived in Paris, and in hospitals.

T: Did you like Paris?

M: I enjoyed being there. The French people were still quite happy to have us around. I understand things changed after.

T: Did your job change in Paris? You weren't working in an evacuation hospital any more.

M: The general hospital.

T: So you had casualties, longer term casualties, who were still there.

M: True. We had people that were just (*sighs*) tired. We had some Red Cross volunteer workers that were looking for a good place to live, so they had a hospital room.

T: They didn't really need to be there.

M: No.

T: Were you under-worked or over-worked at this time?

M: We were under-worked. We were responsible for a ward, but you might have a half a dozen patients. People there that were living there. There weren't very many very sick patients in that hospital.

T: And you were there for a couple months, right?

M: Yes.

T: What an adjustment, from really serious work to, what sounds like, little work.

M: Yes.

T: Martha, what was your initial reaction to being back in the States when you got here at the end of 1945?

M: It was Camp Kilmer, outside New York. I was very impressed with sailing past the Statue of Liberty. And the boats all came out and everybody was tooting the horns. That was very nice coming back. But then we hoped that we could go into New York for New Year's Eve. And we were restrained, or restricted, to the camp there. So I decided to try to call my folks to tell them I was home. And my mother is very hard of hearing. She was really deaf in one ear. They didn't hear the phone ring. I let it ring and ring and ring (*laughs*). They didn't answer the phone (*laughs*). That was New Year's Eve.

T: You could have gotten out of the military pretty soon after you got back.

M: True.

T: And yet you decided to stay in the Army for another year.

M: Mostly because I couldn't quite decide what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to do something special. I didn't want to just go back to plain nursing.

T: So you wanted to stay in the nursing field...

M: True.

T: But you wanted to do something special? Is that the word you want to use?

M: Yes. And I didn't think I wanted to just go and get a degree. I knew I had the GI Bill that I could use.

T: But you wanted to do something.

M: Yes.

T: When you say something “special,” what do you mean by that?

M: I wanted something that moved along. That’s when I decided I thought I would enjoy anesthesia. This was quite a challenge.

T: Are you saying in a sense that, having been in a high energy nursing situation, you didn’t want to go back to just being a regular nurse in a small town somewhere?

M: True.

T: That’s an interesting effect of the war. So you came back a different person?

M: I think so. I think so. I think you really grew up, because you were brand new graduates and you got over there, and you were expected to know and do a lot.

T: Right away. So you came back looking for... something. And you stayed in the Army for a year. Did the Army satisfy that “something special” urge that you had?

M: No.

T: That was an easy answer! *(both laugh)* You were at Percy Jones General Hospital, in Battle Creek, Michigan.

M: True.

T: How did you adjust to being in that kind of environment after being in Europe?

M: It was a little difficult. I wanted something a little more exciting than the regular shifts. It was sort of like going back to St. Joe’s.

T: So, in a sense, what some people may have craved, peace and quiet, that was not what you wanted.

M: No.

T: And this Percy Jones General Hospital didn’t do this for you.

M: No. I met some friends, or patients I became good friends with. I don’t write to them now, but I did for a long time. They were in for a long time. They had to have amputations revised and surgery, plastic surgery, that type of thing. So you got to know them quite well.

T: Unlike your time in Europe, where you didn’t get a chance to know people very well. That was a change.

M: Yes. That was rather nice.

T: How did you adjust in your personal life to being back in the States again? You couldn't travel to Paris and the Riviera any more.

M: No. I'd never been to Ann Arbor. I enjoyed being around there.

T: So you traveled in Michigan as well.

M: Yes.

T: You weren't married until 1955, so you were a single person. Were you living on your own by this time as well, or did you live in Army quarters in Michigan?

M: You had quarters that you lived in at Percy Jones, and later when I went to Ann Arbor they only had a few rooms for the nurses in the nurse's quarters. So I had to get an apartment there. I went to Ann Arbor, this university town, in September thinking I could find an apartment.

T: Wrong month to go.

M: Oh, my.

T: That's the University of Michigan there.

M: I know. I thought I was going to live in my car for a while.

T: Did you go right to Ann Arbor right after Percy Jones in 1947?

M: No. No.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

T: When you moved to the Twin Cities in 1947, you got out of the Army in January of 1947, out of active duty, did you go back and live with your folks right away or did you find an apartment here on your own?

M: No. I stayed in Howard Lake for a few weeks. A surgeon in Willmar [Minnesota] knew I was home and he told a friend of his in Watertown that they had known me in Watertown. I went to work for this doctor. Actually he had a large converted house that he made into a small hospital, and I went and worked for him until I found out what I was going to be doing. And I had just done this on a temporary basis. That's when I decided no, I was going to go into anesthesia.

T: Did you have to find a place to live on your own then in Minneapolis, where you decided to go to school?

M: But there I had a sleeping room in a private home in Watertown.

T: So you still didn't have to find a place to live or anything?

M: No.

T: When you got into civilian life, in general, what was the hardest thing for you readjusting to civilian life now?

M: I don't think I had much trouble adjusting to civilian life.

T: And you were still pretty much in the same line of work.

M: True.

T: And that was a job in demand, so finding employment wasn't a problem.

M: No. This has never been a problem.

T: Different than some other people who were not in nursing. Did you face any difficulties being out of the service and trying to make your way in school?

M: No. I had sent enough money home. I had money withheld from my checks and my dad deposited that for me, so that when I went into anesthesia I could buy a car. Fifteen hundred dollars I needed.

T: And you could pay cash for that?

M: I paid cash, and I've never bought a car since then that I couldn't pay cash for. *(laughs)* If I can't pay cash, I don't get it.

T: Was it hard to get a car even if you had cash?

M: Yes.

T: So you couldn't just walk in and say, "I'll take one."

M: No.

T: Do you remember that experience of getting a car?

M: Yes. The dealer in Howard Lake... I got a Plymouth... and he sent me to a friend of his, a dealer in Minneapolis. He traded two of them then. I know a friend of mine got a car and she got... they had wooden bumpers on it. They didn't have metal to

make... big blocks of wood were bolted to the front end for the bumpers. You didn't have much choice. A two-door Plymouth.

T: And this was 1947, several years after the war, and still getting a car was not a matter of just having the money. You had to have connections, it sounds like.

M: Yes.

T: One thing I wanted to ask to conclude here. When you were in the service and when you were in the war, what did the war mean for you personally? In other words, what was that all about?

(2, B, 458)

M: I knew Hitler had to be stopped. I lost some very dear friends in the war.

T: People you knew as a child?

M: I'd known them for some time. I had a boyfriend that was a navigator on a B-24 Liberator [four engine heavy bomber] that went down. I got word of that two days after I arrived at Camp Carson, Colorado.

T: You'd known him pretty well?

M: Yes. A friend in another plane sent word to his folks that he had seen the plane go down. No parachutes came out. He wanted them to know, so that they didn't just...

T: Wondering whether he was missing or captured?

M: Yes.

T: How did you take that news?

M: It's really very odd, because he, his father was American. His mother was French. His father married her in Paris after World War I. And he was named after the ship they came back to the States on. His first name was Antigone, the name of the ship. And he went back over there. The plane went down in France.

T: That was a personal impact for you?

M: Very much so.

T: Did hearing about this or getting news yourself about loved ones or friends, did that change how you viewed the war or how you saw your place in it?

M: *(pauses eight seconds)* I kept thinking, I guess, that if we had done something sooner maybe it wouldn't have gotten so bad. I don't know. I get disturbed, and then you read the Old Testament and you know that it's never going to be different. It's been that way since the beginning of time.

T: What do you think is the most important way that the war changed your life?

M: It certainly made me grow up in a hurry.

T: You were twenty-two when you went into the service.

M: I guess I just wonder, I look at young people come thrashing around and I think well, I guess I never went through that. I decided, "This is what I was going to do and..." I hope we don't have another one, but I'm afraid we will.

T: Would you say, again, that you were a different person after the war than you had been before?

M: *(pauses eight seconds)* I don't know. *(pauses five seconds)* I guess not. My religion is much more important, my faith is much more important, but I guess it always has been.

T: Were you a person who attended church regularly before you went in the service?

M: Always. Yes.

T: When you were in service, did you attend chapel regularly?

M: Always. I remember how a couple of times in the middle of the week I'd get a call to report to the chief nurse, and we'd go down and we'd find out that this Missouri Synod Lutheran chaplain had looked us up and he was going to have a communion service for us.

T: You identified yourself on some documents, is that how they knew who you were?

M: Yes. They knew this. He must have had this information. This happened two or three times.

T: You attended chapel regularly when you were in service?

M: Yes. We had our own chaplain. Perkins. I had a little card made up, "Perk up with Perkins." *(laughs)* I think he was a southern Baptist.

T: So it didn't matter what denomination.

M: No.

T: When you went to chapel, what were you looking for?

M: Strength for the day.

T: Did your experience in France test your faith?

M: It's sort of hard to realize that the things are happening. You have to keep telling yourself, "God is still in control."

T: Was that hard sometimes?

M: You'd see an awful lot, but then I do heal. September 11 [2001] I have a hard time understanding.

T: At the conclusion, when you were coming back to the States, had your faith changed in some way?

M: No. I think maybe it was stronger than ever.

T: Do you think having been a religious person made your experiences in Europe easier?

M: Oh, I think you have to have it. Yes, I think it did.

T: Something to lean on?

M: Yes.

T: Very interesting. Any final things you want to add before we conclude?

M: That certainly made me remember lots of things.

T: Hopefully in a good way. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW