

U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY WITH CAPT (ret) ANN BERNATITUS, NC, USN

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**Interview with CAPT Ann Bernatitus, NC, USN, (Ret.), World War II nurse, 25 January 1994, Exeter, PA.**

**Were you born in Pennsylvania?**

I was born in this house. This is the old family homestead. Mother and Dad built it. I think it was built about 1905. Nobody has lived here but the Bernatitus family.

**When did you decide you wanted to be a nurse?**

I always wanted to be a nurse. There was nothing else for girls to do in those days but be a school teacher or a nurse. My parents couldn't afford to send me to college. My school friend, whose mother was a widow, told my mother, who was also a widow, to let me go for training. My mother then decided to let me go for training locally. That girl went to New York for her training.

**Where did you go?**

I trained at what was then the Wyoming Valley Homeopathic Hospital in Wilkes-Barre. While I was in training, someone from the Army came to Mercy Hospital to talk about military nursing and we had to go. That was where I got the idea of the Navy. In those days, things were pretty bad.

**That was during the Depression.**

Right. There were no jobs for nurses. If you were one of the old timers, maybe. They had private duty nurses in those days but only the rich could afford them. I wasn't thinking about going in the service at that time. It wasn't until after I graduated. I had no job. I then decided to take a post-graduate course in operating room technique and management at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate Hospital in Philadelphia at 19th and Lombard. I applied and was accepted for a 6-month course.

Even after I finished that, there were still no jobs. First of all, I think I was too young at that time to get a job as a supervisor of an operating room. I stayed on at Penn and did general duty for \$45 a month and my board.

**When was that?**

I went in training in '31 and I graduated in '34 but, as I said, I stayed on. I saw an ad in one of the nursing magazines that said they would find you a job so I applied. One day I got a telegram saying there was an opening for a staff nurse, not a supervisor, but a staff nurse in the operating room at the New Rochelle hospital in New York

for \$80 a month and board. I grabbed it. So I went to New Rochelle and worked in the operating room there rather than being a staff nurse. I was doing what I had trained for.

After so many months, I realized I would have to get New York registration to be able to stay on there. At that time, I got a letter from my former director of nurses at Wyoming Valley saying she would give me a job as an operating room supervisor at the Nanticoke State Hospital in the area. But they would only pay me \$70 a month. But I took it mainly because my mother felt better that I was close to home and not out in the big city. The superintendent who gave me the job had been an ex-Army nurse back during World War I.

I think at that time I had written for an application to join the Navy Nurse Corps. For the longest time, I didn't hear from them. So I wrote a second time and finally got an application form from the Bureau [of Medicine and Surgery]. I had to go to Philadelphia for a physical.

**Did you have to take some kind of examination?**

No. This was in '36. What was happening after World War I, like always, is like we're doing right now, cut, cut, cut. Somewhere along the line, I had heard that there were only 325 nurses in the Nurse Corps. Some had resigned after World War I and some had been furloughed. They were slowly calling them back. And they were also accepting new applicants. It seems that I went for the physical exam on the first of September, and on the 25th I was on my way to the Naval hospital in Chelsea, MA.

**How did the Navy brand of nursing differ from what you had experienced before?**

First of all, I had been working in the operating room which meant my job was different from a regular staff nurse that was out taking care of patients. In those days, when you joined the Navy, you were on 6 month's probation. That was the stipulation. For those first 6 months, you wore the uniform and hat you graduated with and had in civilian life. They put you on a ward with an older nurse and you just learned the language and the routine.

**Of course, that was the era before Navy nurses even had ranks. You were probably addressed as Miss Bernatitus.**

Right. In those days we were neither fish nor fowl. We were not officers and we were not enlisted. We were in between. We did not get the pay of an officer but we got more than the enlisted.

**So there you were at Chelsea, a provisional nurse. How long**

**were you there?**

I was there the first 6 months. Then the Navy would decide whether to keep you or throw you out. New nurses were coming into the Corps roughly every 2 to 4 weeks. I found myself supervising the corpsmen and keeping the books. Every morning you went on duty and had to count all the blankets, the thermometers. I think we had to count the glasses. And then you had to scrub the floors. You had to keep the curtains at the windows just so.

**They had inspections?**

Only once a week on Friday when the captain and chief nurse would come through. When the chief nurse visited the ward every morning, you had to accompany her, as the nurse on the ward. You stopped at every bed to tell her what was wrong with the patient and how he was getting along. Maybe what medications he was getting. Not like now.

**And you were responsible for so many corpsmen?**

Yes, so many corpsmen who were assigned to that ward. You taught them how to do things and saw that they did them. There were times you actually did nursing--took care of a patient. If there was a critically ill patient, you took care of him yourself.

**How long were you at Chelsea?**

Exactly 2 years. If you were the youngest nurse on duty, you took turns doing morning duty and afternoon duty, and then we all took turns doing night duty. It was the older nurses that got the assignment for straight morning duty, no afternoon duty. We worked from 8 to 3, and the afternoon nurses worked from 3 to 10. The night nurse came on at 11 and stayed until 7 or 8 the next morning.

All of a sudden, we had nurses assigned to the linen room. You had to check it out to see if it was all there and what condition it was in. There was a seamstress to mend it if necessary. And, by golly, I got assigned to this job as straight morning duty. A lot of the older ones didn't know what that was all about.

**That was considered to be a plum assignment?**

Oh, sure. Then they decided to open some World War I buildings. They had no dispensary. They had a dispensary in the Navy Yard at Charlestown but they didn't have a hospital for dependents. So they decided to open a hospital for dependents but did so before it was really set up. Then they hired some civilian nurses to come in and run it. That turned out to be a disaster. The nurses couldn't understand the Navy way of doing things. Finally, one day I went

down for lunch and on the bulletin board was a note from the chief nurse. It said, "Miss Bernatitus, see me in my suite." I thought, "What did I do now?" I went in and found that they had decided to put a Navy nurse in charge of the other nurses in the dependent hospital and I was it. I looked at her and said, "I don't know anything about obstetrics. I'm an operating room nurse." She said, "Tomorrow morning you go over there." So I did. They put me in charge of the two floors. The lower floor was an outpatient clinic and an older nurse was assigned there. There was a death in her family and she had to go on emergency leave and never came back. So I ended up with the first floor too. And that's how I ended up with three floors.

After that I got orders to go to Annapolis.

**When was that?**

In 1938. The Navy was a real nice place in those days. The nurses lived separately; they had their own mess. You were served; the food was always good. Life was good.

**Was it as good when you got to Annapolis?**

Yes. Annapolis was a smaller station. In Chelsea, the building we were quartered in was at least 100 years old. The rooms were enormous with big, high ceilings and big windows. At Annapolis, we all had individual rooms. The place was beautiful. We could date the midshipmen. Some midshipmen would get their eye on you and then you were "dragged" to the hops at the Academy. You had to walk from the nurse's quarters across the drill field to get to the dancing place. It was very nice. You learned a lot. I was exposed to things I had never been exposed to before. The older nurses would feel sorry for you and take you places. It was such a nice, close group all the time. You knew everybody in the house.

**How long were you there?**

I was there maybe 2 years. I remember at that time the Nurse Corps would send nurses to George Washington University for a course in dietetics. And they'd send nurses elsewhere for a course in physiotherapy. At that time they were looking for nurses to sign up for these courses. The announcements were on the bulletin board. At that time I was relieving in the diet kitchen. The chief nurse kept asking me whether I wanted to go to dietetic school. I had filled out the form we used to get every year asking us where we wanted to go next. I had the Philippines down. "Suppose I go to dietetic school and there was an opening in the Philippines, I wouldn't get it." So I didn't sign up and sure enough, I got the Philippines.

**How did you get there?**

I didn't have much of a vacation. I had to go to Norfolk, VA, to the hospital there to meet the other nurse who was going with me, Mary Chapman, and get the ship. We went over on the *Chaumont* (AP-5). I think I took an overnight ferry from Baltimore to Norfolk and met Mary there. We stopped at Guantanamo Bay and then through the [Panama] Canal.

I wasn't a sailor and didn't enjoy the trip. I was seasick all the time.

**Did you stop at Pearl Harbor?**

Yes. We had marines aboard they were taking to Midway, where they went ashore. Then we went on to Guam and arrived in the Philippines in July 1940.

**What was your impression of the Philippines?**

I had no idea what the Philippines looked like; I hadn't read up on it or anything. Of course, somebody met us at the dock to take us to Canacao. All I can remember is the smell of copra which seemed to be everywhere. The nipa huts, the kids running around naked. The houses on stilts, the carabao. But life was very good out there too. We went to work at 8 o'clock. You went to lunch and then didn't have to go back on duty.

**You had the afternoon off?**

Yes, because only one nurse had to go back to supervise. We had golf, bicycling, swimming. You could go to the markets if you wanted to. For \$5 a month you took your shoes, put them outside the door, and the houseboys would take them downstairs, polish them up, and when we got back they would be sitting by your door. It was the same with the women who did your laundry. On your way to work you dropped it off in the washroom and when you returned there it was all pressed for you. Just before war was declared, we had one shop across from the Army and Navy Club run by a Jewish woman originally from Philadelphia named Rosie. Nothing was on display. She would say, "I've got just the thing for you. You might go in to buy a pair of stockings and you would come home with an evening dress. She would serve you a drink first. Anyway, I bought this two-piece slacks suit. Rosie was taken prisoner and I don't know how many years later, I get a bill from Rosie. Apparently, she had kept her records and the bill came from Philadelphia.

**You probably had signed a chit for that dress.**

Sure. That's all you ever did.

**Did you have individual rooms there?**

Yes. Did Dorothy [Still Danner] or Bertha [Evans St. Pierre] tell you how we found out that the war had started?

**Bertha said that her boy friend at Cavite phoned her.**

Ed. Yes. He called her around 6 o'clock in the morning. The telephone was downstairs on the first floor. And she came running up the steps and into my room. "Ann, war's been declared."

**Even before you got to the Philippines, had you been hearing anything about war?**

I don't recall when we were going out. But one thing happened that made us aware that something was cooking. Mary Chapman was going to get married and had put in her resignation. When the *Chaumont* would come in, somebody already had their orders to go back but the ship always brought someone out as a replacement. The chief nurse Miss [Laura] Cobb had us at a meeting and said, "I would suggest that anything you have, you pack up and ship back. Mary Chapman was going to be on that boat so I packed up a Hong Kong chest that someone had picked up for me and all the other things I had bought from the Chinaman who used to come to the nurse's quarters. He came with his valises packed with linens and things and he would spread them on the floor. And he'd tell us to just sign the chit. You wouldn't have to pay for the things right then. So I packed all these things up and sent them with Mary Chapman's things.

**Did the stuff go out with the *Chaumont*?**

Yes.

**But Mary Chapman didn't.**

No. I'll tell you why she didn't. When we heard about Pearl Harbor, they started sandbagging around the hospital because it wasn't on a solid foundation, just on these corner posts that held it up. And it was a three-story building. They assigned us so many hours duty and then somebody would come and relieve us. I remember I was coming off duty some time in the early morning hours when the siren went off that the planes were coming to bomb Nichols Field. When the war was declared all the patients who could go back to duty were sent back to duty. They sent the Filipinos home. Anybody who couldn't be moved ended up under the hospital.

**They put them under the hospital, protected by sandbags?**

Yes. I stayed there, I don't remember how long because I had

started to go over to the nurse's quarters already. The captain then decided to evacuate the patients to Sternberg hospital in Manila. He decided that two nurses and two corpsmen had to accompany them.

**Were the patients transported by ambulance?**

I don't recall, but we went by car. Laura Cobb lined us up in the living room asking for volunteers to go. First thing you know, Mary Chapman volunteered. There were no other volunteers. I don't remember how many times she said, "Who's going to volunteer?" Nobody would. So, I got real bright and said, "Why don't you make us draw straws? Then no one can ever come back at you and say, "If you hadn't made me do this, this wouldn't have happened." Laura thought that was a good idea. So she went out to the other room and got long applicator sticks with cotton on the end and held them in her hands like this. And she went over to Goldia O'Haver. Goldia then pulled one out. It was long so she knew she didn't have to go. She came to me and I pulled the short one. So I had to go.

That afternoon they took us to the nurse's quarters at Sternberg. You wouldn't believe it. When those nurses came off duty, they always served tea and those nurses were having tea. War had been declared and they were having tea.

**Was that on the 9th?**

Yes. It must have been. It was the day after the war began that the decision was made to evacuate the patients. (referring to a document) Those 68 enlisted men and veterans who were ambulatory went back to their ships on December 8. Nichols Field was bombed on the 9th. The remaining patients were transferred to Army Sternberg Hospital to be accompanied by two corpsmen and two nurses.

When we got to Sternberg they had us in some kind of a barracks for the Navy patients. Mary Chapman, who was senior to me, took morning duty and I had to take night duty. I have it here (again referring to document). We were located in one of the barracks recently vacated by the Philippine Scouts. On December 10, the Japanese bombed the Navy Yard at Cavite on Sangley point.

**You were at Sternberg while all that was going on.**

Yes. We were out in the courtyard of the nurses' quarters watching all this. There were fox holes dug there. It says here, (referring to the document) they were bombed by approximately 125 planes flying at 20,000 feet. The patients who were brought in were given first aid at the Navy Hospital and transferred to Sternberg immediately. On the 11th of December medical personnel at Canacao evacuated and reported to Sternberg in Manila. Within 2 or 3 days

of reporting, CAPT [ ] Davis received orders to establish a temporary hospital at Balintawok. That was just outside Manila. One half of the Navy medical personnel went with the group. I think that was Laura Cobb, Margaret Nash, Eldene Paige, Bertha Evans, Edwina Todd, and Helen Gorzalanski.

**You were still at Sternberg at this time?**

Yes. This was where we separated. (again referring to document) Those remaining were divided into teams and assigned to units being set up in other areas of Manila. Dorothy Still, Susie Pitcher, and Edwina Todd went to the Jai Lai Club. Mary Chapman and Mary Harrington went to Holy Ghost. Dorothy Still and I originally were to go to Santa Scholastica with Dr. Carey Smith and Dr. Claude Fraley and Corpsmen Jones and Cary.

Santa Scholastica College was a girl's school located in the vicinity of the Philippine General Hospital. We two nurses and the two corpsmen were on the bus just about to leave when someone came aboard and told Dorothy that she was being reassigned to Jai Lai.

**So, the two of you were on the bus with the doctors and corpsmen.**  
Yes.

**And someone came on the bus and told her that she should report to the Jai Lai Club?**  
Yes.

**So, you were now the only nurse on the bus with the two doctors and two corpsmen?**

Yes. When we got to the school [Santa Scholastica] we found other medical personnel were there already setting up the hospital unit. Our job was to set up the emergency operating room facility. I don't recall our living quarters, but apparently they were adequate. Since we were the only Navy personnel, we formed a kind of clique. In the evenings we got together and sat out on the lawn.

**About this time, General MacArthur declared Manila an open city.**

That's when all this happened. And why did I get picked to go to Bataan? Only for one reason. When he declared Manila an open city, they were sending surgeons out to Bataan. They weren't picking general medical men. The fact that I had been Dr. Smith's ward nurse and I had the background in operating room, he picked me.

**It all boils down to this. Since you had worked for Carey Smith as a surgical nurse, he knew you, he had worked with you. And since**

he was going, you were the logical choice.

Yes.

Bertha Evans told me that everyone at these remote locations in Manila were awaiting orders and there were no orders. There was so much confusion. The Army marched their patients down and put them on a hospital ship. As Bertha recalled, "What about the Navy patients? What's supposed to happen to them?" Nothing happened. They sat there. Is that how you remember it?

I wasn't with them. That was the whole trouble. (referring to her document) On December 22, Dr. Smith informed me about 7 p.m. that Manila was to be declared an open city and that surgical units were selected to go to Bataan on Christmas Eve. Our unit was included.

So you and Dr. Carey Smith and Dr. Fraley, Jones, and Carey, as part of that unit, were to go to Bataan.

Yes.

Dr. Smith told you that you had been selected. Who gave him the orders?

Whoever was in charge of Santa Scholastica. The Army was there so I don't know. (referring to document) It says here that on the 24th we left at 6 a.m. and were taken to Jai Lai, where the convoy was to form to go to Bataan. Being alone, I sat on the curb to get out of the way, when one of the Navy nurses, Dorothy Still, assigned to Jai Lai, came out and found me. She wanted to know what I was doing there. I told her I was going to Bataan. She asked me where it was and I told her I had never heard of it until 2 days ago. At that time, I recall walking into the Jai Lai building to see how they had set up approximately 100 beds on the porch. This is in Dr. Davis' diary. It was about this time that Dr. Davis at the Philippine Union College in Balintawok received orders to evacuate the patients and personnel to Santa Scholastica. According to a newspaper article on 3/17/46 by CAPT [Lea] Sartin, approximately 160 Navy and 100 Army patients were treated and facilities were prepared for 700. CAPT Davis ordered the Canacao unit to stay together and serve until further orders came. New orders never came.

**What about the convoy to Bataan?**

It formed up at Jai Lai.

**Did you see the other nurses?**

No. Just Dorothy. I was waiting on the curb to get on the bus

to go to Bataan.

**So you never saw any of them until after the war?**

Yes. That's right. Anyway, the convoy took off for Bataan. There were 24 Army nurses, 25 Filipino nurses, and me, the 1 Navy nurse. As we passed through the villages, the natives came out and cheered us giving us the "V" for victory sign. Many times during the trip the bus would have to stop and we would dive into gutters along the roadside because the Japanese planes were overhead. Late that afternoon we arrived at Camp Limay, Hospital Number 1. There were 25 wooden, one-story buildings, 15 of them wards. A water pipe outside each ward provided water. The utility room for the bedpans and what have you was the back porch. The buildings were in a rectangle with the operating room building at the upper end with a generator and water towers alongside. At the farther end was the building housing the nurses' quarters and the officer's mess hall. The remaining buildings were along each side. Behind the buildings on the left side of the beach was a warehouse in which were stored the equipment and supplies for the hospital. In the center of this area was grass and trees and foxholes dug everywhere. We were assigned two to a room. My roommate was Arlene Ellen Francis.

The first few days I was assigned ward duty but this was changed and I was reassigned to the operating room. You know, they really left me alone. I only worked when Dr. Smith worked. He was the one who took care of me. The Army nurses didn't bother me. I was a member of Dr. Smith's team.

Let me go on. (continues reading from document) Everyone was involved in setting up the hospital. All the supplies and equipment were crated and stored in the warehouse on the beach. The crates were neither marked nor stored as units so the Navy crates had to be opened before you found the items for your particular unit. I recall a crate being opened and in it were surgical gowns wrapped in newspapers dated 1917.

The operating room was a long narrow building with approximately seven or eight tables set up in the center. Along the window openings were the cabinets with supplies. There were shutters with a stick to keep them open. I'm a bit vague on how we sterilized the gauze and linen but it seems to me it was done in pressure cookers operated by kerosene. The instruments were sterilized by placing them in a foot tub filled with lysol, then rinsed in alcohol. The period of sterilization depended on how fast they were needed. As the patients were brought in they were assigned to a table by Dr. Weinstein of the Army Medical Corps. The team assigned to that table took care of the patient regardless of what type of surgery was indicated.

Casualties were heavy and the operating room was an extremely busy place.

We got there on December 24th. On January 23, 1942, Camp Limay moved to Little Baguio farther down the peninsula. We had two meals a day: 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. The wards were just concrete slabs with corrugated roofs. They were open on the sides. The operating room was on a little knoll.

On March 30, the hospital was bombed, even though the warehouse on the beach had a big red cross.

**You were there when the bombs dropped.**

Are you kidding? Outside the operating room was a bench. I almost killed myself trying to get under that bench.

**Did you hear the planes coming?**

Yes. The alarm would sound and then you could hear the bombs coming down--a whistling sound. On April 7 the Japanese apologized. It had been a mistake. That hospital was right next door to the ammunition dump.

**I imagine there were killed and wounded.**

Oh, yes. Every operating table would be filled. They would come in from the field all dirty. You did what you could. There were lice; I kept my hair covered all the time. He did a lot of leg amputations because we had a lot of gas gangrene out there. I remember one patient we were operating on. Dr. Smith didn't want to sew him back up. He had died. I remember telling him that I didn't want him to do that if anything happened to me. He said, "I'll sew him up just to shut you up." We were washing the dirty dressings that they used during an operation. We would wash them out and refold and sterilize them and use them again.

**The operating theater and everything were right out there in the open? No screens or anything?**

No. It was just the wards that were open. The OR was in a building. It was at Limay where we had the long row of tables. At Little Baguio it was in a building. I can't remember exactly how many operating tables we had. As you walked in, there was a setup for ear, nose, and throat.

**What were you eating?**

I remember Dr. Fraley would go down to Mariveles scrounging for food. One time he came back with lemon powder. After that, everything was lemon. After I got home I didn't want any lemon.

**When did you write this document? (examining the paper she is reading from) It's dated November 26, 1975.**

Yes. I've added on to it from time to time when I would get some other document, like Sartin's diary.

**You said the Japanese apologized after the attack on Little Baguio.**

That was on March 30. On April 7, the following week, they bombed us again. It was terrible. By that time, they had stopped advancing for awhile. Things were kind of quiet at the front lines. But we were getting a lot of patients with malaria, dysentery, all that. We ran out of beds. You'd go to bed at night and when you awoke the next morning you'd get out there and there would be all these two or three-decker bunks made of wood and patients in them. There wasn't much surgery going on, but the nurses taking care of the sick were very busy.

When Dr. Smith was operating, Dr. Fraley got the job of being an assistant to the colonel in charge of the whole outfit, COL Duckworth. He would go to the Navy facility down at Mariveles and scrounge instruments and whatever. The *Canopus* was there and the men aboard would make things we needed in the shops on the ship.

The second time we were bombed, they hit one of the wards. There were patients who were tied in traction. The nurses had to cut the ropes so they could fall to the deck. There were pajamas in the treetops. During this time we were not busy in the operating room. The Army nurses were unhappy because the operating room nurses weren't working as hard as they were. We really didn't have a chief nurse there with us. Anyway, they got talking about naming somebody to be the head nurse to make all the rules or decisions. How do you do that? In the Army and the Navy, it's usually the senior nurse that gets the job. Well you would die laughing. Who was the senior nurse? I was. Can you imagine what would have happened? There would have been another war. Well, they finally appointed somebody from the other hospital up at Cabcaban that was out in the open. Our hospital was intended to be the operating unit. We would then ship them up there for convalescing.

**So, you didn't get on that well with the Army nurses. You kept to yourself?**

That's right. I always did.

**You mentioned earlier, before we had the tape recorder on, that your relations with your fellow Navy nurses were strained at some**

**point. Was that after the war?**

Yes. After the war. Once I left, that was it. When they came home, I wrote to some of them but never got an answer. A lot of it stemmed from the time I got promoted and made junior grade. I was a chief nurse.

**When was this?**

Right after I came home. I jumped over a lot of nurses that had been in for 15 years. The ones that were jumped over were not very happy.

**Let's go back to Little Baguio. At some point, there was not a lot of surgery going on. How long were you there? This was in April '42.**

We were bombed for the second time on April 7th. On the 8th, we were transferred to Corregidor. That's when the front lines collapsed.

**How did you get there?**

I don't remember what kind of boat it was, probably one of the things that used to ply between Corregidor and Canacao. Anyway, it was after supper. We ate at 4 o'clock. About 8 o'clock they told us to take what we had--and we didn't have much--and put us on buses. I left Dr. Smith and Dr. Fraley there. Later on, Dr. Smith showed up on Corregidor; Dr. Fraley didn't. I think I had all I owned in a pillowcase. To get to Mariveles, they had a road they called the Zig Zag trail, with a dropoff on both sides. We met the fellows coming up, going to the front lines.

You know that picture of me in the coveralls?

**Wasn't that picture taken much later on when you were on the Relief?**

Yes. The picture of me is on the *Relief* but those coveralls were made for us at Little Baguio. The Quartermaster Corps made those for us. Anyway, we got down to the dock at Mariveles and we had to stay there for awhile waiting for a boat. Some of the men that were there asked us where we were from. They were shocked to find us nurses. Finally when the boat arrived, we got on. It must have been a ferry. I remember sitting in the passageway on a wicker chair. I was carrying my camera; I never gave that up and brought it home with me. They were shooting back and forth over us. When we got to Corregidor I don't think the people there knew we were coming because that night we had to sleep two in a bunk.

I remember the following morning, the Army chief nurse came to

me. She took me out to what we called the hospital exit to show me what Bataan looked like with the ammunition dumps going up. I felt real bad because I knew one of the officers that was left there to do the job.

**What did you see when you looked across at Bataan?**

Fireworks. You wouldn't believe. They had bombs and everything. The Army nurses still over there were further up the peninsula and they were being evacuated too but they didn't get to Corregidor until the next day. I was less scared on Bataan than I was on Corregidor. When the Japanese bombed, the whole place just shook.

**You were in the Malinta Tunnel?**

Yes. We were in the hospital tunnel. The Malinta Tunnel ran like this [gesturing] straight through and the laterals went off it. When you went into the hospital lateral it was like this [gesturing]. At the end of this would be another lateral. The main tunnel was where MacArthur and Wainwright had their headquarters.

**Did you ever see MacArthur while you were on Corregidor?**

No. I never laid eyes on the bugger. He was egotistical.

**Did you work in the hospital there until you were evacuated?**

I didn't do much work when I got to Corregidor because I had dysentery. Of course, the Army was in charge so Dr. Smith wasn't working either. I remember only doing one amputation with him.

**Where did you live there?**

Off the hospital lateral were these other laterals. One was the nurse's quarters. Another was the mess hall. Another was the operating room.

**So you had laterals off laterals.**

Yes. It was not a clean tunnel. It was just rock.

**You were over there at least a month.**

We went on the April 8th and left on May 3rd.

**And while you were there the Japanese were bombing and shelling constantly. It must have been bedlam in that tunnel.**

**Did you ever get out of the tunnel?**

You would try to get out at night. The fellow I told you was responsible for blowing up the ammunition dump, well he finally

showed up.

**How did you get selected to be evacuated from Corregidor?**

I don't know how I was picked. I remember the planes came in first to evacuate people. (Reading from document) Two Navy PBYS took several Army nurses and 15 other passengers on April 29th.)

**You were being treated to this terrific bombardment every single day and then one day they come to you and say "By the way, we're taking you out of here." Is that how it happened?**

Two PBYS came in first and they took some nurses on it. How they picked them, I don't know. We were called to the mess hall and told we were going to be leaving that night. They stressed that weight didn't matter as much as size. All I had was a duffel bag. I always said that I didn't want to go out of there on an airplane. I would rather go by submarine. We were dreaming that that's exactly what was going to happen.

**What happened then.**

They told us we would meet after dark in front of Wainwright's headquarters. But then the Japanese started shelling us so they canceled us. We were told to meet I think 2 or 3 hours later. Your name was called and you stepped out of the crowd because everybody was gathered around to see this. Wainwright shook your hand and wished you Godspeed and he said, "Tell them how it is out here." And then I got in a car and they took us out of the tunnel down to the dock. Everything was pitch-black, just some trees standing with no leaves, no nothing, charred.

When we got down there we got on a boat that was even smaller than the one that took us to Corregidor. Then we shoved off. We had to go through our own mine fields to get to the submarine. We learned later that it was taking us so long to get out there that the submarine wasn't sure Corregidor hadn't already fallen. Finally we saw this dark shape and we came alongside of it. You could hear the slapping of the water between the two objects. Then someone said, "Get your foot over the rail." And then someone just pulled me, and then the first thing I knew I was going down the hatch. I got down there awfully fast. (Reading from document) On May 3rd we were evacuated from Corregidor. There were six Army officers, six Navy officers, eleven Army nurses, and one Navy nurse. There was also one civilian woman, and two stowaways--one Navy electrician's mate and one who was with the Army transport.

**What do you remember about your 17-day voyage on the *Spearfish***

**(SS-190)?**

When they first said 17 days, I thought I couldn't make it. But I did. When we first got aboard I was in the control room. Everything was lighted up and there were all these valves and what have you. They took us into the officer's mess. That's where we sat and they gave us tea and chocolate cake. We hadn't seen chocolate cake and tea in a long time. The chiefs gave up their quarters for us. It was just a cabin with a sink in it. Four of us would go to sleep in a hot bunk. You know what a hot bunk is?

**Someone gets out and someone immediately gets in.**

Our luggage we brought with us was on the deck in that same room. I was one of the four picked to go to bed right away. The next morning when my 8 hours were up four others went to sleep. You just had to kill time any way you could. Most of our time was spent in the crew's mess. Someone had a victrola that was playing all the time. The crew would come with magazines they had stashed away someplace. We would sit and talk. And of course, the boys loved it. The crew was fed first. Anything they served was wonderful for us. We hadn't seen food like that. They gave us one bucket for four of us when we went to bed. And that was for bathing and washing. Of course, if you went to the john you had to have an escort. Down in that submarine, the only thing you heard was the sound of the screws turning. You know, after a while the gals were cooking for the boys.

They initiated us when we went under the equator. I had just gotten up and I had to stand in a pan of water or something.

You know, while we were on that submarine we remained submerged during the day and at dusk we would surface to charge our batteries. When we came up we came up at an angle like this (gesturing). And then someone opened a hatch and we felt this gush of nice fresh air come through. We had hardly done this when whish, down we went again. Well, that was an experience. They thought they sighted something. Everything was turned off and everybody was sitting around doing nothing. You could watch the men. Those who had shirts on you could just see those shirts gradually turning from tan to brown with perspiration. We must have been submerged for several hours just barely crawling. But everything turned out okay.

**What happened when they found the stowaways?**

They turned them over to the authorities when we got into Fremantle [Australia].

**What do you remember about Fremantle?**

When we got in, everybody from the admiral down was there. The

Navy had a hotel where people stayed and that's where they put us up, the Navy wife and I. And the Army just took their nurses. I saw some of them when we were going home.

**How long were you there?**

Not very long. We were going to stay. Do you know who Dr. Wassell is?

**Yes. Corydon Wassell.**

He was the one who was kind of taking care of Peggy and me.

**Peggy was the civilian wife.**

Yes.

**Dr. Wassell was a legend.<sup>1</sup>**

So am I.

**That's right. You're both legends.**

One day we were invited out to dinner at the house of one of the admiral's staff. Oh, how they were living it up. I can't remember what I had to eat but they did offer us champaign. In Australia they have a custom. Early in the morning they bring in a cup of tea and bread and butter and put it in your room when you wake up. Well, I made the mistake of drinking the tea after the champaign we had and I'll tell you that my head spun round and round. I never knew that that could happen to you.

You know, a bath was what we wanted the most when we got to Australia. Even before we got off that submarine, each nurse got a bucket of water to go into the john and take a shower. If you don't think that was a treat. It was wonderful.

Back to Australia. One day, I realized that I had just had it. I wanted to go home. Nobody objected.

**So you didn't have any official duties while you were there.**

No. I don't know how soon after I said that that arrangements were made for me to fly to Melbourne to get the *West Point* (AP-23) troopship back. The Navy really took good care of me. When we got on that ship, they gave me just about the best stateroom in the house.

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<sup>1</sup> LCDR Corydon Wassell, MC, USNR, was famous for his heroic care of wounded during and after the disastrous early battles of the Java Sea.

**Did that ship come into New York?**

Yes. We went through the [Panama] Canal again. And we had no escort with us either. In Australia, the paymaster had me list all the things I had left behind in clothes and things. I forget how much money they gave me. But I went out and bought a dress, a coat, and a hat. When I got off that ship in New York, I was a civilian. I wasn't in uniform. But some of the Army nurses who had been on that submarine insisted on wearing those dungarees they had gotten from the men on Bataan.

**But you still had those dungaree coveralls they had made for you at Little Baguio.**

Yes. I guess you would call it a jumpsuit.

**When did you get back to New York?**

In July, just before the Fourth. I think I went to the Bureau [of Medicine and Surgery] on the Fourth.

**What do you remember about that? Did you see the Surgeon General.**

No. I didn't see the Surgeon General but I did see Miss Dauser [Sue Dauser, wartime Director of the Navy Nurse Corps]. All I could think of was all the time they spent eating.

**At the Bureau?**

Anywhere. My sister and I went from New York to Washington and we got there at lunchtime. Everyone was pulling out their little brown bags. It seemed like you just had your breakfast and here they were having a coffee break and then lunch, then a coffee break.

**So you saw Miss Dauser.**

Yes. That's the time they were trying to arrange for me to meet Eleanor Roosevelt but they didn't succeed. We then came home to Exeter. I had a very short vacation. The people of my town were quite proud of me. They had a parade and a dinner at the high school. And they presented me with a gift from the town and then I had to go back on duty.

**Where did you go?**

To Bethesda. I was there when Franklin Roosevelt broke the champagne bottle on the place.

**That would have been on the 31st of August of '42 when they officially opened the hospital.**

I was there sitting in the second or third row up front on the left.

**I have a photograph of that with the President standing at the podium outside. Where did you work at the hospital?**

In the sick officer's quarters.

**How long were you at Bethesda?**

A very short time. This is where I got pushed around. There were a lot of senior nurses there but I was a chief nurse like the rest of them so they had to consider me. I alternated on SOQ with another nurse. That was when the public relations place downtown was shipping me here and there selling war bonds, going to factories.

**And you made speeches.**

Oh, yes.

**When did you get your Legion of Merit?**

I didn't get that at Bethesda. I got it when I was at the dispensary in New Orleans.

**Were you on a speaking tour there?**

No. I had been transferred there. I finally went to Miss Dauser and said, "Look, if you don't want me in a psychiatric ward, you had better get me off this rat race. I would go to work in the mornings, come off duty, have my bag packed, go downtown to the PR place, get my ticket from them to where ever I was going, and then I would ride at night and get there the next morning and go to somebody's breakfast, be interviewed. And I'm not a speaker.

**You were everywhere, all over the place.**

Oh, yes. The other staff nurses thought that I was having a ball just riding around going to parades and banquets. That wasn't a ball, not to me.

**When did you pose for that famous portrait that Albert Murray did?**

It happened through the PR group. They were pleased with my presentations. I could never just get up and talk. They would write a speech for me. And I would practice enough so that I could present it the right way. I could get the women in the audience to cry. I used to say that if you could do that, you were all right. Did you ever hear of Miss Lally?

**Grace?**

Yes.

**She was the chief nurse on the *Solace* at Pearl Harbor.**

Right. She came to relieve Mrs. Carver at Bethesda just before I left and she used to say that that wasn't the way to do it.

**Who was Mrs. Carver?**

She was the chief nurse. And Grace Lally used to say that you should end a speech with a poem. She used to have to give speeches too.

**So at some point, they decided they needed a portrait of you.**

Albert Murray was doing portraits of some of the admirals.

**Where was the portrait done?**

At the Corcoran [Gallery].

**You know, that portrait is still hanging in the Pentagon?**

Really?

**How many times did you go to the Corcoran to pose for him?**

I can't remember the number of times. I think it was every day. I was on afternoon duty so I'd go down in the morning. I'd take a trolley or bus from Bethesda.

**You left Bethesda and went to New Orleans.**

Yes. And that's where Admiral Bennett presented the Legion of Merit to me.

**Was he the CO of the hospital?**

No. He was the CO of the district. The dispensary was in town off Charles Street.

**How long were you there?**

I wasn't there very long because from there they sent me to Great Lakes. I was an assistant chief nurse there because they always had these older nurses that were chief nurses. And I wasn't there very long before I got orders for the *Relief* (AH-1).

**Where did you get the ship?**

In San Francisco.

**That would have been late '44?**

I remember that on April the first of '45 I arrived at Buckner Bay in Okinawa because that's when they made the landings.

**What were your duties on the ship?**

I was chief nurse.

**Then, you were in charge of all the nurses on the ship?**

Yes.

**What do you remember about going to the *Relief*?**

When I got out there I was at Treasure Island temporarily while the ship was being overhauled. They were putting bunks out on the deck and loading it with supplies.

**There's that famous picture of you taken on the *Relief* in the jump suit they made for you in Little Baguio.**

Yes.

**When did you actually board the ship?**

[Reading from notes] I actually got to San Francisco on November 3, 1944. The ship was being overhauled from November to February. We left for Ulithi on February 13 and arrived there on March 5, 1945. On March 11 a suicide plane crashed on the deck of the *Randolph* (CV-15). On April 1 we invaded Okinawa. The next day the *Relief* arrived along with the *Comfort* (AH-6). At 6:10 a single engine Japanese plane crossed her bow at about 5 miles, made a 10 degree turn and approached the *Relief* and *Comfort* from bow on. The destroyer *Wickes* (DD-578), on picket duty off Okinawa, came to our rescue. As the enemy plane continued straight toward the *Relief*, the destroyer's gunners placed close bursts of anti-aircraft fire so near as to rock the enemy's wings. This came just as the aircraft released a bomb, causing it to fall a few feet wide of the *Relief*. A few hours later, another enemy plane flew over for a few minutes but made no attack. During the day the ship anchored off the invasion beach and deployed to sea at night illuminated like a Christmas tree. On April 10th we went to Saipan with 556 casualties. On April 26th we went to Tinian with 613 casualties.

On April 19th the *Comfort* was attacked by a kamikaze with some loss of life. We alternated with the *Comfort* taking these patients wherever they were going.

**When did you write these notes?**

I don't know when I did this.

**You were at Okinawa during the invasion. What do you remember about that?**

When we stopped retiring out to sea at night all lit up, we would stay where we were anchored ready to pick up casualties. Every time the kamikazes would come we would get the alarm over the loud speaker. They would say "Kamaretta red, smoke boat make smoke." And then this boat would fill the bay with white smoke so the kamikazes couldn't see.

**Did you see any of these kamikaze attacks at Okinawa?**

No.

**Where did you go from there?**

(Again reading from notes) In July we left Saipan for San Pedro Bay, Leyte, and served as a fleet base hospital in the Philippines until the end of the war. August 15th was V-J Day and that was a day! We had just gone up on deck for a movie when it was announced. And that bay lit up that night like you've never seen. The sky was bright, everybody firing something or another. It was beautiful. I remember standing at the rail with somebody. The person said, "Well, maybe now we can go home." And I said, "No, I don't think so. I think we have to go get the war prisoners first." I was still thinking about Dr. Carey Smith and Dr. Fralich. So, sure enough, that's what we got orders for.

**To pick up the POWs.**

(Reading from notes) So, on the 28th [August] we were enroute via Okinawa for Dairen, Manchuria to pick up the prisoners of war. We were escorted by the destroyer escort *McNulty* (DE-581) and the *Eugene Elmore* (DE-686). We picked up a Chinese man and woman. The next day the *Relief* was guided past 10 floating mines. One crewmember of the *McNulty* was injured by shrapnel and transferred to the *Relief* but he died. At 9:18 we docked with no help from anybody. It was not till the 11th [September] that the prisoners come aboard, 753 of them. That was really something.

First of all, music was blaring from the ship and everything was all lighted up. Well, they didn't let them come right aboard. They had to be deloused first--fumigated and then given showers. Then they came aboard at 2050. I remember the supply officer who was in charge of food, came to me and said that the senior medical officer was going to give them sandwiches and I said, "Listen, if you can't give them a steak dinner and ice cream or something, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves." They would stand in line waiting from one meal to the next and they ate bread. God, they ate bread!

The men were up on the SOQ (Sick Officers Quarters). The galley was in the middle and my office was to the left of it. Because all the bread and butter were on my desk, they reached in to get bread and butter, then with their trays they would go through the galley to load up, and then go out to their bunks.

**Those guys must have been in terrible condition.**

No, not really and I'll tell you why. The POWs had to come down to the docks from Mukden by train, but the Japanese had blown up the rails. And so there were food drops to the men. So, they didn't look too bad.

**Dr. Fraley and Dr. Carey Smith were with that group?**

Yes. In fact, we had one Army doctor who came ahead of them. I packed a box for Dr. Fraley and Dr. Smith--candy bars and oranges, and I don't know what else--for the doctor to take back to them.

**So it must have been quite a reunion.**

Oh, yes it was. So many of the 753 people we brought out were the ones who started the American defenders of Bataan and Corregidor.

**You brought them back all the way to San Francisco?**

No. We put them ashore in Okinawa. In fact, when we came into Okinawa, we couldn't land because of a typhoon and we had to go out to sea again. That was on September 12th. We came in on the 18th and disembarked the prisoners. I don't know how they came home from there.

**Did you make another run then?**

No. (Reading from notes) On the 26th we were underway for Taku, China and arrived on September 30th, where we provided medical facilities for the First Marine Division assigned to occupation duty in north China. We continued there until October 24th and then we were ordered to evacuate patients to the west coast of the U.S. We picked up our patients at Tsingtao on November 1st and 2nd, and more at Okinawa on November 5th and the 8th. We then went to Guam to pick up more on November 13th and 14th, and then sailed for San Francisco with 361 passengers and 386 patients. We arrived on November 30th, 1945.

**That was your last run on the *Relief*?**

Yes. I was relieved when I got back. The *Relief* made only one more trip to Japan and then she was decommissioned at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard on May 11, 1946 and sold for scrap on March 23, 1948.

**Where did you go after you came back to San Francisco?**

I went to Brooklyn, NY. I was there a short time when I requested occupational therapy school and it was granted. So I went to the Philadelphia School of Occupational Therapy. It was, I think, an 18-month course. I was then assigned to the Naval Hospital in Houston, TX, and was there about a year when they transferred the hospital to the Veterans Administration. From there I went to Long Beach, CA. I was there for about a year and then that hospital was transferred to the Veterans Administration. I was also at Camp Pendleton and Newport.

**Did you ever run into the other Philippine nurses during that later part of your career?**

I was in California after I retired and I think I saw Helen Gorzalanski. When I was in Philadelphia, one of the doctors told me that Mary Chapman had died. The first time I saw Dorothy [Still] was after I retired and had gone out to San Diego for a Defenders [of Bataan and Corregidor] convention. One of the nurses I had worked with in Texas had a cookout and that's where I saw Dorothy. I never saw [Edwina] Todd or [Bertha] Evans, or [Goldia] O'Haver. I had written to Bertha when they first got back and I did get a reply. Helen Gorzalanski Hunter died in December of 1971. Mary Chapman Hayes died in 1970. Nobody knows what happened to Eldene Page. And then on Guam, you had Marion Olds as chief nurse and Leona Jackson, Doris Yetter; she's in California.

**She's still around?**

As far as I know.