

U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY WITH CAPT (ret) DANIEL BRANDON, MSC, USN

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Interview with CAPT Daniel A. Brandon, MSC, USN (Ret.)

Let me ask some preliminary questions just to get an idea of your Naval career. Where are you from?

Brewster, New York. It's just 50 miles north of New York City.

When did you enlist in the Navy?

September 16, 1941, at 90 Church Street New York. That day, they put us, 50 recruits, and put us in an overnight steamer to Providence, Rhode Island, for off loading and eventual transportation down to Newport for recruit training. It was different. In fact, my first night at sea I was at my first day in the Navy. We had gambling on board because we went outside, I guess, the 3 mile limit some where along the line en route to Providence.

Was it a ferry-type boat?

I called it a steamer. That's what we used to call them--overnight steamers--from one place to another. They just didn't send you by railroad or bus to Providence. I don't know why, 1941 was different.

Where was your boot camp?

Newport, Rhode Island. Newport was an old recruit training station at that time. In preparation, I suppose, for World War II they had built some new barracks for recruits and I went into those first. Then after two or three weeks in this detention-type of place, you were transferred into the older buildings--barracks A, B, C--depending at what stage of development you were in.

That was 9 weeks. After that, I got a week or so forth of leave

and then came back to Newport and was sent to the Naval Hospital Brooklyn, NY, on 15 November. While I was in Brooklyn, the war started of course on December 7. I graduated from Brooklyn on 16 January 42. So that was only a 2-month stint. I went immediately from there to Naval Hospital Washington, DC, on the 16th and stayed there for 3 weeks and then went to the National Naval Medical Center which had moved the patients from Washington, DC. I think I told you earlier about traveling in high(?) society at that time. Dr. Pugh was the man that moved myself and other corpsmen, two nurses, and the bed pans and urinals from the surgical ward of Naval Hospital Washington to the surgical ward of National Naval Medical Center Bethesda on the 5th of February 1942.

What are your memories of the Naval Hospital Washington, DC?

The day I arrived in Washington on the 16th of January 1942, I was a draft of one. I was not met by transportation or anything else. You were sort of left on your own to shift for yourself in those days; they didn't expect you to have to be hand carried. You can imagine this sailor of 19 years of age with a seabag, a hammock, and a mattress strapped up on his shoulder wanting to know where 23rd and E Street was because that's where the naval hospital was and at that time. Of course everyone recognized the Foggy Bottom part and that's what they would tell you, "Down Foggy Bottom." So I got on a bus at Union Station and rode down to 23rd Street and walked up the hill to the entrance. The entrance of the naval hospital at that time was kitty-corner to what it is now. It now enters onto 23rd Street but in those days it entered onto the corner of 23rd and E

Streets, it went up the hill that way. There were no walls and such as there are now. It was grated all the way up to the Admiral's quarters and up to the Naval Medical School. I went in with my seabag and hammock which by the time I got there I was totally exhausted. Incidentally, George Washington Weiss(?), a pharmacist in 1941, was the personnel officer that transferred me down to Washington. He was the personnel officer at the Hospital Corps School in Brooklyn. To get back to the Naval Hospital Washington, the personnel office was in the basement of building two and I don't recall too much about exactly where but as a "fresh-caught HA duce," which was the expression they used for us at that time, I was treated rather well and sent down to the barracks in a stake body truck and off loaded at the barracks on Constitution Avenue. Where the parking lot is now on Constitution just below BUMED, that used to be Constitution Avenue running right along side of it no fence, no anything around the hospital and Constitution Avenue ran out to Rock Creek Park and 23rd Street continued toward the circle around Lincoln Memorial. The barracks were down there and as a "HA duce," I was provided with a bunk in a ward-like atmosphere where everybody else was with you. I got my first eye opener as a very disciplined sir. It was just about liberty time when I arrived there and up until then you did everything in uniform. Well, my first sight was to see somebody come down the middle of the barracks ward-like place I was in, in riding goffer going someplace. I go "Is he a corpsman?" And he was, so I was exposed to civilian clothes in Washington, DC. The following morning I went to the surgical ward which was in building four or where the controllers' office used to be in my day at the Bureau.

It was on the left hand side and it probably housed about 10 to 15, at the most, patients. We had one patient in critical condition who died while I was there. He was a young marine corporal with cancer. It was almost impossible to believe that this guy was so young and dying of cancer. But in those days, hospital corpsmen second class did a lot of different things and in that hospital it was unique. For example, every morning you scrub the heads and I remember in particular scrubbing the urinals with oxalic acid but they were cleaned. The treatment of patients was such that you didn't have too much traffic to the bathrooms because appendectomies used to stay in bed for 10 days and the herniorapies(?) were in bed for 18 days. They were supposedly in bed because at night they would go and you'd never know it. The corpsmen did all the AM and PM care and we also had to do with the feeding of the patients. You'd set up trays in the galley which had its own washing machine for trays and you also washed these terrines, perhaps 8 of them, and you would go down to the galley which was in the basement of building four, and pick up your terrines of food--pots these terrines were--and you brought them back up, served them in the trays to the patients, brought it back, cleaned the terrines for the next meal, and got ready for setting up. You did all of that stuff. You were a busy young man in those days. In fact, we used to work somewhere between 80 and 90 hours a week as hospital corpsmen, but that wasn't bad. I also remember that in that building I was in charge of laundry. That is getting of the dirty laundry and bundling it up and getting it ready to be placed on a truck and taken to the laundry which was down along Constitution Avenue. The funny part of that was there was a laundry

room on the deck below or in the basement of building four and the corpsmen off of the surgical ward would strip the beds almost daily and throw the sheets, pillowcases, and whatever else down a shoot which you stood in the room and caught from the shoot so that you could pile them up and get them out of there. I was the guy that had to do the catching; little man on the totem pole is what it amounted to. I don't remember the names of the physicians but I remember the name of a nurse in that place--Gladden(?). We had three nurses in those days. You worked three different types of shifts--AMs, PMs, and nights--or if you were doing special watches you worked from 7 o'clock at night to 7 in the morning. As a young corpsmen I didn't do any special watches until I got to Bethesda. There was very little camaraderie between the physicians and hospital corpsmen because you hardly ever saw the physicians. There was more human interaction with the nurses who were all Navy Nurse Corps (NNC) rather than Nurse Corps. I don't remember the chief nurse's name either. But there was a definite separation of the groups--enlisted, officers, and nurses.

So there were only three nurses for the whole hospital?

Three nurses for the surgical ward and that continued at Bethesda too. Every once and a while they would have someone going on leave or something like that. In those three weeks at the Naval Hospital Washington, we would have another nurse come in but it was generally these three nurses of which I can only remember one I think her name was Gladden(?). The only reason I remember her was because we called her boltsen(?) mate Gladden but never to her face. I hope

she is not going to hear what I'm saying.

I'm interested in the natural layout. You know how they renumbered the buildings three, four, etc. You say building three and four were the main hospital buildings.

Maybe it is three and four, yes.

So three is where the surgical ward was.

Right. Building two was the nurses quarters and of course that was totally out of bounds.

You were not allowed in there.

You could barely walk by it. It was totally restricted for corpsmen absolutely.

So the layout of that would be a mystery to you even now.

It was probably in rooms. Actually if you went upstairs on the second deck of building two, those rooms, except for that area where we have the vault, at least on one side, were at one time pretty small and would have made ideal bedrooms with a solarium for the end room. I don't know what's down there anymore.

On the second deck there's a conference room.

It used to be the architect's office when I was there.

What was the first deck where the SGs suite is?

That was all nurses quarters and the chief nurse probably had a suite of rooms in there. Chief nurses were afforded suites and I don't believe assistant chiefs were but they were given better

accommodations than normal.

Where was the nurses' dining room?

Probably in that room...

Where the SG's suite is.

Right. Including a galley to support it. That was all normal in that day. There was nothing unusual about that. Building five was the SOQ where the fire places were you could enter there. After all you were going to take care of whoever was behind those doors.

How were they fed?

The same way--terrines.

From the galley?

Absolutely.

So they didn't have there own messing facility?

No, they did not have their own messing facility no way. They had to have their food carried to them too. They were served differently than we were on our wards. Our wards were served very nicely.

The wards in three and four then were at the far end. You go through the solarium and at the far ends were the actual wards.

No. As you entered into building three, I guess it's the canopy and then you enter the building. The wards were here and here and

back there was the operating room. The operating room was straight ahead and there were two more wings back there.

In building four was the OR because you can still see the slanted ceiling back there. Was there only one OR?

That was it.

You had this slanting roof which was glass because you still see that white tile in there. How did they operate in the summer with the sun beaming through there?

I don't know. In fact, I wasn't there in the summer. I was only there those first three weeks and it made a tremendous impression. I really enjoyed every minute of it. That was my first duty station after corps school. You had recruit training, then hospital corps school, and then the old Naval Hospital Washington, DC. Liberty was good and at that time you had every other night, every other weekend. The people that were there that I was working with were very nice. It's a miracle that I don't remember any of the names of the people. For a while there I could remember some corpsmen but I've forgotten their names now.

While you were there did you ever get into the medical school area?

The downstairs in the medical school was where the personnel office was. There was a lower level.

The basement? There was personnel down there?

Yes that was personnel down in there. Absolutely. That's where we would go to get our assignments and you didn't get your assignment more than one time at least as far as I'm concerned but when you were going to be reassigned they would call you and say, "Here. You're going to be transferred or something. Get ready to do this. Have your seabag packed and so forth." They were the persons who would tell me. I've forgotten who the fellow was. This was just an observation. You wouldn't see the personnel officer per se you would see some petty officer. In those days, a third class petty officer was a very high on the ladder supervisor; and the second class you hardly got to see at all and the first class would be like the chief master at arms, and a chief warrant officer was the personnel officer or what we would call today the administrative officer would be another chief warrant officer. You never got to see them, very, very rarely. If you got to see the chief petty officer in a personnel office set up, you were lucky. You just rarely saw them. You were filtered out in any of your questions or anything you wanted to do and if you couldn't get satisfied at one level you might get to the second level but that would be about as far as you'd ever go if you weren't satisfied. It didn't make any difference. That was a different type of Navy operation, not a bad one but things were different.

You were still a Hospital apprentice Second Class (HA dos) at that point?

And I didn't get promoted until September 1, 1942, almost a year to make what would be Seaman First Class HA One but then the promotions

came like fire. I made Third Class in January of 1943, made Second Class in April of 1943, and made First Class in September 1943.

A pharmacist mate.

Yes.

That was pretty quick.

Yes. It was a time when the needs of the service was such that you got promoted rather rapidly if you passed a test. That's all you had to do is pass a test and put in the time. I was overseas that was a little bit different. I came back in '44 and a few months after that I made Chief in New York City or the Third Naval District. That was in '45.

What do you remember about the day that you and Dr. Pugh took the stuff out?

That was a hard day really. That morning we had to get up and feed our patients and get them ready for transfer. This was February the 5th of '42. We had to get them all ready for transfer. By that time, they had reduced the number of patients perhaps down to 10. The ward didn't hold more than 15 or 20 at the very most with quiet rooms included.

This is just the surgical ward.

The surgical ward at Naval Hospital Washington.

And that surgical ward was in building three off to the left.

In building three off to the left and I don't know what's in there anymore. In fact, when I was there the controllers shop and the planning, that sort of thing was in there. We got the patients all ready for transfer. Those that could walk were put on buses and those that couldn't were prepared for movement by ambulance and they were moved out first to the National Naval Medical Center Bethesda. I had never been there until the day I was driven out there by Dr. Pugh. By that time we had already put together our seabags and hammocks and they were taken out by trucks some other time and dumped somewhere out there. We didn't know what happened to anything but it was a pleasure moving to Bethesda by all means. After the feeding and preparation of the patients for movement, we stripped the beds and left everything there and that day I didn't even have to go down to the laundry hole; somebody else was going to take care of that stuff. We cleaned up the galley and the food preparation stuff or food area and got ready to move. By this time, it's almost noon but nobody was thinking about food. They just wanted to get in that car and go. He had an old car and I've forgotten what it was and it didn't make any difference. But we had the two nurses and two corpsmen and the only thing we moved, not one dead sheet or pillowcase, we just moved urinals and bedpans and everything else was out there. When we got there the regular crew for the surgical ward replaced those temporary people who had been moved in to prepare for the arrival of the patients. They had gotten them all into bed and we just went right to work and did our normal hospital ward care at that time but under entirely different circumstances. The heads and the places for bedpans and urinals with new equipment, we no longer had to go to

the galley with terrines to pick up the food. We went down there and got these monstrous-looking food service wagons that had terrines in them. There were all sorts of much nicer things. We had a new "dressing room" and our Second Class Petty Officer that worked in there and assisted the doctor; but he was at a level that was far above an HA dos. You had to knock on the door to talk to him. They did a lot of the professional work. We did all the nursing work. The actual movement wasn't a bad trip at all.

One trip?

Just went out one trip in his car. Everything was there. That's all we had. I didn't even get to see where I was going to sleep. In those days as you entered the nearest gate to Bethesda, the hospital corps building was the first building on the right, just beyond the heliport now. Corpsmen lived according to what their duty was. For example, if you were a night corpsmen, you went to "night corpsmen quarters," if you were the day corpsmen, you went into "day corpsmen quarters" and there were very nice accommodations there too. Again something brand new--all beds, all linen, everything was new, nothing was used. Of course your own blankets. You never went anywhere without your own blanket but then you didn't even have to worry about your mattress and hammock somebody else had taken care of them.

Had you worked with Dr. Pugh back at the hospital before this?

No. Not really. Dr. Pugh was a surgeon. But as I said you very rarely ever saw this fellow except when he would come in and the

morning we'll say and you never had any communications with him of a personal nature. Never, it was just not done. The only people you ever talked to at the most was probably the nurse on the ward or the petty officer in personnel or in the barracks. The rest of the time you talked to corpsmen and you lived, ate, and slept with corpsmen. It was a different type of society. Dr. Pugh was nice but we didn't get to talk to him and the three weeks I was there he probably didn't even know, "Who's that guy over there in the corner?" But had you done something wrong, I suppose sooner or later you might have gotten up to Dr. Pugh but it didn't happen that way.

But your paths crossed later on in your career didn't they?

Yes. Before he became Surgeon General he was at Bethesda or some place like that and we crossed again and I think...in bringing it up one time in a conversation with him, I was an officer by that time, I mentioned the fact that he had given me a ride out to Bethesda some years before. Did he remember? Yes, he remembered but I'm not sure whether he remembered the faces of the individuals in the car or not but it was fun. He didn't know many more than that though, I'll have to admit.

So you're up at the hospital which actually opened in February.

We were getting patients then.

It wasn't dedicated until August.

No. No. It was dedicated long after I was gone but they had a very nice ceremony out front. When I got to Bethesda, they were

just in the throws of completing. The structures were complete and the main buildings were the laundry, the hospital corps quarters, the nurses quarters, the hospital, and there was a research building back there too. But I'm not sure if the research building was completed because I never went back there.

I think it opened in the fall of that year in September or October '42 when it opened.

Yes because I have no idea. Certain things were very nice out there. For example, up until then if you had laundry you took care of it somewhere downtown in Washington. When we moved to Bethesda, you had your laundry done everyday ironed and returned on the same day; washed and pressed and sent back to you folded and it cost a dollar or two a month. It was that cheap and that went for everybody--nurses, doctors, corpsmen--the whole works got their laundry done. Well, the nurses and doctors probably had to pay more but the corpsmen only paid a dollar or two a month. It was fantastic as I said "good living" out there.

From Bethesda you got your orders to overseas?

From Bethesda I went to Mobile Hospital No. 5.

Where was that gathering?

We went to Pier 92 in New York City and gathered there for the first week or so after people were ordered into the unit. Now the officers weren't there at that time. Within the month after arrival there I was moved over to the receiving barracks in Brooklyn near

the Naval Hospital Brooklyn across the street, in fact, on Flushing Avenue. They were called Flushing Avenue barracks. We stayed there for two months at the very most and at that time we were brought together as a unit; our officers joined us and we would do various things together. Not exercises but just getting together with the people that we were going to work with. Those mobile hospitals were built by the corpsmen and doctors and a small gang artificers-one CEC officer. You didn't even have an electrician just had a CEC officer. The commanding officer was Conklin(?). Bill Mercer was our warrant personnel officer. Barrow was our material chief, CPO at that time made ensign. White was our chief nurse. George Burkley was our chief of medicine out in New Caledonia, Atsofada(?) Beach. I was on the first draft of people to go home. By then I had made First Class Petty Officer and was resting on my laurels to they sent me back. I worked in the operating room down there too.

So at Pier 92 you were ship out as a unit?

We were shipped out as a unit from Brooklyn to San Diego to San Diego to New Caledonia during the Coral Sea battle. We started(?) the Coral Sea battle on the way out. Late August of '42...

Just in time for Guadalcanal.

Yes. Guadalcanal was already booming away. There was another battle between us and Guadalcanal but it was very small and the Navy and Marine Corps were successful in overcoming whatever resistance they had there and all we had to concern ourselves with was Guadalcanal. In the opening parts of the war, the sea forces were

under considerable stress even before we had our hospital built. Our first casualties were burn cases off of the *Porter* that was a destroyer. *San Juan* and *San Diego* had gotten into some sort of skirmish out there, they were two sleek looking cruisers. There were casualties from an aircraft. I don't recall which aircraft carrier it was. Our major casualties were burn cases initially. In addition, that hospital had no nurses but by Christmas of '42 we had nurses on board.

Your hospital was set up on New Caledonia and you obviously helped set it up.

The first part of the hospital was 250 beds in small butler huts and we had our own food service. This was built in a cow pasture there was nothing there but a vocat(?) of water. There was no electricity or anything. We had a generator on. Everything had to be culled from scratch. Fortunately, the Army had been there a month or two before us and had provided us with some logistics support. Initially, they fed us food for a couple days until we could get our galleys going, galleys, pots, and things like that. That was rather primitive at first and when I was ill with the dengue fever we didn't have a building at that time. So, if you got sick you stayed in the tent. Shortly thereafter we opened the place. We were able to get the buildings up. We didn't have bathrooms we had tents on the end of each ward with facilities for bathrooms but that all changed as time went by and we were able to build in ORs, permanently built in ORs, never had any air conditioning. That didn't come until several months later. We built another operating room and it became air

conditioned. I was an OR corpsmen at the time so I was able to enjoy it.

What was the procedure for treating the burn patients who came in early on from the ships?

We had two different kinds of treatment at that time. One treatment was with vaseline and gauze over top of it. I don't think we had a thing called vaseline gauze at the time pre-made. You had to make your own. Another treatment was with tannic acid believe it or not and this tannic acid ointment used to almost crust up. There were some people who believed it should be one way and others that believed it should be another way as the treatment of these people were concerned.

The tannic was either an ointment or a spray. You could spray the solution.

No. The solution was put on by something else. We didn't have to many spray things.

I guess I'm thinking how at Pearl Harbor when they had so many burn patients and they couldn't get the tannic acid on fast. There were so many casualties so what they did they got flick guns. They washed them out and they put the tannic acid in the flick guns and they went and they sprayed the bandages to keep them wet with tannic acid.

That may have been how we did it. I don't remember exactly. All I know is that it would get stiff and I'd think "How is that going

to help the guy when he goes to bend his wrist, his fingers, or his hands and he's got this stiff stuff." But apparently it was good. I don't know.

After you got your initial burn patients and Guadalcanal was going, you probably got lots of casualties from there.

Yes. You would.

Was the *Solace* running down there?

You had at least one down there. I don't recall all of the forces at sea. Noumea, New Caledonia, had a beautiful harbor and we were right on the beach which looked at the seaway into the harbor and you could see the casualties coming in then, not persons but the ships. We received our patients by ship not by air. Air was not a factor in healthcare in those days as far as I can remember. I don't remember it at all.

No it wasn't until later on.

As time went by, we would get more and more gunshot wounds, mine wounds, and that sort of stuff. We also got a lot of NP [neuropsychiatric]. NP was a significant factor at that hospital.

Because of battle fatigue of patients?

Probably. You might have gotten a few psychiatric types but mostly NP. We had an significant number. We had two or three buildings with NP or psychiatric difficulties. Our hospital grew from 250 beds the initial size of the facility to 2,000 beds in the

18 months I was at New Caledonia. We received small drafts of 10 or 15 people. I can remember receiving drafts from places like Bougainville or Rendova or a couple of other battles and they would 600 patients come to you in one day and we could facilitate it. We had a huge sorting area. It would be known in Vietnam as a triage area but in those days it looked more like a football field because we had to sort them out there and we would move them in. We could do it. We could handle that many casualties and they had a staff that was able to do it too. It was very big.

Had they received much of any kind of treatment when you got them?

Surgical patients hadn't had too much surgery, very little surgery, gunshots, very little, but they had been seen. They had been stabilized. Not too many died at our place. We had some deaths of course but not too many. We were more like an evacuation hospital in a sense that they would be treated for a while and we would ship them out on hospital transports, not hospital ships, and send them back to the states.

This is interesting. When we arrived there, we had one anesthesia man who was not qualified in other words he was not a board certified anesthesiologist but he had experience in anesthesia. His name was Anderson and he trained a nurse who would pass gas, ether and particular, and corpsmen. We had corpsmen who were anesthesiologists giving spinals and Nembutal, penthol(?) rather and ether. He would work with at first only two ORs then we got this new OR I spoke of which had air conditioning and so forth, we had

four in there and he was still the only anesthesiologist with the one nurse. By then he had three or four corpsmen who could serve the rooms. Corpsmen--First Class Petty Officers--I know their names even one was Saxon Lord Downes(?) and the other fellow we used to call "Diddy Boat Tilden." Downes had been a teacher at Redlands University and Tilden came from someplace in California, I've forgotten where. But they were all very interesting people.

How were they trained? Did you have an anesthesiologist on the staff who trained these people to do this?

Yes. That fellow that was aboard wasn't even a certified anesthesiologist. I did spinals believe it or not. We trained using surgical packs and using the spinal needles you could go through the packs and feel yourself going through the various tissues until you were in the spinal cord.

The surgical packs were for practicing?

Yes. That's how we were got trained to be able to feel the passage of the needle into the spinal column and it was very effective. It worked like a charm. Those were artige (?) ways of doing things but they worked and they worked very well.

So, you went from one anesthesiologist and ended up with four or five. Then you were probably busy doing too.

Every single day. We had plenty of them.

Besides doing that did you actually assist in surgery?

Sewing up you would do but you'd never do any of the other stuff. You'd hold retractors. You were always the OR corpsmen--surgical--and in those days there were no nurses who scrub for the surgery. Maybe they do today. I don't know but I haven't heard of them that's the reason why we train the corpsmen to be a surgical. There was a surgical nurse, we had the circulating nurse. He was the one who was not scrubbed but he would work the OR and he would be the scrub man. Sometimes you would assist the surgeon.

But at that point there were no nurses there stationed there at that point.

In the early part, there were no nurses at all. Our chief nurse was a First Class Petty Officer and as soon as the nurse came he ask for transfer and he got. He went someplace I don't know where but he didn't want to compete let's face it. He had been the chief nurse and a new chief nurse came in so he left. He was a corpsman acting as a chief nurse. Actually corpsmen were in charge of our wards. Second Class Petty Officer were ward nurses but that was not unusual at all in those days. When the nurses did come, they did not do any more than supervise. For example, our OR nurse never scrubbed once and the OR nurse who was the anesthesiologist did more work than the chief nurse. The surgical nurse for the OR she made the schedules, she assigned the people to the various cases and stuff like that but nurses didn't have to do those things. In late 1942 when they got there, they didn't the uniforms they have today like khakis or greens or anything they did it in whites, long sleeved whites. That was the only uniform they had.

Do you remember when the nurses showed up on the scene?

Yes. Just around Christmas of '42.

What was that initial group of nurses like? Did you have any contact with them at all?

Yes. I had a lot of contact because I was in the OR. OR corpsmen were very highly respected in this hospital so I got in contact with all of them. It was a lot of fun. They were not much different than they had been at the Naval Hospital Bethesda or at Washington. They took over very quickly and the shift from an all male atmosphere to a nurses and corpsmen was not difficult at all for us in the OR. I think perhaps it was the way things are and that's the way they'll be. As I said the First Class Petty Officer in charge of the OR left but for his own purpose. Frankly, other than the anesthesia people there were no First Class Petty Officers in the OR. When you made First Class, you were given other responsibilities. In fact, you were given other responsibilities when you were a Second Class. They didn't given let you stay a Second Class if they could around it or if you asked the chief of surgery to intercede you might stay there as a Second Class but you'd never stay there as a First Class and I didn't. But the nurses were very well excepted. We had three nurses in our OR but I can't think of any of their names now. It was such a long time ago.

How long were you there?

Eighteen months. As First Class Petty Officer, I was in the mastered arms department. After 18 months, [?] to be temporarily

sitting on a telephone in an office when orders from a place called COMSOPAC, Commander South Pacific, advised that six corpsmen from Mobile Hospital No. 5 were to accompany the patients back to the United States and they would be six original corpsmen and they should be taken alphabetically from the top and my name was "Brandon" and I went. I told them I couldn't even take the phone call I was on my way and I left within an hour or two.

We got there [New Caledonia] in about August of '42 and I left February 11, 1944 and went back to the states to Narton(?) Heights, CT, and that's where I made Chief in '45.

Narotan Heights, CT, what was there?

Narotan Heights, CT, had a small communications school where they trained basic radiomen that is radiomen for seamen and also advanced radiomen techniques. It was a small school up there. It had been a VA hospital and we had taken it over and turned it into a radio school.

They needed a corpsmen on the staff?

That was a big school and I was the senior corpsmen as a First Class Petty Officer. We had two doctors, no nurses, one chief and maybe 10 to 15 corpsmen and we had a ward of about 8 to 10 beds. It was a pretty good size operation as far as a little remote thing like that in Stanford, CT.

You weren't too far from home at that point.

Oh, no. That's the reason why I got there. While I was Norton

Heights, I made Chief in April of '45. In fact, I made Chief the day I left there and didn't know it. I left April 20, 1945, I made Chief that day. In the Third Naval District down in again 90 Church Street New York and when I got to my new assignment which was the pre-commissioning detail of USS *Sanctuary* (AH-17), before it was built, there were people looking for me because I'd made Chief and they didn't know where I was. I'd left Norotan Heights and I was en route to the *Sanctuary* and on leave. They finally found me and told me to come to 90 Church Street. In those days, you got paid a certain amount of money for a new uniform and things like that as a Chief Petty Officer and they dated my rank on the 25th of April of 1945 and that was a very great pleasure. But here was an OR corpsmen Chief Petty Officer going to the *Sanctuary* slick armed Chief. A slick armed Chief meant you didn't have a hash mark which meant you had less than four years in service.

So that was pretty good.

For me it was. But when I got to the ship and I'm the only slick armed Chief on board, naturally I'm the junior Chief. So there are things that go with being the junior in every place and that was one of them.

The ship was being built in Jersey wasn't it? Hoboken.

Hoboken, Bajor, NJ; Sunship Yard. There were two of them up there at that time. One was commissioned prior to us and we were commissioned on June 20, 1945. Incidentally, our first administrative officer on there was HH Burton(?). HH Burton was a

Medical Service Corps officer lieutenant at that time and he later made commander perhaps he made captain even. I think he may have ended his service in St. Albans or Camp Lejuene I'm not sure which but that was in the early 50s.

The ship was being built when you got there. What were your duties?

My duties were very sketchy because they were still constructing this ship. I mean the decks had not even been completed. They were treated in a certain way for this hospital ship. It was a fully air conditioned ship one of the first in the Navy. The decks were made out of some sort of composition. None of the material had been received on board. Nothing was received on board until it was excepted on the 20th of June. By mistake, some things did get there and we were held responsible--the hospital corpsmen--I happened to be one of the Hospital Corps Chiefs, we were responsible for the security of that stuff. But we didn't do much more than that. Every once and a while we'd be asked to do something as far as a space was concerned on the hospital ship but nothing too much. You got to know the snapper. The fellow that was the top civilian builder of the thing because every once and a while you'd be asking him to do something for you or what was going to be done with a certain place and so forth. They were nice ships and I went to sea on that and we were en route to Okinawa and Guam and places like that and the war ended in Japan. So we didn't have to fight the war.

They dropped the bomb on my birthday. I was born on the 6th

of August.

This was in August of 1945. Our first job was to go to Japan to a place called Wakayama and we evacuated POWs. Our ship was very good for that because we had 802 berths on board for patients alone but the eagerness of people to get out of there was such that we took 1100 and some on board and they slept on the decks and they slept in the yeoman's office and slept anywhere because we could put out cots.

What do you remember about those first POWs?

They were marvelous. On board the hospital ship we had some old-timer chief petty officer who knew a couple of the hospital corps people that had been taken aboard as POWs. Everyone of the POWs had malnutrition. You would stick your finger into the fleshy part of their leg and your fingerprint would stay right in there. It would go like a hole, stay there. I think they had what they called beri-beri. They were very hungry and we fed them anything and everything that they wanted to eat and they it ate it practically dry. We had a few desk. We also had some civilians on board and we had some people on board who could not return to the United States for various reasons. So we had to dump them in Hawaii. I don't know what these reasons were. We brought back the first shipload of POWs from Japan into San Francisco. Believe me we were well received to say the least. It was great, thrilling. Then we went out and we left that load off about Christmas or sometime before that and took out a shipload of wives to Hawaii en route back to Japan or where ever in the Western Pacific to pick up more POWs but we took the first

shipload of wives of members of the Navy in Hawaii out to Hawaii. We did that in late '45. That was another first. These were wives of our military people stationed in Hawaii or on ships and so forth.

O.K. Because now you could have dependents again.

Yes. We got dependents again. Then went on out picked up another load in a place called Nagasaki and that was the atomically bombed town. While we were there we were permitted to go in and take a look at what they atomic bomb had done. They just loaded us on. This was in the fall of '45. I would say perhaps September, October some place along in there. It wasn't too long after the bomb had been dropped. The people were still walking along the roadside of the bombed out area with mask over their face and they were still dying in the hospitals at the rate of 100 a day. But we were put in trucks and given a tour through the city. What a sight, unbelievable, unbelievable. You can't imagine such a thing. But people think they should have atomic war or any of that kind of war, they should have seen that first hand. The only thing you could see standing would be an occasional pagoda. I remember a significant site I saw was a barber chair in the middle of a totally devastated blocks and blocks of area with one barber chair standing upright. The Mitsubishi submarine place which was near the site of the explosion were steel-framed buildings and they were all bent this way and completely gutted, nothing on the outside of the buildings. In other words, the sheathing had been taken off. Hospitals and schools were brick and withstood the explosion from several hundred yards away but the windows were all gone and everything inside was killed dead.

It was just no second chance. It was that devastating. It was quite an experience. The Army gave us the tour by the way. They had moved in there with their civilian government already. They had just moved in there and we were the first ship to get in there. I remember we had to be guided into the harbor by harbor masters--Japanese type--they were our ships' directors so to speak when they came aboard.

Had the POWs you collected from there been subjected to radiation or any of that?

The only casualties we ever took from POWs were from Nagasaki were the ones that were hit by food bungles or clothing bungles that had been dropped by parachute and they were trying to catch them and they were casualties. They also had beri-beri and we were able to handle them a lot differently than the ones at Wakayama. By then, we'd become experienced in this thing and we took over a hotel when we moved into Nagasaki and we got a school teacher and several Japanese students to help us herd the POWs through a screening area so that we could pick out the ones that were seriously ill and still walking. We also had to send out teams of an officer and men out into the surrounding country to round up the guys who escaped from the POW camps and of course that was no problem. After a while that word got out and in a matter of three or four days all of them that we could find out about. They had escaped and we wanted to get them in and get them on to the boat and bring them down.

That group health wise was pretty similar to the first group.

They all suffered from malnutrition. My own observation was that they were of good spirit. They were glad, of course, to be aboard that hospital ship. We had a terrific ship to begin with: air-conditioned, all the food you could eat, clean berths. They didn't care whether they were sleeping on the floor or where they were, extremely good spirits. We had a few die. We took the second batch from Nagasaki to Guam and dropped them there and took up another group or POWs from there and brought them back to the states. That was sort of a screening area or staging area for the return of these people. It wasn't quite the Wakayama-type return to the United States. That was a very dramatic type thing. The Wakayama one, the ship is overloaded to begin with and we hit the typhoon out there and that drove us five or six days off the track of where we're going. I don't know whether it was to Guam or where we were going. We were going to have to get provisions I'm sure. But whatever we got we got it, got in, got everything on board and then took off and took what they called the great northern circle to get to San Francisco. If you take the great northern circle, you want to be prepared for rough sea at that time of the year and we were not. We had more seasick POWs on there than you could shake a stick at, but it all worked out.

Was that your last crews on the *Sanctuary*?

No. I put the *Sanctuary* out of commission after a while. I've forgotten exactly when but we went back to Philadelphia. In August of '46, I left the *Sanctuary* and I went to the Philadelphia group of the Sixteenth Fleet Staff and then to South Dakota. The

commissioning of it and the decommissioning of it.

What do you remember about the decommissioning?

Nothing. By then it was a nothing ship. We, the *Sanctuary* that is, came to Philadelphia tied up just inside the main gate of the Philadelphia Navy Yard and prepared the ship for mothball fleet. By the time it went out of commission on the 20th of June of 1946. Now they say the 15 August of 1946 but I can a sure you...wait a minute it may have been the 15 August 1946. I had to stay on it one year at that time because you had to be at sea for a year to make permanent chief. I was an acting appointment chief on the *Sanctuary*. One year at sea and you could become a permanent chief and I was on there more than one year obviously. So, I became a permanent chief and that meant a raise in pay from 99 to 107, I think, dollars per month. But you couldn't lose chief petty officer either. However, in the decommissioning details there was very little. By then, we'd lost most of our crew. We had six chief petty officers still on board. One of the chief petty officers was a guy by the name of Luber(?) who used to be the driver for VADM Ross T. McIntire who was the Surgeon General at the time. Another was a schoolteacher from upstate New York. They had six of us on board. We had a small crew of people and interestingly enough we did not live on board the *Sanctuary*. We lived on board the *Cascade*. We berth and ate on the *Cascade* and the stores aboard the *Sanctuary* were left in tact. Unfortunately, the stores included a field hospital of hundred beds with all the equipment and supplies necessary to set it up. Included in the supplies was morphine syrettes and in 1946 a coxswain from the *Cascade*

realized that there was morphine in the hole of the *Sanctuary* and took it and unfortunately for him he sold it to some under cover people in downtown Philadelphia. That was the first I'd known of people using drugs and that sort of thing. We just had not heard of it in the Navy up until then but there they were stealing it on the hospital ship. Of course, he was given a general court martial and dismissed from the Navy. His name was Smith. That's all I remember on him.

What happened to you after you left the hospital ships?

I stayed in that follow up(?) group at Atlantic Reserve Fleet, well it later became known as Atlantic Reserve Fleet, until Christmas of '47 or near that. Then I went to the Headquarters for the Atlantic Reserve Fleet on 90 Church Street and stayed there for three years. While I was there I worked for a doctor by the name of Pream(?). He was our senior medical officer. There was only one medical officer, one MSC, and one chief that was all there was on the staff. Hall was our MSC and I married a wife there who was the secretary to Admiral Thomas C. Kincave(?), the commander of the Atlantic Reserve Fleet and the eastern sea frontier at that time.

He had come back from his stinted laity golf and all that.

Yes. He was being honored in the big city. In fact, in 1950 on the day that he got out of the Navy or retired from the Navy and they had a big ceremony out on Broadway for him, a parade and everything my son was borne. My son's mother had been his private secretary all the years that he'd been at 90 Church Street. I have in my archives a telegram from him welcoming the new sailor who later

became an Annapolis kid and is now flying for Delta.

When did you get your commission?

I left 90 Church Street and went to sea on USS *Malet* an APA. On the *Malet*, I heard about the program for hospital corpsmen. At that time it was mainly First Class and Chief Petty Officers I don't know but it might be still today. But it was a program and actually I had heard about it before from Admiral Kinkaid himself. He asked if I was interested in it and would like to go to the school in Bethesda. I had just married my new wife who was his secretary at the time, and I said, "No. Not just now. I won't." So I gave up the hospital administrative school, something like that, I've forgotten what they call it but be that as it may, it was sort of like a way of getting educated for the MSC program. I ultimately went there from another duty station and became an ensign a year after that in St. Albans New York in '54. That was an interesting experience too. I was a bit old for the program by that time. You couldn't be over 32 years of age. On I believe Friday, August the 28th, my birthday was on the 30th, I made a comment to the effect that [?] procures my chance of becoming an ensign. Friday here we are and I'm not an ensign yet. So there's no chance. Later on that afternoon, they got a phone call and said to get my physical and get sworn in the next day you wanted to be an ensign and I did and beat it by one day and about 36 hours.

When did you retire?

I stayed on board until June the 1st of '84. I did another

thirty years after that.

Another thirty years. What was your total time then?

Forty-two years and nine months. It was excellent. I have never regretted a day.

You left BUMED in '79 and went where?

I went to Headquarters Marine Corps for a year or a little less and then when Admiral Shea who was the third director of the Nurse Corps, went to become the commanding officer of HSETC, I became the administrative officer up there with her and stayed there until I retired. I've forgotten exactly when that was but it was along about that time. We had a couple of other commanding officers after that or one after that and then one of our execs made Admiral. But be that as it may, my last tour was at HSETC. I had a good time.