

Marie Parker

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Question: The first thing that I like to do is just have you same your name and spell it for me so I have it on tape.

Answer: Okay, all right. My name is Marie Parker. M-A-R-I-E P-A-R-K-E-R.

Question: Great.

Question: Now how did you get in the -- you were a nurse within which branch of the Service?

Answer: I was an Army nurse. When I first went in I went to the Pocatello Army Air Base, and then after Pocatello Army Air base, after we were there for a certain length of time, we were transferred to Port Swift, Texas, and from there we went to Newport News, Virginia and that's where we left for overseas on a ship. I have a big certificate in one of my rooms of going overseas on that ship. Because we had a big celebration you know, when you have to join to become a -- on of Neptune's --

Question: Oh, that's right, yeah.

Answer: Yes, you have to -- you have to go through the initiation process and all that, you know. But anyway I enlisted, well it's a long story. You know I graduated from nurse's training in '41. In those days there were two careers open for girls, mostly, teaching and nursing. And so I chose nursing and I went to this little school in South Dakota for three years for \$60. That's -- that was quite a bit at that time. But anyhow, because my father had died when he was 40 years old and Mother was left with five of us in 1930. And so she had -- we had a struggle for quite awhile, but once we got in high school and got out, we all started, you know, doing something worthwhile, at least we thought it was. And eventually, you know how you get around. You graduate from training and you get a job and you go here and you go there and you work. And my brother and I both came to Seattle -- we were both in Seattle. My second to the youngest brother. And he joined the Marines from Seattle. And then after he joined I thought, well, it would be nice. I saw the -- we were watching a program put on by the Navy in downtown 5th Avenue in Seattle and I saw all those beautiful Navy nurses. They looked so nice in their uniform and everything. So I thought well, that might be a career, you know, to go in. So on May 29th, 1943, I signed up with -- went down to -- I suppose the City Building or whatever it was. Raised my right hand and so help me God. And was enrolled in the Army Nurse Corps.

Answer: From there I was went to -- I was sent to Pocatello Air Base. Was there for a few months, made lots of friends you know. But the friend that I was closest to, there -- we had boyfriends, you know, we had airmen we liked and we were always together, the four of us. But then she went to the South Pacific and I went down to Texas, over to India and the boys went -- one went to South Pacific as well but not her friend and one went to England. So there we were, separated.

Question: Wow. Now had you done any nursing? I mean you'd gone to school and you studied nursing --

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: -- were you a nurse before you --

Answer: Oh, yes. I was working at a hospital. I was working in Seattle at a hospital at the time that I enlisted. And of course, that was an honor then, you know. Everyone was so

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enthused to think that so many young people were going into Service. There was no protesting and no, you know, running to Canada or anything like that at the time. And it really was a wonderful thing. A wonderful opportunity to -- well, it was security at that time because jobs were, you know, you didn't get much pay. And, well I don't know, it was just another adventure, I guess, for me. (laughs)

Question: So you got -- stationed in India then?

Answer: So then we went -- we were 32 days on board this ship. We were surrounded by submarines and little ships guarding us and everything. Well, there was 6000 of us on the ship, going over. Not only nurses but Army and chaplains and Red Cross and everything else, you know. But we did stop in Cape Town for a couple days and were allowed to get off there for a couple of days to walk around. And then we landed in Bombay after 32 days and they allowed us to go up after a certain length of time, up board -- topside, and it was like going into another world. Another culture. There were all these little men with just little things around their waist, you know, and something on their heads. So, and from Bombay we got on board a train and we went to -- three weeks on this Indian train, up to where our hospital was to be at Ledo, Assam India

Answer: That was what the destination was at that time.

Question: Wow. So that's kind of by the Himalayas -- is that where you are? Kind of by the Himalayas?

Answer: At the foot of the Himalayan Mountains.

Question: Now had you ever been out of the country prior to --

Answer: No, unh-hunh. No.

Question: So here you are, young, 20-some year old.

Answer: I think I was --- probably in '43 -- I was born in '20 so I must have been about 23 years old, something like that. Yeah, I was quite young. We celebrated our May birthdays on board ship. You know, it was when we left. So it must have been in May that we were traveling along. It was so nice, we had a big celebration. You know, they did everything on board ship to try to make our lives pretty much worthwhile. the nice thing about it was we were free to go to -- to mass or to church services or whenever -- up on deck, you know, they would have things like that for us. But the trip to -- on the Indian train, you know, it's a new experience in itself as well. I don't know if this is --

Question: No, this is exactly --

Answer: It is?

Question: Yeah.

Answer: Because there were about four or six of us to a compartment and the beds were just like a platform coming out from the wall on each side. And not much padding on it or anything, hot, you know, it was really hot. Couple of the GIs found a big tub somewhere along the way with some big chunks of ice. I don't know where they got it. But then we'd try to fan it -- fan the ice, you know, to make it cool.

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Question: Take the cool air off of it.

Answer: But at night, all the cockroaches and everything would come out. And so we'd kind of -- one of us would be on guard, most -- take turns -- to keep the cockroaches away from us. And every time the train would stop and we'd open the doors and we could look out and everything, there would be all these little Indian children and everything. Baksheesh memsab, baksheesh-- they were begging for money, you know. And so that was kind of sad, you know. But it took us three weeks to get up to our destination.

Question: Do you remember what you were -- was it exciting or was it scary -- 'cause now you're -- I mean, now you got a couple things going on. You left the US, you're in a new country, you're going to war, you've got all these different things. Do you remember what you thought?

Answer: Well, you know, there's so many of us in the same situation, and I don't know -- I just did never -- I was never afraid of anything. I never was sick one day when I was in India

Answer: I never was sick. I don't even think I had a headache. But we had to take Atrabrine and all that, you know, to keep us from getting malaria

Answer: We turned yellow, I think, after awhile. But no, I've never been afraid. I always think what's to be will be. You have to accept things like this. And this is the Army. So, and we were nurses and we had a lot of respect, you know. The GI's on board the train would -- would cook -- would try to help us out, you know, we had C-rations or whatever they were then. We said he used -- sometimes when they'd start -- like they'd make Cream of Wheat - they said it was Cream of Wheat -- in these big garbage cans, they'd have it outside the train. And if we'd stop, after awhile we got so we thought -- it looks just like worms, you know. So we wouldn't eat it. So we'd just turn to our C-rations and eat them.

Question: Boy, that's a long adventure. I mean, that long on a train.

Answer: To spend all that time on a train.

Answer: But anyway, once we got there, the -- the hospital was arranged, I guess before we got there. It must have been as I remember correctly. But each bash -- we called them bashes -- each set of where people were going to live was just a cement slab on the floor and then they'd have maybe two -- two to a room, you know, what we called room. And we'd have mosquito netting over our beds and things like that because of malaria, the mosquitoes and things. And so we had Lister bags hanging up. We called them -- canvas bags that were purified, you know, with -- what did they do? What did they do to purify the water? Because everything in India was contaminated. We couldn't eat anything from the ground or drink the water or anything like that. So if we wanted water, we'd have to go out to the Lister bag and get some fresh -- some water from there. And most of -- most of, I think, the food that we had at the mess hall was dehydrated. There was such a treat at Thanksgiving or Christmas or sometime if someone would fly in a nice turkey or a roast or some -- and the fellows tried their best to make the food good, you know how it is. Course everybody griped, you know. That was par for the course.

Question: So some common enemy was food.

Answer: Yeah, right, right. But we had a wonderful group of people working with us. We had wonderful doctors. The nurses were -- well, my roommate. There couldn't have been

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anyone better than her for me to live with. And we were all just friends, you know, we were all there together and we were going to do what we could and come home. And this little place, I told you, Dibrugarh where we visited, you know, once in awhile to go to the bazaar and all. And there was another place called Chadwal, and every once in awhile, the fellows from Chadwal would call and say, or send a message or something, that they were having a dance on Saturday night. Could you come up? Could you send some -- send us some gals? Is what they'd say. So people would go if you wanted to. If you weren't on duty or something for the night, you know. You could go up there and they fly down and get us, take us home, you know. Well, this one night this happened and some of the girls went and on the way home the plane crashed. I don't know what it was -- it was kind of foggy and dark in the jungle and everything, and several of the nurses -- all those that went on that trip that night were killed. But you know, as I recall, one of the letters I got from the girls that I was telling you about when they answered my ad in the CBI Roundup. She said she had gone up there that night with one of her friends, flown up. But they decided that they would ride home with a couple of the officers that night. You know, instead of taking the plane, they'd ride home. And she said that's what happened. They were just saved. They just were not supposed to be on that plane that night. Isn't that something.

Question: That's a -- a lot of the veterans we've talked to, it's real interesting, because their kind of life perspective really changed and they realized that when it was going to be their time, it was going to be their time.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: And they had no control but they also had no fear.

Answer: No, see, that's it. We just -- well, you try to make the most of everything. But when you're altogether like that, you know, it's not, you know, you don't feel sorry for yourself or why am I here, I'm the only one. It was -- we had such good times.

Answer: We had a little -- oh, what they call a clubhouse somewhere. And every Saturday night the GI band would come to the clubhouse and we would dance, you know, and socialize. And we did get some liquor supplies, you know, about once a month I think they'd give us a quart of whiskey or something like that. And so we would just share it, you know, we would just take it to the clubhouse. Well, naturally, you know, you did. And that was fun, you know. We did have some fun. Occasionally we would hardly every did we get off the base to go traveling up to Cashmere, probably maybe or to Calcutta would be, if you could get a ride, you know, and you had time, little time off. But other than that, so--

Question: Because you were pretty -- I assume pretty busy --

Answer: Well, we were busy taking care of --

Question: -- where you were at --

Answer: Yes. We were pretty busy. You know, like I said, when we were there, penicillin was discovered. And so when that came by, everybody came over, everybody got a shot of penicillin right off the bat. And so that was helpful, you know.

Question: Do you remember -- 'cause here you were, you'd been a nurse over here taking care of little scrapes and bunch and surgical and all that. And now all of a sudden you go over in a war environment. Do you remember when you saw your -- when you knew that you were a war nurse?

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Answer: Well, the thing is, we probably -- we knew that we were war nurses but there wasn't any active -- well, there was a place called Myitkyina, and that's where Merrill's Marauders were. And the Japanese were coming up into that area from Burma, up through Rangoon and into that area

Answer: And that was pretty dangerous situation. But right around our hospital it wasn't too bad. There wasn't any shelling and bombing and things like that. So maybe if there had been, we would have been more frightened. But we used to get the -- the Chinese troops that were injured from General Stillwell's troops up in Burma

Answer: And they would come down. But with those people, they were so unaccustomed to sanitary anything. We had to -- they even laughed when we showed them a toothbrush, you know, to brush their teeth and things. And if some of them had a broken leg and they were up in traction or something, anybody's in the ward -- they would stand around and laugh and poke fun at them, you know. Things -- they'd never seen anything like that before. And sometimes, if they could walk, we had a certain section for that group of soldiers. And they had dirt floors and stuff, you know. And then their little beds were just criss-cross robes with sheets over them, but even that, they were so surprised at what they had.

Question: Wow.

Answer: And then it wasn't unusual sometimes for one or two of them or whatever to get up and just walk out of the ward and go down to the bazaar and get a lot of rice and spices and stuff, come back, start a fire in the middle of the ward, cook their dinner. Cause they didn't care too much, I don't think, about our American food. It was foreign to them. Naturally. So anyhow, we learned a lot of things about different cultures, you know, there.

Question: So you also had a lot of American soldiers that were wounded that --

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah, we had a lot of the boys. Mostly, I think most of them was like with broken bones and -- and jungle rot and, oh, what, dysentery and malaria and things like that, you know. And of course some of the boys, you know, they would fly the Hump, and if their planes were shot down, that was pretty disastrous, you know, cause, I don't know. someone said that sometimes if the Japanese caught them they would -- I shouldn't say that maybe, but if they did, they would chop off their hands and that would be it, you know. But anyhow, I never saw evidence of that myself but I don't know if anyone else did. But when the boys did come home if they were rescued if their plane was down, it was pretty bad. They were all so good, you know, those kids that would take -- and they had a lot of convoys, you know, trucks and everything. That they would carry supplies across the mountains to Stillwell and Chennault. Actually, that area of the war was so nondescript to most people, they hardly knew there was a war going on there. And poor General Stillwell and Chennault really had to suffer for supplies. Because most of the supplies were going to Europe or to the South Pacific, you know.

Question: I think even today, people that know just general history --

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: -- don't even really realize. I mean you think of -- you think of, you know, Iwo and places like that. Pearl Harbor. You think of the Battle of the Bulge.

Answer: That's right.

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Question: And you forget about places like India and Africa

Answer:

Answer: That's right, because there was -- there was trouble going on in all those places, you know. And so we -- and General Stillwell was so highly honored, so highly respected, you know. Of course he expected the best from his people, from his troops. And every single one of them tried. He was a very good friend to the Chinese. He was very good to them, and they called him Vinegar Joe, you know, because he was really -- you'd think he was very severe but he just -- he loved those people. He was a Burma surgeon, you know, he did a lot to save peoples' lives.

Question: Were they pretty -- your -- what you had for facilities. Could you provide real good care? Was it real primitive? I mean, could you just do basic --

Answer: Well, in those days the main thing that we did probably in our hospital was provide IV's, we had quite a -- like I suppose people have broken bones. We had surgical equipment. They kept us pretty well supplied with that, you know. With things like that. That they could set bones and things, you know. And then treat -- treat the medical part of them, you know. That was keeping people healthy, you know, so they could fight. Yeah, we had -- we had -- I must say we were pretty lucky that way to have pretty good medical supplies in the sense you can hardly remember. But we had, you know, the Americans are so adept at making things go and work, you know, with very little. So we had our laundry rooms and we had our, you know, make-shift this and that and the other but it always worked, you know, the boys did all that. So anyhow, we served our time there and when the war in Europe ended, they decided that our hospital was -- we were, I suppose, close to Japan as anybody. Go to set up a hospital in Japan. And so we closed up our hospital I think in about a week because we had to be on our way. And then we activated in Calcutta

Answer: All the nurses and everybody, we went to for a week or two before we got a ship to take us across the Pacific. So we were 54 days on the ship going across the Pacific. But we did stop at Perth, Australi

Answer: You know, every once in awhile those little stops were so important. So we could get out and walk around. And that was nice, being in Perth, Australi

Answer: But then we went on. Went through a few typhoons and -- and while we were on our way, they dropped the atom bomb on Japan. Well, that was a shocker, too, you know. And I think that made the typhoons worse. Some of the ships went down in that typhoon but we were fortunate. And we landed on Okinawa, I forget just what date it was. I guess I have a little autograph book somewhere. We landed on Okinawa and that's when I told you about climbing down over the side of the ship over the ropes and this one nurse had a darning needle or something in her bag that got out. When the GI was coming down over the ropes, you know, criss cross rope, that thing jabbed him in the abdomen. And oh, he was so offended -- women coming to war, you know.

Question: Guted by friendly fire, I guess.

Answer: Yeah, friendly fire. Anyway, every time I started out on the ship, I don't care when it was, how long it was or what, I was sick. The first days out, I don't know why I was so sick.

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Question: Oh, 'cause of the --

Answer: The motion sickness, yeah. That was just -- that was the only bad thing about all the--. And then we were about six deep in the hold, you know. I always tried to get a lower bunk so I would be close, yeah.

Question: Make the run.

Answer: Yeah, make the run quickly.

Question: When you were in India -- what were your duties? Were you a ward nurse -- were you --

Answer: Yes, I was a ward nurse. I was a medical ward nurse, hm-hmm.

Question: So you had a lot of one on one contact with these young boys that --

Answer: Oh, this was what was so nice, you know, this little girl Lillian, I have several pictures of her. She and I were on this one ward, M-4. And like that Jimmy Shans and some of those nice corpsman, Jack Bergan and oh, so many that I remember that were so good, you know. And they -- of course nurses weren't supposed to at that time associate, you know, with corpsman. I guess, well, I don't know, didn't bother us too much. We never shunned them or anything like that. But you know, you weren't supposed to go on dates with them. And all that type thing. But, you know. But they were just wonderful. Yes, the wards were -- the beds were -- the wards were pretty narrow and the beds came out on both sides, this way, you know. And we would -- we had a lot of camaraderie with the boys and things. And at that time, in our hospital, the African-Americans were segregated into their own wards, you know. That's the way it was then. But we never -- we thought -- that made no difference to us. We were nurses. We took care of them. You know, it was just like other patients.

Question: So even if they were wounded, they were segregated.

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: That didn't -- wasn't an equalizer.

Answer: As far as I can remember, no.

Question: Wow, hunh.

Answer: But they had just the same amount of care. And we took just as good a care of them as we possibly could, you know. So anyway things have changed a lot since then.

Question: When you think back, do you ever think of particular patients that you had -- encounters with patients?

Answer: Well, yes, there are some that I think of. I think especially of this one colored, black man. I used to go in and talk with him and he was so proud because I think one of his daughters or someone was getting married. And I think he felt good about being able to talk to somebody about it, you know. And so I used to go and have lots of conversations with him about what was going on at home and things like that, you know. What -- so many -- so many -- so many things, you know, if you can see somebody that's so desperately ill and they're recovering and getting better, you know, that's so important.

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Question: Is that what most of them -- when you talk to them --'cause these are again just young kids --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: -- are they just wanting to talk about home or do you remember what they talked about?

Answer: Well, most of it was -- yeah, most of it was talking about home. I know that's how it was when we would meet at the clubhouse on Saturday nights, you know and we'd talk. 'Cause everybody was from a different part of the country, you know, and we'd say what do you think about this, what would they do back home with this? And you know, so everybody kind of shared their own little culture with everybody else, and that's what made it so kind of nice, too. You know, it's -- when you talk to people and one thing leads to another, you know, about where they were and where they're from and how they lived and you know their families, they liked to talk about their families and stuff like that, you know. And we would have a lot of fun talking with them. They were all so good.

Question: Were most of them from your facility -- did you patch them up and send them back?

Answer: Send them back. If we could. Yeah, like if they had dysentery or something, and malaria, we'd try to help them get well and get over the worst part and then send them back, yeah, we would.

Question: Were there kids that -- I imagine being out in the jungle and all that they're facing, malaria and the jungle rot and everything like that and then be fighting an enemy on top of that, were there some that --

Answer: You mean kind of gave up or --

Question: Or yeah, or --

Answer: Just depressed.

Question: Depressed, yeah. Did you face that?

Answer: Well, some of them were. Some of them, you know, some of them were very young when they went there -- and it's almost like they missed their mothers, you know, really. And you know, what am I doing this for, you know, seems kind of hopeless, sometimes they would say. You know, what is this all about? Because, well in those days we had no television or anything, you know, we didn't know what was going on in the rest of the world unless we got it through newspaper or something, you know. But all in all, I can't remember of anybody going off the deep end or anything like that. But we did have psychiatric wards, of course. You know, to kind of help people, talk -- I think it helped them a lot if they could talk -- talk things out, you know, talk about things, talk about what's bothering them, that type of thing is some important I think. Well, it is with any kind of illness. You know, if somebody can talk about it and all that, you know.

Question: And so would they -- would they often talk about what was happening in the jungle or was it more they'd try to get their mind somewhere else? Or do you --

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Answer: Well, when they -- they knew where they were, and they knew that -- were people, too.

Question: Who is that -- the Corpsman. The Corpsman. But he was from New York City. Well, I shouldn't say.

Question: So you had a specific uniform you had to wear?

Answer: Oh, well, we had -- our uniforms were very, very simple, but very easy to care for. They were brown and white striped wrap-around little dresses, and we had a little brown and white striped cap that we wore on our heads. And like I said, we would go to the -- we loved to wear those little Indian boots that those Indians made for us. We would go to the Indian bazaar, put our foot down on a piece of white paper, they'd trace around our footprint, and then we'd come back in about a week and they would be finished. And they would fit perfectly. And they would go up about three-quarters of the way up our legs and they were just so comfortable and so wonderful, you know. So that was many. And of course our -- we did wear slack suits, too. They were brown and white striped.

Question: So was that -- a -- your dress suit then?

Answer: Yeah, and then --

Question: One was kind of a city --

Answer: And then we did have regular OD, you know. Other than when we were traveling and so forth where we were really -- where it was khaki, I guess, or something like that. But OD colored, you know, a shirt, jacket, slacks and things. But when we were up there in the jungle it was mainly sear sucker stuff because it was hot. It was hot up there in India, you know. So (laughs)

Question: That's always -- it's interesting cause the picture you had on this ship, you'd stopped at a beach somewhere and gotten off to go look at the beach. And it looked like you had a skirt on and it almost looked like maybe you had pumps on or something like that.

Answer: Well, it might have been, yeah. Yeah, we had skirts, and we had -- I don't know if we had slacks to go with our jackets or not. We had -- I don't have a picture of me -- well, it's just like that picture of me in the book with -- with the fellow at Pocatello. You know, that's the kind of a uniform we would have, you know. And some of them were blue and some were -- there's a nice picture hanging on the wall in there, I think, of me in that uniform. But anyhow, for dress -- dress-up when we got back like to the States or traveling somewhere where it was more important, then we had something more uniform and regulatory to wear, you know.

Question: It sounds like you made lots of friends and some of those friends there were some young corpsmen once in awhile.

Answer: Oh, we could never have done it without the corpsmen. They were perfect. It just makes me cry to think of them. But they were -- they were so good. they helped so much. They never hesitated, you know. Gosh, like, it was just -- they were from all over, you know, the United States. They came from all over. That little Jack Bergen was from New York City and he had that little New York accent, you know, and he was Irish and he was Catholic and that was good for me. So --

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Question: Now he's the one that had the crush on you? Is that --

Answer: Well, yeah, I guess he did. We used to go for walks and things, you know, we could do that, I guess. Apparently we did, it was on a picture. So (laughs) Anyhow, but you were not supposed to socialize with the, like go to the enlisted men's officers club, enlisted men's club and things like that, you know. But to be friends with them, you know and things like that. There was nothing wrong with that, I don't think.

Question: So you had that -- that every day life? I mean that --

Answer: Yeah, we had that every day life. Well, there were quite a few boys like that little Jimmy Shans. It's so nice to think of him now. You wonder what happened to them after all these years, you know. But anyhow --

Question: You'd go to dances and movies?

Answer: Yeah, but we never went with the enlisted men, you know, that was always with officers when we were at dances. And I suppose with that outdoor theatre, you know, we probably went to some of the movies and they sat beside us or something, you know.

Question: Kind of like kids with parents where you had to go separate and then sneak in and find each other in the dark or something.

Answer: Right. Oh, dear. So as much as I can remember. It was hot and --

Question: Now you had rank, right?

Answer: Yes, we were lieutenants. Nurses were lieutenants, you know.

Question: People referred to you as Ma'am.

Answer: Yes, that's right, Yes, Ma'am, No, Ma'am, and salute -- you know, salute us. Things like that.

Question: How did you like that? That must have been kind of a different experience?

Answer: Well, it was, you know -- you had to get used to that. But you learned that, you know, that that's the way it was.

Question: The protocol.

Answer: Yeah, the protocol, you had to do -- you had to take care of that. and you learned to salute very well, when you had to, you know. And we had an awfully nice -- we had a nice, you know, hospital staff. That directed the hospital, you know, like the adjutant and all that that really took good care of all the personnel and saw to it that, you know, if anyone got too desperately ill or hurt or anything they would be sent home, of course, to the United States for better treatment or maybe back to England or Europe or someplace where the facilities were somewhat better. But other than that I think we did pretty well at our little hospital. In those times, you know, when you're living through something like that, you don't realize how important it is. And you don't, you know, a person should have kept notes on everything that went on and names of people. And I had them, somewhere, once, I think quite a few, but it's been -- I've moved around quite a bit since I got home from the Service and everything. It just seems like things kind of get lost in the shuffle. Somewhere.

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Question: It seems -- and I think you started to touch on it was when you're there and it's happening, it's just life going on.

Answer: Ordinary. Yeah, it's just ordinary. Ordinary things going on in that situation. That's the way it was.

Question: Cause I'm guess and I don't know, you can answer this. That -- I mean, did you realize you were a part of history at that time?

Answer: Oh, heavens, no. No. We just knew that the war was on and that it had been going on for quite awhile. And that we were doing our best, you know, well, we did our best at our job. And that's where most of the young people were in those days was in Service. And we never -- we never had any trouble as I can remember at our hospital with drugs or alcoholism or anything like that. It just seemed like people were just, you know, you didn't want to cause trouble. You didn't want to -- we never complained about our government. I can't remember of us ever griping about our president or anything like that. We just respected authority, I guess that was what it was.

Question: Do you -- so you're a lieutenant. Who did you answer to, then?

Answer: Our chief nurse.

Question: And what was her name?

Answer: Her name was Louise Campton, as I remember. She was our chief nurse. Yeah, she was -- she was pretty strict, you know. She wanted us, when we were in uniform, to be in uniform, you know. And that was it. And she never liked long -- my hair was long and black at that time. I had long black hair. But she never wanted long black hair hanging down over the uniform. You know. And like Paglione said, when I get home, I'm going to let my hair grow down to my feet. (laughs) But anyway, she was our chief nurse and so any problems that arose with the nurses, she would have to handle them, take care of them. But she was a very nice person, too. That was a lot of responsibility, yeah. And on the base we had a -- we set up a nice little chapel. I can't remember his name, but we had the nicest little priest there who used to -- he threw up his hands many times that, you know, how -- what the things were going on. You know in the sense that it was so different for him. But he was a wonderful person, too. The chaplains were all very good, and people prayed a lot in those days. I think you weren't afraid to mention God and everything, you know.

Question: Did you have a variety of chaplains or the chaplain had to do --

Answer: No, I think they had chaplains for Catholics, Protestants, probably Jewish Rabbis and things like that, as I remember. Course being Catholic, I would be more in touch with the Catholic chaplain. But we'd go to mass every -- every Sunday and things like that, you know, and carry on, pray. And so that -- we were never deprived of services, I know that. And they would come around. And they were just like one of the soldiers, they really put their lives on the line, too, you know. A lot -- not only -- not so much maybe in India, but I'm sure in Europe and the South Pacific and everything. My brother was a Marine in the South Pacific for four years, and he went through all those horrible battles in the South Pacific. And then my youngest brother, Betty's husband, was a sailor. He was younger but when he graduated from high school he was in Service and he went to the South Pacific to Japan after the war and everything. So we're a very patriotic family. We were. My oldest brother couldn't go because he had had trouble with his ears and he couldn't hear too well when he was younger, so he

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couldn't go, and my sister of course was married and family. But anyhow, we've always been a patriotic family.

Question: Do you -- when you were in the Service, did you have any idea -- did you have contact with your brother at all? Cause you're in India and he's over fighting --

Answer: Well, see, we didn't -- in those days we had those little -- everything was censored. All the mail, everything we wrote or anything was censored. But I'd write home to Mother. Things would be scratched out or everything, and he'd write home to Mother and so we would get news that way. And then she'd write to each one of us.

Question: So she was the clearing-house.

Answer: Yeah, so -- what she got, I guess, was about half of what was going on, each way. But it was pretty scary. She was -- my mother was a musician and beautiful pianist. And so all the time that we were -- were Catholic, but if this makes any difference or not. But all the time that we were in Service, my mother, every morning, played the organ in church and sang the high mass in Latin. For us. So that was pretty nice.

Question: Wow. That had to be hard for your mom.

Answer: Well, yeah, because she -- you know, she -- she struggled to raise us.

Question: As you say, your dad died when --

Answer: Yeah, she was 35. In 1930 at the beginning of the Depression if you can imagine that.

Question: The Depression, and she had five kids and --

Answer: No money, nothing. Like I said, we always were like Topsy in Uncle Tom's Cabin. We just grewed. You know. That's all. But we did a pretty good job of it, I think.

Question: And it's interesting cause I don't know, you can give me your perspective on this. Looking back you realize it was the Depression, but did you realize it at the time?

Answer: Everybody was kind of out of money at that time, everybody, you know. It was probably worse for a woman with five kids, but I think nobody had much money. And if anybody had any money, they were considered well off. But everybody at that time was pretty much the same boat. And Mother finally got a job on WPA, you know, and she was in charge of a sewing room for ladies -- there were about 40 ladies under her. And she would make little overalls for the boys and little dresses for girls and she did a lot for the Indians -- we lived in South Dakota

Answer: That's where I grew up. And down in the breaks and everything, the Indians, she'd take flannel sheets and blankets, that kind of stuff, out to the Indians. Cause they were out there in the cold winters, you know. I don't know. There's so many things go on in a person's lifetime, you know. You don't really dwell on it till you start talking about it, thinking about it, you know.

Question: Cause it's just like you being a nurse in the Service. There was -- there was a job, and everybody was doing the same thing --

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Answer: Yeah, and you did what you were supposed to do, what you were sent there to do. And you tried to do your best.

Question: Now you had one picture from Indian that was a cemetery at the -- where you were a nurse and you talked about the plane that had gone down.

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: Was that -- was that for soldiers, too? Is that what --

Answer: Oh, yes, hm-hmm. And I think -- I think some of the nurses that were killed in that plane were buried there first and then they probably -- they could be sent home, I guess afterward. Sometime it would be interesting to be able to go back to that are

Answer: Up to Ledo and see, you know, where all these places are now.

Question: See how much it's changed.

Answer: How much it has changed and everything. Yes, that was for -- they had to have a cemetery there for -- for boys, you know, and girls. I can't remember of anybody from our medical hospital other than the nurses that were killed in the plane crash, the Red Cross girls or whoever it was being buried and having big funerals and things like that, you know.

Answer: But then on holidays, like, I said, there was a picture there of the 4th of July and everybody was trying to -- try to pretend we were Stateside, you know, carry on.

Question: That must have been kind of -- especially the 4th of July -- I mean, American independence --

Answer: Yeah, right. Q -- over in India, you know.

Answer: Yeah, right. So anyhow, that's the way it was.

Question: Did you -- I assume you spent a Christmas there then?

Answer: Yes, we were there Christmastime. But, you know what we used to do. We had all that Atrabrine tablets, you know, and so we would put a lot of those Atrabrine tablets in a pan of water and we'd dye some of our mosquito netting and make little curtains for our bashes and stuff. It would dye kind of yellowish-green and stuff. And we'd make little curtains for our -- for our bashes. But Christmas -- yeah. Well, we tried to celebrate it just like we would if we were home, you know. I can't remember. We probably draw names or something and tried to -- if we ever got somewhere out of camp -- get -- but they didn't have things like PX's that I can remember, you know. But we were always supplied with -- with toothbrushes and toothpaste, you know, toiletries that we needed. But it was always nice to get a box from home.

Question: Oh, yeah.

Answer: And find some things in it, you know that -- that we wanted. That's when -- when nylon stockings were coming into vogue, you know, that's when they were coming. so it was always nice to get some new pair of nylon hose and some nice shampoo or something.

Question: So would your mom -- I know the Red Cross -- but would your mom --

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Answer: She'd send packages. They could. If they could get them -- take awhile to get there, you know. But we would. It was always nice to get a package. At Christmas, holidays, things like that.

Question: I imagine that Christmas became even more special --

Answer: Yeah, everything -- we held things more dear, I guess, then. Well, we'd -- we never thought we would never get home, that something would happen. But you couldn't help but realize that you were on a mission that was dangerous. You know, I mean, I don't know, how to express it. We never dwelt on it at all. But there was always a possibility, you know, that something would happen. Just like there is now if you fly in the sky, it's -- you never know if you'll get to your destination or not. But you don't not fly because you're afraid to.

Question: So it was the same of being a nurse then, you didn't -- didn't

Answer: Hm-hmm, yeah.

Question: So you don't remember, say if a soldier passed away, came back from fighting and passed away there, you don't remember a big funeral for him or --

Answer: I can't remember that unless his squadron would do it, you know. I can't remember that we had any huge big funerals with a procession and everything, you know. I can't remember that we had any.

Question: 'Cause I would imagine, maybe I'm wrong, but that became -- a certain aspect of it became every day.

Answer: I think wherever the military funeral was, that's where they would take the body, probably, if he died. And of course they'd have to write home, you know, and give all the information. But I think -- I think that's where that would be taken on. Like people go out to the Tahoma National Cemetery here. We have -- we're so fortunate to have that here now. And lots of -- they have about 12 or 15 funerals a day out there, sometime. But that's like it would be over there. They'd have a special place for them, and a special ceremony for the body and so forth. and I suppose like if you belong to a group and everything like that.

Question: Now you told me earlier, you were describing the latrine -- tell me about that. Getting to the latrine from where cause getting -- well, I guess give me kind of a picture of where -- was it a village that you were in or a --

Answer: No, it was just our hospital.

Question: Just your hospital out in the middle of nowhere?

Answer: Yeah, just our hospital out there at the foot of the hills. But then apart from our bashes, you know, the GI's had built up this bamboo wall, you know, around this area and somehow or other they had figured out how to get some water down there that would be enough for us to shower, you know. So we would -- but it was tall grass that we had to run through on the way from the bashes to the latrine. And those tall grasses were filled with leeches and everything, goodness knows what kind of bugs and snakes and everything else. So we would run down there and we'd try to get -- if we had leeches on us, try to get them off by showering and soaping and everything like that. Then on the way back, if we -- leeches

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got onto our legs or anything, then we'd have to burn them off with a cigarette or salt or something like that. But if they got into your bloodstream, that was pretty bad, you know.

Question: It sounds like you running the shower was almost pointless, to a certain extent.

Answer: I know.

Question: You get cleaned up and then --

Answer: Yeah, back. But anyhow, it was -- it was nice to have it -- have the latrine there, you know.

Question: So you didn't have --

Answer: To do that was mainly -- yeah, well it was latrine and then shower as well. You know, so anyhow.

Question: And you had a nice chapel.

Answer: We had a lovely chapel on base. We had -- the wards were nice. They were clean. Our American wards were nice and clean. And we were always free to go and talk to anybody in the higher up that we wanted to, you know, anyone that was in charge of the hospital or anything. I never did but I'm sure that some people did, you know. And we always had male companionship if we wanted it, you know, like the officers and everything. You know, we could always go with them. They were always good. So forth.