

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Mary Kathryn Hampton

INTERVIEWER: Beth Carmichael

DATE: November 21, 2005

[Begin Interview]

BC: This is November 21, 2005. My name is Beth Carmichael, and I'm at the home of Mary Kathryn Hampton in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to conduct an interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro [UNCG].

Ms. Hampton, thank you so much for talking with me today. If you will give me your full name, we'll use that as a test to see how your voice sounds on the machine.

MH: My full name: Mary Kathryn, K-a-t-h-r-y-n, Hampton. That's my maiden name. I went back to my maiden name after I was married.

[Tape recorder paused]

BC: Ms. Hampton, would you tell me a few things about your background, such as when and where you were born and where you lived when you were growing up?

MH: I was born in Winston-Salem, April 30, 1920. And I lived here until I went into the army. I went to the nursing school at North Carolina Baptist Hospital. Eight months after I got out of nursing school I went in the army.

BC: Can you tell me a little bit about your family and your home life when you were growing up?

MH: A little bit?

BC: Or as much as you'd like.

MH: Well, I am the third girl, and then I had two brothers. And then eight years after my youngest brother—there were just two years separate from the first five. And then my youngest sister was born when I was twelve years old.

BC: And what did your parents do?

MH: What did they do? My father came to Winston-Salem with his family to work at Reynolds Tobacco Company. And he didn't like it, so then he set up his own business. You want some of the dramatic part of my life?

BC: Yes.

MH: Okay. Right at—In 1932 at the peak of the Depression, he—on a Saturday night, the night before his birthday—he knew that it was dangerous to be alone. And so he put two dollars in his pocket and seven nickels and got in his T-model Ford. And this young black man, young one, about sixteen-years-old, came up and shot him. And my father never believed that he would shoot him, that he wanted to shoot him. He said, that boy thought I had a gun. But he did not have.

BC: Oh, my.

MH: As a matter of fact, I remember very dramatically riding down the street one time he said, “There is the bad word, nigger, who shot me.”

He never pressed charges. This was the night that Smith Reynolds was murdered. He got all the publicity [laughs]. But nobody believed that my father would live, nobody, except my mother. My mother was pregnant with my youngest sister.

BC: Oh, my goodness.

MH: And the lady in the church decided that they had to have a meeting with her, because they knew that she was going to be too shocked when, you know. So, they came, and they, you know, to try to make it easy for her. She said, “He's not going to die.” And he didn't. Nobody, including the doctors and the nurses—my father chewed tobacco and, of course, his intestines were perforated, so he couldn't drink anything. And so his parotid glands swole up. And the Dr. Osley, namely for better care, moved the other patient out of the room. So, he had a semi-private room and nobody in the city could know that there was an infectious disease person. The doctor, for sure, knew that it was from chewing the tobacco. But this was to give him better care.

MH: How long did it take him to recover?

BC: He was in the hospital for six weeks. He had private duty nurses for two weeks. He lost everything he owned, everything, most of all his pride because—we lived on 25th Street and the front of our yard was in town. The back was in the country. And, so, we had a good garden. He had a chicken farm. So, our living situation did not diminish at all because my mother was a very, very good seamstress.

BC: You lived off your family farm, basically, your garden?

MH: Oh, yeah. And he had an incubator, you know. And, so, he worked real hard. And he sold his eggs and everything. But we ate as well as anybody else did. But he did lose our home and had to rent for awhile until—really until I went to nursing school.

BC: Where did you go to high school?

MH: I graduated from [R.J.] Reynolds High School.

BC: And when did you graduate?

MH: Nineteen thirty-six—thirty-seven, excuse me.

BC: [Nineteen] Thirty-seven?

MH: And I was out for a year because I had to be eighteen years old before I could go in nursing school.

BC: So, what did you do after graduation?

MH: Well, I did some private duty nursing before I went into the army.

BC: How did you get into private duty nursing? This was—

MH: Well, I didn't want to work for the hospital.

BC: Let's backtrack just a moment. When did you decide that you wanted to become a nurse?

MH: That's all in here [points to memoirs]. When I was ten years old I had my appendix out. And they gave ether then. And I was so sick. And my mother was standing there trying to get me to smile. And the person, the nurse who was standing there who was—she just recently died—stood there. She said, “She can't smile. She's too sick.” And when I looked up I said—she was the prettiest thing I had ever seen. And I made up my mind from that day forward that I was going to be a nurse. And all my plans, all my education and everything led to becoming a nurse. She became a very good friend of mine.

BC: Did she?

MH: Went to my church. And I told her that when [laughs] I was happy being a nurse I gave her credit. When I was unhappy, I would—

BC: She got the blame.

MH: And I've got a wonderful picture of me and her.

BC: That's great. Where did you go to nursing school?

MH: North Carolina Baptist Hospital which is now Wake Forest [University] Baptist Medical Center.

BC: And what was nursing school like back then?

MH: Ooh, how much time do you got?

BC: As long as you want to talk.

MH: The first three months we were probationers. And we were not even allowed in the patients' rooms. We had to be sure that we learned to clean everything. And our utility rooms were very clean because we had to clean bed pans and everything. And clean beds. I mean more than aides do now. And then once we got—once we passed probation we got our caps. And nursing school in those days were [laughs] so different from what it is now in so many, many ways. Mainly because we staffed the hospital. There was only one RN [registered nurse] in the hospital at night. The nurses—The students staffed the hospital. And if we were on night duty we would have to get up in the middle of our sleeping time to go to class. Work came first. Education came next, which was minimal.

BC: What types of classes did you take?

MH: Type of what?

BC: Classes?

MH: The nursing school, well, that was just, really, it was—I think nursing education in those days was similar to what the nurse aides get now, although, they did give us special classes in each one of the specialties. But not necessarily did we work—like when I had obstetrics I didn't—I may not be in obstetrics.

BC: Okay.

MH: Because I was staffing the hospital. But we had specialties. The interesting thing about my class particularly is that we did not have a pediatric department. And, so, in order for us—for our school to get accreditation, we had to have some experience with children. So, my class was the first and there were only two or three at the most, who went to Children Hospital in Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania]. And that was my first time to ever be out of the state. So, that's where I got my pediatric experience

BC: Oh, wow.

MH: That's the unique part about my education was going up there for three months. It was very good for me because we had to go intervals. My roommate went before me. And then my time went past the time I had to be to graduate. But I had scarlet fever, and I had to make up time. So, my make up time actually was the same as the extended time for my pediatric experience. So, I was very lucky.

BC: That worked out well.

MH: Oh, yes.

BC: What kind of social life was there?

MH: None. You go to church on Sunday night. And you go out—and our house lady, she had a cane. She could hardly walk [laughs]. But I'm here to tell you if we did not get in by ten o'clock we were sent to the director's office. Very, very strict. Very little social life. But we could go to church on Sunday night. And ten o'clock on Saturday night we could go out.

BC: When did you finish nursing school?

MH: Nineteen forty-one. I graduated in September '41 before Pearl Harbor. So, you see Pearl Harbor came in December of that year. And then eight months later I went in the army.

BC: Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor, do you remember that?

MH: Very, very, very well. My mother—as I told you, she was a good seamstress. And she had in the Beelo Home, you know where the Beelo Home—Right now there's not a door in that room, but there's a window. But there was a door opened up from the street. And she had a sewing room there. And she sewed for students at—A lot of students at Salem College. And she started a fad of a particular pattern of a dress that all the students at Salem College wanted. Then nursing school students. Anyway, I was standing right beside of her when war was declared on Monday after Pearl Harbor was on Sunday. And the Monday when the president announced that he was declaring war I was standing right beside of her. I have a vivid memory of this, very vivid.

BC: Was that the first that you had heard about Pearl Harbor, or did you hear about it that Sunday evening?

MH: I don't think I—We may have. We had a radio. In those days we didn't have television, you know?

BC: Did you know where Pearl Harbor was or what—

MH: No, but I've been there since.

BC: Did you decide right away that you wanted to join?

MH: I started working on my family right away, pretty soon. Because I was not happy with—I wasn't about to work for the hospital [laughs]. I was working twelve hours a day for a little bit more than six dollars every day of the week.

[Dog barks, tape recorder paused]

MH: Biding time until I could get into the army, until I convinced my family I could go in the army.

BC: When did you decide to join?

MH: Well, it took me a little while. I don't remember. But I got pretty tired of working twelve hours a day for \$6.50. And when I found out that I could get—I could make—at first we made ninety dollars a month plus board and room and everything, which was a lot more money. And that was the main reason I wanted to go to begin with, because more better pay.

BC: Did you ever see any recruiting posters—

MH: No.

BC: —or anything?

MH: No.

BC: —that made you—

MH: No.

BC: And why did you choose the Army Nurse Corps instead of, say, the Navy Nurse Corps?

MH: I wanted to go into the air force and they told me at that time it wasn't an air force. It was an air corps. It was part of the army. And they said you join the army and you can usually get into the air. It didn't happen that way.

BC: Now, did any of your siblings serve?

MH: My two brothers did. And that's all in here.

BC: Were they in the army as well?

MH: No. My oldest brother was in the air force. And my youngest brother was in the navy.

BC: Okay. How did your parents feel about you joining, did you need their permission?

MH: They didn't like the idea, but I convinced them that I wouldn't have to go overseas. And then, you know, I told you in the story, you know, how I happened—When I got so tired of doing the paperwork. A lot of it is written in here. The paperwork, I got so tired of doing the paperwork, at Fort Benning and the social life—I wore evening dresses. The only thing we could wear other than uniforms were evening dresses and bathing suits. I wore evening dresses out literally. Mama made me quite a bit. I still got the cape that Mama made me.

BC: Do you really?

MH: She made me a dress uniform, formal dress uniform. My mother was a very good seamstress.

BC: Where did you enlist?

MH: I went to Fort Benning, Georgia. We went to Fort Benning, Georgia. I was there for one year. And then we went to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. That's where they wanted to teach us how to march which I never learned. And then we were there for a short time. And then we went to Elkins, West Virginia. And that's when we learned to live and work in tents.

BC: What kind of training did you have? Did you have—

MH: In the military?

BC: Right. Did you have something equivalent to the basic training?

MH: Well, Tony tried to teach us to march, but he never succeeded. Most of it was trying to learn how to work in tents, how to nurse.

BC: Was this in preparation to go overseas?

MH: Oh, yes. Because when, you see, what happened when—see, when the chief nurse said that she had to have ten names the next day. This is the way the army works. And she had my number. You need to read this to know how she got my number. And, so, I told her she could put my name on the list if Lucy would say she would go. And, of course, did not—her name did not stay on the list, but mine did.

BC: And this was your friend Lucy Denny?

MH: Yes, and she stayed at Fort Benning and then she was supposed to—about the time the war was over she was supposed to go to Pacific, but she never left Fort Benning.

BC: And you two had enlisted together?

MH: Huh?

BC: You two had enlisted together? You joined the Army Nurse Corps together, didn't you?

MH: Oh, yes. Yes, we were down there together for a whole year.

BC: What did you do at Fort Benning, what kind of work?

MH: We sat at the desk and told the corpsman to do all the nursing. You want to hear more about it? You ain't got time.

BC: So, you—

MH: I didn't like that. They put me on the officer's ward because every time I complained—One time they had a patient, a paratrooper, that landed on his head. And my record showed that I had had experience in a—with an iron lung. So, I got the nurse there. And then I had—then they put me on a woman's ward. I said she had my number. And I worked on the woman's ward. And they put me—then they had an epidemic that's called atypical pneumonia. And they opened up a ward before the sheets were on—anything was on there, the patients were there.

BC: So, you worked with men and women at Fort Benning?

MH: This was all Fort Benning, a lot of it that happened at Fort Benning. I got fed up with it.

BC: Did you feel that you weren't getting to do the same types of nursing work that the men were doing?

MH: I did not. I was not doing the kind of nursing I wanted to do. And this has been my life. I've been trying to change nursing ever since.

BC: Okay. What happened when your parents found out you were going overseas?

MH: I don't remember. I think before it was over with they were very proud.

BC: I'm sure they were. But they weren't too happy when you first went?

MH: Oh, no. Oh, no. But I was of age, and they couldn't keep me here.

BC: When did you leave? And can you tell me a little bit about where you went from and where you sailed to on your trip across the Atlantic?

MH: I went by train to Fort Benning.

BC: And then when you went from Fort Benning overseas?

MH: Went—Well, from Fort Benning we went—When I joined the 44th Evac—When the chief nurse said she had to have ten names to go join an evacuation hospital, I didn't know what she was talking about. I didn't know what—I never heard of an evacuation hospital. But I told her she could put my name on the list if Lucy would go. And I figured Lucy wouldn't go, and I would not be volunteering. This is the way I got around my parents. But my name stayed on. Hers didn't. The best thing that ever happened to me. And that's in here.

BC: Is that when you joined the 44th Evacuation Hospital?

MH: Yes. Yes, that—So, what happened when my name stayed on the list, then I went to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Then from Camp Atterbury went Elkins, West Virginia. We went from there to Fort Dix, New Jersey. And that was the staging area before we went—before we got on the ship in New Jersey to go through England. And then we were in England for seven months before the invasion of Normandy.

BC: What did you think when you were in all this training, setting up tents and learning about evacuation hospitals?

MH: It was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun. It was rewarding, the most rewarding experience that any nurse can have. I have all kinds of nursing in my life. I have taught nursing. I have been nursing administration. And I have got all kinds of nursing. Nothing will ever, ever equal the experience I had in the 44th Evacuation Hospital. But I happened to be extremely lucky. I was in the best unit that was in the army.

BC: Did you have much leave time during your training? Were you able to see any of these places?

MH: I didn't have any leave time after I joined the 44th. I had some from Fort Benning. That's when I came home for Mama to sew for me. I think I must have had two trips home. I don't remember how much as far as Fort Benning.

BC: And did she make all of your uniforms or were you issued—

MH: Oh, no. She just made what I wanted. Made my evening dresses more than anything else.

BC: But you were issued—

MH: Because I had to wear an evening dress if I went out at night. I couldn't wear plain dress clothes.

BC: But you were issued standard—

MH: Yes.

BC: —army nurse uniforms?

MH: And I found—The first time I have seen the seersucker dress that I was issued was at the luncheon [annual Women Veterans Historical Project luncheon at UNCG].

BC: You're kidding?

MH: When I went to the Woman's Memorial [Women In Military Service For America Memorial (WINSAM)] they did show it. And I have pictures of the general who was a nurse, retired nurse, who gave a wonderful tour of the Woman's Memorial. And I told her that I did not see the uniforms that were issued to me.

BC: Well, I'm glad we have one.

MH: But I saw it over here. That seersucker dress. And I got a picture of it.

BC: Oh, great.

MH: That my friend made of me.

BC: Great. So, you sailed from New York?

MH: Well, New Jersey.

BC: New Jersey.

MH: Fort Dix, New Jersey. Let's see, Fort Dix. We left about—I got it. It's written. The name of the—it was in here, so I managed to get that. We left there, I guess it was New York.

Anyway, you will get the—exactly where we were when we got on the—We got on the [SS] *Aquitania* which was one of the large, about the third-largest British transports at that time. It was a big one. It's a pretty good story.

BC: And what was it like sailing across the ocean?

MH: Going across the ocean?

BC: Yes.

MH: How much time you got?

BC: [laughs]

MH: Well, I was in—As Bob says, it was a cabin, it was not a room, that had a sink in it and it had—it probably was a third-class place for one person. It had three bunks on one side and three bunks on the other side. And that was our bedroom—bed and bath. [laughs] Okay. We went—When we got on—When we first got on we reported at night. And the next morning [laughs] we had a drill. And, so, we were instructed to follow the MP's [military police] instructions. They had white gloves on. I was the second one in line. The first one went that way, and I followed this one over this way. I happened to be the very first one, and the only one, to see the ocean that day. When I got out there I was the only female, the only one, in olive drab among about—It looked about like four hundred Royal Air Force, Air Corps pilots in their dress blue. And so—and that was it. The announcement came on the speaker said, “All nurses go to the office lounge.” Well, that nurse on Deck C, whatever it was, “Go to the office lounge.” I was the only one that. And I got to see the ocean first.

BC: Did you have much interaction with the men that you were sailing with?

MH: Never saw—Not on the—We didn't see any. We were completely isolated. That's the only time I ever saw them. Never saw them again on that boat.

BC: So, the women were isolated?

MH: Oh, yes. They were—See, they had two meals a day. And they were—you were programmed to go at a certain time. So, I'm sure that they went at other times. Because they served meals all day long.

BC: So, were you with only army nurses or were there other—

MH: Oh, they were the only ones that we ate with. They were the only ones I saw going across the ocean.

BC: And when did you arrive in Scotland?

MH: Yes. I got it here. The dates I've got in here.

BC: Okay. But it would be the fall of '43?

MH: It was right before Thanksgiving.

BC: Okay.

MH: The day before Thanksgiving. We got to Maidenhead in England, I think it was Thanksgiving Day because we had a Thanksgiving dinner. That's where we were in England. I've got pictures of that, too.

BC: How long did you spend in Maidenhead?

MH: In what?

BC: How long did you spend in England, seven months?

MH: Seven.

BC: And what did you do during that time, was it all training?

MH: Most boring experience anybody could possibly have. There were four of us in one room. That was just about this big [laughs].

BC: What—

MH: And we tried to teach other how to play bridge without any instructions. They did—We did do some marching and we had—we bivouacked some. I won't ever forget. I was never as cold after we went into Normandy as I was there because our—When we bivouacked, see, we would go out and we was supposed to live in a tent like we were going to when we got to Normandy. Well, we didn't have enough under us. And it was cold and damp in this nasty weather [pronouncing it with British accent] as they say. So, I was very cold. We did some bivouacking I think a couple of times. And then we did a lot of marching. And I think the chaplain always planned our marches because we went to churches—I got a lot of pictures of us at church graveyards.

BC: What were your living conditions like?

MH: What?

BC: What were your living conditions like?

MH: The nurses were housed in two different buildings. And we were within walking distance of the Thames River, very, very close. And we spent a lot of time on the Thames. I've got—See I painted twenty-five paintings of our—I got some of them left. And I've got a painting of us on the Thames River.

BC: That's wonderful.

MH: Living conditions? I will never eat—I have never had liked Brussels sprouts since then. [laughs] We were fed—I used to say we were fed Brussels sprouts three times a day, but I think that's an exaggeration. But we spent a lot of time on the Thames River on the boats in Thames River. And I've got a painting of us trying to feed the king's swans.

BC: Oh, that's neat.

MH: Wasn't very nice what we did. We put the real hot mustard—we were not used to that the English did—wrapped bread in it and we would feed to the king's swans and we would watch it go up and down. That was part of our entertainment.

BC: What else did you do for recreation?

MH: Tried to learn to play bridge. Finally, we found some doctors who knew the rules of playing bridge and they helped us. Of course, see, I got married in New York City and then we were together all the way across the continent. And he was Catholic, so I had to get married a second time because—that's in here, too.

BC: So, you got married before you—

MH: I got married in New York City six o'clock one night. The next morning he went to England. One month to the day we were together, and we went across the continent and ended up about ten miles apart.

BC: So, he was in the army?

MH: He was a quartermaster, laundry. And when we got—See, when I went over with those by-the-book, straight-laced colonel in charge. And when he saw [MH's husband] Pat, he was ready to send me to the Pacific. We got rid of him first. And when Colonel Blatt—We didn't have Col. Blatt hardly any time before I realized that I could ask him, because I knew that Pat was in the laundry we were going to have a laundry attached to our unit. And the colonel said, yes, he could get him. And he said he thought about it. But I'd have to—he would have to admit that we were married. As it was he—we didn't get Pat in there. But he saw to it that we were together. And they even put a sidewalk in up for us at times. And I got to Normandy first. And when—And the day that Pat got there none other than the colonel told him where to find me.

BC: That's amazing.

MH: It's all in here.

BC: So, he was attached to a different unit—

MH: Oh, yes. He was the quartermaster laundry, yes, and that's why we're both up in platoons attached to hospitals. But his was not. His stayed in one company. And they laundered all of the soldiers' clothing.

BC: How did you two meet?

MH: When we were on maneuvers in West Virginia.

BC: In West Virginia.

MH: Yes. Big mistake. I had a two-year honeymoon and no marriage.

BC: Well, I'm sure it was awfully hard with you both overseas.

MH: Well, that was fun. We had—I spent—we were in Paris on VE [Victory in Europe] Day, five days on a three-day pass, worth every day of it. I did a lot. I say, when you can read my story you will think I had nothing but a good time.

BC: Well, let's get back to England. You're with the 44th Evacuation Hospital. What did you know about D-Day? Did you know what you were training for?

MH: Oh, yes. All along we were being prepared to work in tents.

BC: So, you knew that you would be going to France?

MH: Oh, yes, oh, yes, oh, yes. We knew that from the time we got to Camp Atterbury.

BC: What kind of uniforms did they issue you? Did you have specific field uniforms?

MH: We had to have fatigues. You want to know about what we wore across the English Channel? That's in here, too.

BC: Well, can you tell me about your trip across the Channel?

MH: We're through with England?

BC: Unless you have anything else that you wanted to add about your time there?

MH: No, I don't think there's anything else you want to know about England. Pat—See, I spent a lot of time going up—Pat was in Oxford, and I was about twenty miles from him. And

he would come see me one weekend, and I would go see him the next. So, we spent a lot of time going back and forth. I've got a lot of pictures of us, you know, on the Thames River and up—As a matter of fact, the Thames River was in Oxford as well as Maidenhead.

BC: So, it sounds like you had a good bit of free time?

MH: Well, in England we were—everybody was waiting to—

BC: Just waiting?

MH: Waiting to go into the invasion. We all knew that—we all knew about the invasion. We knew what was going to happen. We knew we were going to be among the first.

BC: Were you told to keep that quiet?

MH: No more at that time—

BC: Or was that public information at that time?

MH: —but once we got to Normandy, we were not supposed to write home about where we had been at all until I got to Malmedy [Belgium] and we were told that we could write where we had been. So, I did. Then we got caught in the Battle of the Bulge.

BC: Right.

MH: And my mother wrote me and said, “This is where I think you were because there was a massacre there.” I was there at the time of the massacre.

BC: Right.

MH: And my mother wrote me. And she said, “This is where I think you were.” I never told her where I was anymore.

BC: Well, before we get to that, can you tell me about your trip across the English Channel?

MH: [laughs] Are you ready?

BC: I'm ready.

MH: Okay. We were in an LCI, Landing Craft, Infantry. And we called it a hole where we were. The nurses were at one end of it, and the men were at the other, doctors and administrative men. We were three or four decks high and if we—To walk with all the equipment we had, we had to walk sideways with our equipment, not sideways, that's how much space we had. We had to have a musette bag on the side and our gas mask on

the other side and a canteen wrapped around us. And we could not—And they had—And you know how we were dressed? We had men's long johns to keep us warm. You know how they're made? Then female fatigues that we wear. And then on top of that we had men's fatigues which were impregnated to protect us from what? From gas if we got hurt. To keep us from being burned. Try going to the bathroom when you're seasick. Well, I learned why they had two commodes facing each other.

BC: [laughs] I can guess why.

MH: All the time I was going across the Atlantic Ocean from the day I got on that ship the person that was in the room with me started talking about being seasick. And I said, "It's all in your head." I got so tired of hearing her say this. She was—

[Humming noise, tape recorder paused]

MH: When we—there were forty-five boats, and some of them were ships in our convey. And we got—We were loaded just before dark. Now there had been a storm at sea in the English Channel. You are too young to know about that, but there was. And the docks had been destroyed. So, we were out in the channel and they—our drifting, you know, we lost three anchors. So, then our Liberty ship got on one side and the Victory ship on the other side and instead of going this way, we went this way [demonstrating?]. And we knocked a hole in our little boat.

BC: Oh, no.

MH: So, they gave us an emergency landing then that many of the others could not get. They hooked us up to a causeway and I've got that all in here correctly. Anyway, seasickness is all in your head. So, I got up and I heard all these rumors about all these problems about us having to dock. We might get off. We may not and all this going back and forth. So, I got up and I decided I'm going to go on upstairs and get some nice fresh air. So [laughs] my story's better than anybody's on this. And I got all my equipment except my leggings on. And when I got upstairs Dr. Rob Belt, yeah, I think he was the one, helped me put my leggings on. Then I sat down. No, wait a minute. First thing I did was he helped me with my leggings. And I stood in line to get the food. I got to back up a little bit. I stood in line to get the food, and I got all—got a great big breakfast and I decided I better give that to—I gave it to Mack, I think, at the end of the line. So, then, I got some dry cereal and I knew that I could go back—and I knew that food would stay down if I was like this [demonstrating].

BC: If you were laying down?

MH: I did not want anybody to know I was sick. And I did not want to admit it to myself. So, I went back to bed, and then I got up and went—I got ahead of myself.

BC: Okay.

MH: Okay. So, I stood it down [laughs]. And they got ready for us to go aboard. And Lauren, our assistant chief nurse, came up to me and she said, “Mary Kay, you are green.” I was the only one who walked off of that little boat without my equipment. She had my friends behind me to carry my equipment. Seasickness is in the head. It is real.

BC: Now, you mentioned—

MH: So, you wanted to know how that was. It was rough.

BC: You mentioned a musette bag. What is that?

MH: That is what you carry your—that's what you carry your personal things in.

BC: Okay. And what were the Liberty and Victory ships, they were—

MH: What?

BC: The Liberty and Victory ships, they were on either side?

MH: They are bigger ships.

BC: Bigger ships.

MH: We were in a little, a very little—I've got a little pin of the LCI. Those LCIs were made down out right outside of New Orleans [Louisiana]. And they have this wonderful museum down there.

BC: Right. Oh, it's terrific.

MH: So, I got a pin from that. It's wonderful. But, actually, I called it a boat. It was not big enough to be called a ship. A Landing Craft, Infantry is what it was called, LCI.

BC: And you landed at Omaha Beach?

MH: Omaha Beach on D-13, the nineteenth day of June. See, D-Day was the sixth. We landed on the nineteenth.

BC: What was it like when you landed, what did the beach look like?

MH: All I was thinking about was getting my foot on ground [laughs]. I wasn't going to tell anybody. [laughs]

BC: What was the beach like when you arrived? What were the conditions?

MH: You really want to know? I'd swear I would never go back. You see, the beachhead had already been established, but it was dreadful. Right across where we were set up for our first time, there was a graveyard right across from us. You could smell the bodies before they dumped them. And don't tell me that they were in caskets. They were not. They were in bags.

BC: What did you do after you arrived? You went inland and did you—

MH: You see the first thing that happened was we—There's an old saying in the army, hurry up and wait. So, we had to hurry up to get set up and then, of course, the beachhead was established and they were getting ready for the next big battle which was Saint-Lô. And I was—A good, old friend of mine, he was my sweetheart in Fort Benning that Lucy liked, too. Lucy had told him where I was. And so he came—He was in the corps headquarters. He's one of the general's assistants. And he came to see me. And I said, "I'm getting tired of this hurry up and wait." He says, "I'll give you until ten o'clock tonight." I was in a post-op[erative] ward. Patients were supposed to come to me from the operating room with instructions from the doctor. And I had the right to send them out, you know. If they were too bad I would tell the doctor to come back to see them. In the pre-op wards we had doctors to determine who would go to the operating room first.

BC: Okay.

MH: My ward was immediately filled up with pre-op patients, and I had no doctor.

BC: Oh, my gosh.

MH: So, it wasn't all fun, but that was a fairly rewarding experience. And that's a—And the story that goes with that is, see, Col. Blatt and the five nurses and five doctors that he brought with them had experience in Africa, Sicily, and Italy. And they had set up surgical teams. So, they had a lot of good experience. Okay, we had a surgical team to arrive at that time. And I had a patient—I could give you a long description of this patient that I had—I had to have a doctor fast. I had to have a doctor very fast. So, I sent one of my corpsmen over there. And the surgeon from the surgical team had just arrived. He saved this man's life. And this man was the only one that we kept. See we were an evacuation hospital. And we always sent them back to station hospital. But we kept him for a second surgical procedure.

BC: Can you tell me about the chain of evacuation and what an evacuation hospital did?

MH: The what kind?

BC: Can you tell me about the chain of evacuation and what an evacuation—

MH: See, what happens is you have—in each—See, I was in the First Army. We were the spearhead. And the army is divided up into divisions and corps headquarters. I was in the 13th Corps. And so we had several hospitals. And so we would—When our hospital would fill up, then the other hospital would come and jump over us, and then they would start taking patients while we emptied ours. This is evacuation.

BC: Okay.

MH: And, see, eventually I went into the earlier evac—When I was in Malmedy I was in the earlier evac. That's another—That's a beach story.

BC: Okay.

MH: But I was in the immediate post-op ward then.

BC: So you were seeing patients directly from the field?

MH: Field hospitals, a few field hospitals, but most of them came to us from the medics that were in the fields. Most of them came from the medics.

BC: How many nurses were there?

MH: There were forty nurses and two Red Cross nurses in our unit. And we had a lot of arguments about whether there were forty. Somebody said there were not quite that many. But I always said there were forty nurses.

BC: How quickly were you able to set up and move your hospital?

MH: It didn't take long. Because you see our men were trained to set the tents and everything up very fast. And my—And our wardrobe was our mattress. And it kept us warm. Good way to press your clothes.

BC: I bet.

MH: And you know exactly how—You put your pants here, your—what would go on there—and then your underwear up here. And you could dress real fast. Because it was cold as now. Very good living.

BC: Were you given much notice when you had to move?

MH: You see we just followed what ever the instructions were. It didn't bother us. It's no problem. We would—You see, what happened as soon as we emptied our patients—our

hospital, then we would move on, as soon as we moved our patients. The only time we had any problem was when we got caught in the Battle of the Bulge.

BC: Okay. What types of patients did you have?

MH: In the beginning I had what we call chest and belly. They're the ones that could stay longer. And we—So, that meant while the others were evacuating the earlier, the arms and legs, they had some free time while we were still working because our patients stayed with us a little bit longer.

BC: Okay.

MH: But I wasn't in that—When we got to Malmedy I was in the earlier evac. And then I sent them all out.

BC: What was your workload like when you first arrived?

MH: My workload?

BC: Yes. Did you have patients coming in all the time?

MH: Well, I told you how that was. It varied according to the battles. Like in—I told you in Saint-Lô what happened. I was supposed to have patients coming from the operating room. But I got—in five minutes time I had a ward full of pre-op patients. But that was just one incident.

BC: Right. Did you have much free time?

MH: In between moves sometimes we did but not much. We went—Two medical doctors got acquainted with the natives, the French natives. And, you know, that is the breadbasket of France. That is where all the food is grown. So, we were invited out to dinner. And that story is in here, too. We had a menu of hash one meal and concentrated eggs and bacon another meal. And then the next day it would eggs and bacon and hash and then eggs and bacon and then that's what we had to eat. And we had what we called—

[End Tape 1, Side A—Begin Tape 1, Side B]

MH: Big salad and kept filling it up. And, of course, I took that to be my main meal. And I was full by the time the steaks come. What a meal. I could see that meal, every bit of it, from the beginning to the end till this day. That was a real treat.

BC: Now, I know you kept track of where you moved in a little notebook, right?

MH: Carried it.

BC: Can you tell me a little bit about where you went? You went through France first.

MH: Yes. See what happened. We moved real fast once the beachhead and Saint-Lô was accomplished, then we moved pretty fast and I think we got ahead of our supply lines. So, we—then we had a long time—We were in Malmedy for a long time. That was really—and we were functioning like a station hospital there. Because we were just waiting to finish it up. And then the Battle of the Bulge happened.

BC: So, you went from France and Saint-Lô—

MH: Pretty fast—

BC: —to Belgium?

MH: I was one of the first nurses to go into Paris. We had Toni permanents. Have you ever heard about them?

BC: Yes.

MH: I had my hair with Toni curlers in my hair. And somebody that night, I had it on. And that morning they called and they said, “If you want to be the first nurse in Paris, you have to leave in five minutes.” I put my helmet on top of the curlers and I went to Paris. And we went to Paris for—we stuck our pockets with cigarettes. And for one pack of cigarettes you could get more than an ounce of pure Chanel No. 5.

BC: Ooh.

MH: Well, I had so much perfume sprayed on me trying to smell it. I didn't know whether I had the headache from the curlers or the perfume.

BC: And was this?

MH: That was my trip to Paris, my first trip to Paris. That was when we were, you know, we were going pretty fast. By the time we got in there, you know, there was much to do.

BC: What did you think of Paris?

MH: Paris—Paris was, well, on VE Day, Paris was lit. At that particular time on VE Day, Paris was, I never want to go back to Paris either. It will never be like it was. The—Every single building was decorated with a American, English, and French flags. All the bottles in the store windows were dressed in the flags. The whole town was lit. The opera house was beautifully in red. Everything was lit, including the people. You—And I don't think I had ever seen big highways like that. The people—There were so many people that if you wanted to make a turn you had to start leaning.

BC: In the street?

MH: Yes, if you wanted to make a turn. That's how crowded it was. And I mean they marched day and night. My time in Paris was—that five days there was great because my husband had a friend who had been there for two years in intelligence. And he showed up Paris.

BC: Oh, that must have been wonderful.

MH: He showed us Paris. And there's a lot to tell you about that.

BC: Well, let's backtrack a little bit to your movement into Belgium. You went into Malmédy and you said you spent a lot of time there.

MH: Well, yes. That's where we were when, let's see, VE Day.

BC: Well, before VE Day, let's go back to the fall of—

MH: That was Malmedy. Malmedy was when we hit the Battle of the Bulge.

BC: So that was late 1944.

MH: December 16 is when the attacks started to go the wrong way. And I had 150 patients myself that night.

BC: In Malmedy?

MH: [No response]

BC: Can you tell me what happened when the Germans started to move into the area?

MH: Well, we had to act like we were soldiers. We had to wear our—we wore Red Cross on ours, and they told us not to walk out of the area, to be careful. I didn't have time to think of anything but after working fourteen hours all I did want—I just wanted to go to bed, sleep.

BC: But you had to evacuate, didn't you?

MH: Oh, yes. That's a long story. You want to hear that one, too?

BC: Yes, ma'am.

MH: Well, Pat had just been there two nights before and everything was nice and peaceful and quiet. And, then, we were—I got all those patients and I worked real hard. And they told us to be careful. And so I went to bed. And they told us—What happened, first of all, I

think Pat came and woke me up wanted to know how I was. That was the first time he ever woke me up. He came to see how I was. And I stayed in the bed. And finally the nurses came around and said, "Mary Kay, you have got to get out of the bed. The tanks are going the wrong way. Put your clothes on and get out of bed." Well, I knew my Christmas packages, what was in them, because they could not send us anything that we had not asked for. So I knew I had a Jewish cake and I had all that. So I sat down and I said, there is one—they didn't know whether we were going to be able to take anything with us or whether we were going to be take a musette bag or not. And I had a dog. And so they kept telling us—What had happened, our colonel had sent our trucks ahead to evacuate a small—there was a field hospital that was right at the end of us. And he had sent our trucks ahead. And they got lost. So he didn't know whether he was going to have transportation for us or not. And they didn't know. So they put all forty of us nurses on one truck. But they kept telling me they didn't know whether—how we would be able to go.

BC: Were you able to take any of your things with you?

MH: Well, I packed the musette bag, I unpacked it, stuffed my pockets. And I did that. Finally, I had to leave the musette bag. And I had a denture that was made by—every dentist that ever looked at it said it's the prettiest thing you ever seen. And I left it there. Of all things I could have carried that.

BC: And you said you had a dog?

MH: What?

BC: You said you had a dog?

MH: Oh, yeah, you want to hear about the dog?

BC: Yes.

MH: Well, there was a major that was in this outfit that was right across the street from us in this beautiful building where [Adolph] Hitler had some of his people that lived in a beautiful building. And he had this little puppy that wasn't housebroken. And his colonel told him he had to get rid of the dog. And I wasn't going to let him get rid of that dog, so I took that dog over. And I told Zeats, my corpsman. He said, "Don't bring that dog in here, I've got enough to do." The next thing I knew George was Zeats's dog. And he would bring George into the ward. See, we were all functioning as a station hospital at that time. And, so, the most therapeutic thing you've ever seen was to have a dog in there with these patients. I had two patients that had—one had lost his right leg. The other had lost his left leg on a land mine. And they were out in left field. They didn't know what was going on until George walked in. And they were just as clear. So then, the patients decided that George—we gave all patients penicillin routinely and sulfur pills. And they

all decided that George needed a pill. So, we broke up a sulfur tablet and let the patients give George some sulfur.

So, when the time came to evacuate I kept hollering telling everybody, "Tell Zeats to bring George. Tell Zeats to get George." And Zeats said he didn't have time to look. But the story was his friend said he looked everywhere for George. But George got scared because the bombs were making too much noise. He looked everywhere for him. He was hiding. So we had to leave him behind. That's a bad story about George.

BC: Right.

MH: I had a lot of funny stories.

BC: So there were German bombs and you were trying to evacuate?

MH: The dumbest Germans had—the railroad guns were coming in and bombing and they bombed. The reason I had so many patients is because they had bombed right over our head into this courtyard where people were coming out of church. And a lot of civilians were injured. And, so, the person who was supposed to work with me had to go take care of them. And that's the reason I had all these patients. But I had very, very corpsmen.

BC: Were you still operating in tents?

MH: No, we were in a building then. We were in school buildings then. I've got a picture of that, too. At that time we were working in school buildings. And I had four school rooms. And I had patients in every room in between all the patients and in the hallway.

BC: And those were all your patients?

MH: Yes. But I had—I was on the army larks. I would open up the door and four or five patients would come in at one time from the operating room all in plaster because anybody who had injuries they would make it easier for them to travel. They put a lot of plaster on them so they could travel. So, it wasn't my usual to have a lot of patients come in at one time.

BC: How did you transport the patients when you had to evacuate?

MH: We had ambulance corps. I've got pictures of them, too.

BC: Okay. You mentioned—

MH: See, I had to make the decision which ones to go out on those.

BC: Which ones to send out with the ambulance corps?

MH: Yes.

BC: And those would be, obviously, the patients that were unable to—

MH: Yes, when the patients were real bad the doctors usually will tell you what to do. But these were the arms and legs. Once they got awake and their blood pressure was okay, out they go.

BC: Out they go. Okay. So, you left Malmedy, what, overnight?

MH: What?

BC: When you left Malmedy, did you leave overnight?

MH: We—[laughs]

BC: Or you went—or you left immediately?

MH: We went to what had been a convalescent hospital and they told us to get blankets there. I still have one of the blankets I got there.

BC: Do you really?

MH: A white little blanket. And we were there overnight. And our mail came and in my mail I had [laughs] a double deck of cards that were worn out before we left Spa, [Belgium]. That was Spa [laughs]. They were played all day and all night until we left.

BC: Did you hear about what happened at Malmedy after you left?

MH: Oh, yes.

BC: When did you—

MH: We—See, we knew that the Germans were looking for oil, I mean for gas. They were trying very—and we knew that they were coming our way for that. But it so happened that they did not go into Malm&edy. They bombed—we bombed Malmedy. Malmedy was bombed pretty badly because that's where we thought they would be. After we left our air force bombed Malmedy. And, so, then after it was clear—After we had been out of there for awhile we learned that we could send somebody back to collect our belongings. All of this is right in here so much easier said than I'm saying it.

BC: Did you hear about what happened to the Americans that were captured there, that were executed by the Germans? Did you all know about that?

MH: Some of them were our ambulance drivers.

BC: Were they?

MH: Yes.

BC: Did you find out about that?

MH: Well, we—Yes, we were told. We hear the shots. They took 150 of them. That was nothing compared to what we did. I hate to tell—You don't want to hear this. But I was telling patients later how upset I was about it. They said, “That's nothing. I was told to take two thousand people out and not come back with them.” We still do this. We still do this. [tapping on table]. All you got to do is look at the TV. But when a patient—When a patient tells you that he, himself, did this, it's the truth.

BC: Right. Right. Did you—

MH: I don't like war.

BC: Did you have much interaction with the troops other than when they were your patients? Did you see—

MH: There's people that—Our men were like our brothers. We were like brothers and sisters. I mean, we took care of each other in all kinds of ways, to this day.

BC: Where did you go after that? You went to Spa and then?

MH: Spa, then from there we went to Huy [Belgium], and that—then we went to—we were in town there. I had—for my story I had somebody to call me and wanted to know where I was Christmas Day. I said, “I was in a convent.”

BC: And where was this?

MH: At Huy. Because, see, we had to leave our equipment behind. We couldn't work. And, so, we were in the convent at Huy where the—You have any idea how the children are housed. There were bunks, bunks, bunks, bunks, about five feet long for children. Each one of us had one of those bunks. It was good for me. I'm not too tall. And so we were there for quite some time. We were at Huy from December 18 until January 31.

BC: And were you just waiting for more equipment?

MH: Oh, yes. Our equipment had to be retrieved, reconditioned and re-supplied, you know, because our equipment had been pretty well pure—

BC: So, when—

MH: And we left—When we left Malmedy we left about eighty-five patients with some doctors and corpsmen. And all the nurses were gone. And the next morning they got all the patients out very well.

BC: That's great.

MH: We only had one death that—the men—the trucks that went to evacuate that hospital—That's a real good story. One of the men in that convoy got off track. And he—We never found out what happened to him till later off they found his body. And he was the only death of our—none of the rest of them—no one else died in our unit.

BC: So, where's—

MH: Just the ambulance drivers. But they were attached to us. They were not part of us.

BC: Part of your unit. When did you start operating at the hospital again?

MH: When we got—after the assault. It was in January. The end of January. And then we got to Germany in February. But this is all here. I have to look at my notes sometimes. My memory is not as so good.

BC: And how much time did you spend in Germany—and this was early 1945?

MH: Well, we moved. We moved across Germany. You know, what eventually became East Germany.

BC: Right. And you ended up at Nordhausen?

MH: Oh, no, that was before—where were we? Ludendorff. But we saw those horrible, horrible—that story, the—I'd rather you read that than for me to tell it to you—

BC: Okay.

MH: —about Nordhausen. Because I had one of my friends was French. And she was with me at the time that we saw patients—See, Nordhausen, see they bring all their slaves in that they got from Poland and all these countries and France, everywhere, that they invaded. And they work them until they couldn't work anymore. Then they put them in a hospital up above a great big Red Cross up there. You see, the Germans had been drilling these—in these tunnels for twenty-five years. They were preparing for this since the First World War. And I've got pictures of what they were doing down there, too. Anyway, when Frenchie and I were talking to some of the patients, the patient that we talked to told her that he had—you know how big an army cot is. He had to sleep in an army cot with another person. And he says, and when that person died, he was too weak to roll him off the bed—off the cot. That's the story he told us. Then we saw the crematories where

they burned—some people said they burned them alive, but I have a hard time believing all of that, but—

BC: So, you were treating patients who had been in the camps?

MH: What?

BC: Were you treating patients that had been in the camp?

MH: Not—no. Those were—We were seeing the results of what the Germans had done.

BC: But you were not treating—

MH: We got—I did get some German prisoners.

BC: Okay.

MH: And, of course, I got that in here, too. Because they didn't want to take—they didn't want us to give them any shots. Because they had been told not to take our tetanus because tetanus, if you don't take the right kind of tetanus, the serum that you had before, it can be very dangerous. And we couldn't convince them. They didn't know a thing about penicillin.

BC: That was a new drug.

MH: They would not let us give them penicillin. And I had—And my corpsman I had one that could speak French and one that could speak German. And they still could not convince those German prisoners. But when they emptied our prison camps, and our men came through our hospitals, you ain't never seen such happy people in all your life. Boy, were they happy. And they would come in [laughs] and they were telling me about all the bedbugs they had. I said, "I don't believe you've got any bugs." And one of them said, "Look back here." Great big bug crawling up his back. And, boy, when they saw me they started—we used DDT, and they had me powdered with DDT in no time [laughs]. They were so happy. And we—first thing our men wanted to do was to really feed them well.

BC: I bet.

MH: So, we got out the steaks, and we put out the tablecloths and we really did—They couldn't eat.

BC: Yes.

MH: Heard about that?

BC: Yes.

MH: They were sick. And so we had to go back to soup. But our men—our men were—we had wonderful men.

BC: So, where were you when you heard about the German surrender, about VE [Victory in Europe] Day? You were in Germany?

MH: Oh, yes.

BC: And what—

MH: I heard about it from their radio before you knew it, before anybody in the United States knew it. That's how I happened to get to Paris before VE Day. So I got hold of Pat, and I said, "We're going to Paris, because the Germans have surrendered." And I heard it two days before—

BC: How did that happen?

MH: Well, Axis, let's see. Let's see. Sally, the radio, they had their propaganda radio. Pacific was Axis Sally. One was Sally and the other one was—I forgot. Anyway, I heard it on the radio. I heard it on the radio.

BC: And how long were you in Paris? You said five days?

MH: Five full days. Two weeks after I got back my chief nurse came in and she says, "I'm supposed to punish you," because she got word that I had stayed over. She had—and, so, she told me I had to stay in quarters for two weeks. But she didn't tell me Pat couldn't come. See, I didn't have to go to any parties. Pat could come stay with me. I got pictures of that, too.

BC: So, it was well worth it?

MH: Oh, oh, oh. I had the best time in Paris anybody ever had.

BC: Where were you when you heard about [President] Franklin Roosevelt dying?

MH: I was in the tent. I remember. I remember. It was in April, middle of April when he died.

BC: And what was people's reactions to that?

MH: I—You know, when you think of reactions, of course, it was extremely sad. You see, he was—had just gotten into his fourth term.

BC: Right.

MH: And I think everybody was really concerned about that vice president. Who was he? But our thoughts were not political. Our thoughts were about our own situation. But, of course, we were all sad.

BC: But you were still thinking about your men and your hospital—

MH: Oh, yes.

BC: —and your patients?

MH: Our own situation, yes.

BC: What was the hardest thing you had to do physically while you were in the service?

MH: Hardest physical thing I had to do? Whoo. I guess the only thing I can think of that we—You see, when you are young you have a lot of energy. Working real long hours. I—according to the men, I'm a slave driver. And I worked hard, and I expected them to. And they didn't like that idea. I really did work harder. But I believed in doing everything we could.

BC: What was the hardest thing you had to do emotionally?

MH: [pause] I did not see but two deaths. When the doctor—This was at Saint—right before Saint-Lô, I think it was. The doctor came in and he said, “This patient is going to die.” And I told him, you know, “I'm not going to let him die.” And he said, “You've got to remember he's thirty years old. Think about that.” And it was one of the most difficult things was we had a patient that we had at the end of the tent that had gangrene. And the doctors were just sort of leaving him alone. And I gave him a hard time. And when they came in and took the dressing off, they were absolutely amazed. And he went out the very next day to that station hospital. He had been in that stinking dressing all that time. So I think not getting the doctors to change his dressing before then was probably the hardest thing I ever had to do. But after all you got to think about doctors that operate twelve hours a day or more. And they, you know, they had—I can't be too critical of them. But I could sure raise hell.

BC: Were you ever afraid?

MH: [laughs]

BC: Because you were in—

MH: They told—

BC: —physical danger.

MH: The funniest thing. They told me in England when we got there, the first night we got there. See, I didn't know anything about bombs—about air raids or anything. And all—See, I was married so I wouldn't be going to go out. So, I was left alone. Everybody else went out. And we had an air raid. And they had told us that there was some foxholes in the back. And that was the place to be if we had an air raid. If not, to be sure and get—it was supposed to be under the stairway or something. So, anyway, of course I couldn't find a foxhole. It was too dark. And when all the girls came home, they all told me that I was so scared that I would be putting the bed pans over my head instead of under the patients when we left. That's the only time that I ever thought about being scared. It didn't take long to get over that. You get so used to it. I went down Buzz Bomb Alley with the chaplain right after it had bombed where my husband was. I mean I went through the front lines looking for my husband at times. So, I wasn't scared after I got there. We get over it. You get over it after awhile.

BC: Do you remember any funny incidents or stories?

MH: I think I have told you a few.

BC: You have. And you were married. So what kind of social life did you have? You saw Pat.

MH: Yes, we—I thought we had quite a social life. I told you all about Paris.

BC: Going back and forth.

MH: Nothing could have been better than that.

BC: Did you have much news from friends or family back in the States?

MH: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

BC: You were able to get a lot of mail and write home?

MH: Now, I wish we had kept our letters.

BC: Did you have—

MH: I wish they had kept our letters, oh, do I wish.

BC: Did you have a sense as to how the war was progressing?

MH: Oh, yes.

BC: Because you were progressing with it?

MH: You—I had with my dear uncle was a [General George S.] Patton fan. To his dying day we argued about the war. Because he thought Patton won the war. Patton was our Southern flank. Monty, [General Bernard L.] Montgomery was our Northern. And we were the spearhead. We were Bradley, we were the spearhead. We would see—We would look at the maps every day. We would hear on the radio that Patton was here. But the Germans were afraid of Patton. And this was the reason that we spread the propaganda that Patton was ahead. And this is the reason my uncle believed it. [laughs]. He had a hard time with me. But we were the spearhead. We were the first there. And we—Well, I had a good psychological situation because I had such a wonderful commanding officer. I wonder if anyone else could feel the way we did about ours. I don't much think they could have.

BC: And what was your commanding officer like?

MH: He was a—He was always available to help anybody. One time one of our men dropped and got hold of some money. And when he sobered up he realized that he had money he shouldn't have. So he buried it. And when he was caught the colonel did his best to try to keep him from being prosecuted for it. But he had a difficult time with that.

BC: And what—

MH: But he would do things like that for any one of them. So, if it was just a private. He would do anything for any of us. As I told you what he did for me.

BC: Right. And what was his name?

MH: Col. Blatt, Laramie Blatt. But he was wonderful, wonderful.

BC: What did you think of President Roosevelt and then [President Harry] Truman?

MH: He was the best president we ever had. And, of course, we know that now.

BC: And what about Eleanor Roosevelt?

MH: [laughs] He would not have been as good a president if it hadn't been for her. Let's put it that way.

BC: So, you liked her?

MH: Oh, everybody did. She was a fantastic woman. History is proven this.

BC: Who were your heroes or heroines during that time?

MH: I would put Eleanor Roosevelt ahead of everybody else when you stop and think about it.

BC: Okay.

MH: Of course we all thought the most—thought the president was great. But our immediate people—of course, my hero was people I worked with.

BC: Your commanding officer?

MH: Yes, and my chief nurse. I had never known an administrative nurse to function the way she did. She was always there and never to inspect but always there to help. She knew what was going on but when she would come into your ward she would be there to talk to the patients and everything. It was so different from anyone I've ever known.

BC: Did you—

MH: So, I would call her my heroine.

BC: Where were you when you heard about the Japanese surrender, you were still in Europe—

MH: Well, that's a long story. This is a long one. I told you I hitchhiked all over Europe.

BC: No, not yet.

MH: Okay. See, I got pregnant, and when the war was over. And I lost it. And when I lost it I was supposed to go back—I could have come home but I wanted to stay there because my husband was there.

BC: So, you were still in Europe?

MH: Oh, yes. He—and, so, he wasn't too far from us—from me. And so I chose to go back to Germany. I was in Nancy [France]. No, wait a minute. I was in a hospital in France. I was thinking it was Paris. But, anyway, I made up my mind that I was not going to go back on a train. I knew it would take two or three days. And I knew there were just wooden benches. I wasn't going to do that. So I managed to get to the airport. How much time do you got?

BC: No, go ahead.

MH: So, I got to the airport and I had my bag there, sitting there. And, of course, I was very weak. In those days they kept you in bed for ten days after you had a miscarriage. And the doctors had been so good in taking care of me. And I talked them into letting me out of the hospital early. So I was not awfully strong, because I had just been in the bed a lot. So, anyway, while I was waiting, they told me that, you know, I didn't have flight orders, so I would have to wait and see if there was an opening for me later. So I was sitting there waiting, and I heard this lieutenant saying on the telephone that he had to get rid of

some Danish money. He was going back to Germany. I said, "What part of Germany are you going to?" He was going to Frankfort. I said, "You are going to have room for an extra passenger? I have to talk to the colonel." So we went to eat. And when we came—so, he said the colonel said it would be okay, I could go with them. So, when we get on the airplane I look over there, and there stood—there was Colonel Lewis who had been in our tent. When we were—when the Remagen Bridge had its collapse, see we transported patients across the Rhine River, the Rhine River by airplanes. So he was staying—he had these [tapping fingers] what was it? Gliders command. So, he had men. And so, when of the nurses had drug him into our—that night when I was giving her a Toni permanent. And he thought that—this was like home life, you know. And he was fascinated. He wanted to try to see if he could do it.

BC: [laughs]

MH: So, I looked over and I saw Col. Lewis. And I said, "Col. Lewis, the last time I saw you, you were rolling up a girl's hair." And I blushed. And this lieutenant had got me the ride, I said to him, "I shouldn't have said that." So [laughs] it's a good story. So, as we were getting—Before we got to Frankfort the lieutenant said there were some Red Cross nurses that I could stay with and he would see to it that I had a place to stay. And then we would see about getting me up to where my husband was supposed to be. So in the meantime, the colonel said that I could stay in his apartment. And I says to the lieutenant, I says, "I don't think"—he says, "You better. I think you better." So, he rolled up his bed roll. He went out and locked the door. I didn't sleep, but I slept in his bed. So I told it in the story that I slept in a famous man's bed, because I got—I've got on the Internet who he was. He commanded the gliders that first landed in Normandy.

BC: Wow.

MH: So, I slept in a famous man's bed. Okay, that's not all. So, his major, he made the arrangement for his major to take me to where my husband was. When I got up there I found that my husband was down in France. He had shot his wedding band off by playing with his Luger [pistol], his leg. So he was back in the hospital. So I didn't go back to my unit. See, they didn't know where I was. They thought maybe I was going home anyway. So, major said he would take me on up to Tassel where he was going for a meeting. So, I go up there. He tells me that while he was having a meeting, for me to go over to the officer's club, you know. So, I'm over there. And I'm all ears again. And I hear this lieutenant saying that he had to get some flight time in. "Can you fly down to Nancy?" I had found out where my husband was. Oh, sure, he could fly anywhere. Well, they had already made arrangements for me to stay in the general's headquarters. And I was sitting right there. And here I'm—and the general is walking down the steps. And I'm about ready to pick up my bag and take off with this fellow. And in comes Major Stimson and this colonel he had a meeting with and said, "We've got a flight for you on a P-51." You know what that is, a fighter plane?

BC: No.

MH: Well, there's not room—they're called Mustangs. There's not room for a passenger. So they have to take the radio out or something. And the passenger could ride with their legs around the collar. And I had on a skirt, so I had to put on some pants. So they let me get my change. So, off I get in there. And, so, then I go all the way down to where my husband was. And when we got there, I mean I had all kinds of help. I told you I hitchhiked. And the person where we landed it was right before dark. I knew that he was in the 24th General, in the hospital, which had activated at Fort Benning. And I knew the people there. So, he got me a jeep, took me over to where my husband was, and we stayed there. And, so, then this was before VJ Day.

BC: Okay, so, this was in the summer of '45?

MH: Before VJ Day. So, he didn't want me to come back. It was beginning—it was becoming obvious that I did not have a very good marriage. But I wasn't about to be aware of it. So he said he didn't want me to come back any more. I said, "If the war is over, can I come back?" He said, "Yes." So, the war was over. So you know what I did? I went to his—went to my husband's unit, got his sergeant to take me down to where Col. Lewis was, and they were having a great big party that night so they couldn't fly me out that night, of course. And they had grounded all planes that were not official because on VE Day they had had some accidents. So it was questionable whether I would be able to get on an airplane or not. So, the next morning I'm sitting on—I'll never forget that building where I was sitting when Maj. Stimson. And this captain at the night before had said that he was going to Paris and he said he could drop me off in Nancy, that would be no problem. He was a crazy dude. And, so, he drove up. And I said to Maj. Stimson—Maj. Simpson says, "I think you've got to wait because the colonel will probably have to get a bye." So, this time guess what I rode in? P-38 in a bombardier suit.

BC: In a bombardier suit?

MH: That was so the fuselage—And, so, that time I didn't wiggle a toe because there's a door I would go down. Okay. The pilot is behind me. I can't see him. But I'm talking to him. The next thing I hear is the third voice. Then I stopped talking. My female voice should not have been on. But, anyway, we get down there.

BC: [laughs] And so, where did you go from there?

MH: Then I, of course, I was just there for a short time. And, you know, I didn't see Pat very much after that.

BC: No.

MH: Very, very little, very little after that.

BC: Where was he? He was still—

MH: Well, he wouldn't—we had the best orthopedic surgeon I knew in the army. And I wanted him to come back. He could have come back with us. But, no, he wouldn't come. So, I did—I can't remember how much I saw him after that before we came home.

BC: And when did you come home?

MH: I got home [laughs]. We thought we would never get home.

BC: Where were you at this point? You were still in France and it's the fall of 1945?

MH: I was in Germany. I was in Germany at the time. We were in Gotha, unless—I was in Germany. And they—See, by that time, you see, all of our colonel and all of our top doctors and nurses had many more points than we had, and they were already gone home. So we were no longer the 44th Hospital. We were just waiting to go home.

BC: Okay.

MH: With a lot of other people. And I didn't have anybody to go to. And so, we all got very unhappy about this. And so, we went to France I remember. All of the camps were named after the cigarettes. And the nurses were in one camp and the doctors—all the men were in the other camps. And the men would say, “The only one—only males who would get inside of those wires were prisoners, who were taken care of prisoners of war, who were taken care of [by] us.” And, boy, were we unhappy. And it happened that the nurse who is in charge of all of us, about two hundred nurses, a lot from—a variety, and she had sent several people home that had only fifty points. Boy, did she hear something. Because I had 87 points.

BC: And what were you supposed to have?

MH: You get a point for every time you are in the army, and a point for overseas you get, and for each battle, you know. I had 87 points. And, boy, did she have to go to Paris to take care of all these irate nurses who were angry because—So, first, we thought we were going to be able to go to Le Havre—go to—leave from [unclear] But we went to Le Havre instead. And we were supposed to get on the boat the very next day to go home. When we got up there, there was a lot, a lot of nurses in tents waiting to go home. “How long have you been here?” “Three weeks.”

BC: [laughs] How long did you have to wait?

MH: It seemed like—Let's see how long were we—Camp Morris, Camp Carlisle. We must have been up there a long time. Camp Carlisle, Morris. We must have been up there about a month. It was a long time.

BC: And what did you do while you were waiting, you didn't have patients to treat, did you?

MH: We were waiting to go home. No, there was no more—We didn't have to work.

BC: So, you just—What did you do to pass the time?

MH: Those things you don't remember at all. I don't remember anything about that, how long I was there. It seemed like we were there—According to this, it seems like—because we got on the—Well, I was on the [SS] *West Point* on October 16. And Camp Philip Morris. No, we were not there. We were only there ten days, apparently. As I told you, it seemed like a month. We were probably on there ten days.

BC: And when was this? This was October of 1945?

MH: October. And I got back—I got to Fort Bragg [North Carolina] on October 24.

BC: And were you discharged from Fort Bragg?

MH: Didn't take me long.

BC: Did you ever think about staying in the military?

MH: No, I did not. I got my discharge the minute I—as soon as I got to Fort Bragg. We came into [laughs] Hampton Roads in Virginia. And then from there—The first thing they did, [laughs] they shipped us all into a big auditorium for the colonels to tell us what to do and what a good job you done and all this stuff. All this time I had in front of me a map of Camp, the name of the place where we were, Patrick Henry [Virginia]. And I saw where the telephones were.

MH: I didn't pay a bit of attention to him. And I got—I was one of the first ones to get to the telephone. And I called mama. Mama had just gotten a letter from me saying, “Don't expect me to come ever.” [laughs] So, I came—I told everybody, I said, “I think my mother had a heart attack when she heard my voice.” So nobody else called home. [laughs] So, I was only there one night before I went to Fort Bragg. And I don't remember. I mean it didn't take. I spent one night in Fort Bragg and the next morning went through all the discharge things and when I walked out the door with my discharge in my hand, there stood my mother, my father and my baby sister who had doubled in height. My mother's hair had turned gray and my daddy has lost his hair practically. There they stood.

BC: Wow. I bet that was wonderful, to see them again.

MH: Oh, I didn't have any idea they would be there. I had no idea.

BC: What a surprise.

MH: All I was thinking about was getting that discharge. That's all I had my mind on. Had no idea they were going to be there. But I was—

[End Tape 1, Side B—Begin Tape 2, Side A]

BC: [laughs] Well, you have great stories to tell. Was it hard to go back to civilian life?

MH: Was it what?

BC: Was it hard to go back to being a civilian again?

MH: [laughs]

BC: After being overseas for over a year.

MH: I had no civilian clothes. The night when I came home, of course, the whole family was here. And my sister-in-law said, “Thalheimer's is having a sale on.” They got some new shoes. And, so, I could go, and she would help me. She said she had some ration tickets. I knew nothing about ration tickets, nothing about that. And she said she would give me one. Well, I didn't think about taking that with me. So, I go to Thalheimer's. You don't know about that because it became [?] later. And I started trying on shoes. I had nothing but a uniform on now mind you. And the man, the clerk said, “Now, I want some shoes that have the toes and the heels in.” I kept telling him what I wanted.

He says, “Lady,” I don't even think he called me a lady, “There's at least four hundred women in this town that would like that pair of shoes. You don't want them. You don't have to buy them.”

I said, “Okay, I'll take them.”

“Where's your ration ticket?”

So, I said, “You just hold them. I'll go.” And so I went and found Mary. And I got the ration ticket. Was it hard? Yes.

BC: What did you do—

MH: I did not like—I did not like that attitude he had. And I had a friend who is still a very good friend [laughs] who was taking me to Charlotte and he did not go out of the country. And he was telling me about how much he had sacrificed. He had lost six hundred dollars every month. And I practically pulled his hair out before we got to Charlotte. You think—Was it easy to get adjusted? No. I did not appreciate anybody thinking that they had sacrificed when they had stayed in the United States the whole time we were there.

BC: What did you do after the war, did you go back to nursing?

MH: You want to know all that I did? Well, I—Let's see. What's the first thing I did? I tried to—We went to Okinawa [Japan]. I think I got that typed for you. It doesn't have the acknowledgements in it. And I left him [Pat]—I gave him to a Japanese girl. And then I came back and Lucy and I lived in an apartment here and I did administrative work until I went to Duke. And then I went—I worked at the hospital as an afternoon or relief veteran night supervisor. And I went to Duke. And I went into Duke with twelve hundred dollars in the bank, came out with five thousand dollars. Got scholarships. And every time I would come home—you see, I had an RN behind my name. I could work—all those supervisors wanted time off at Christmas and Thanksgiving time. So, every time we had holidays I'd come home and make money. So, I did all right. I was supporting a car at the same time. I had a great time at Duke University. I loved it.

BC: What were you studying at Duke?

MH: Nursing Education.

BC: Okay.

MH: And then I went to Texas and I worked for a year in the VA [Veteran's Administration Hospital], and that didn't work out very well. There's still more paperwork. And then after that I came home and I went to Columbia University and got my master's degree in Nursing Ed—in the associate degree programs, which were just beginning. Mildred Montag, who started the Cadet Corps, had—was doing the assessment of the education of nurses, the sixth pilot program that she had. And I was up there at the most wonderful time because it was—we called her the Florence Nightingale of our time. Because we changed nursing education. It moved from the apprenticeship that I described when we were nurses to educator nurse. So when nurses were in the hospitals they were there to learn, not to serve.

BC: Right.

MH: That—Anyway, we started the associate's degree program. I taught in the first associate degree program in UNCG. It was the associate degree program. And I got sick and couldn't stay there very long. But our students made the best grades in the state boards that year.

BC: And that was at UNCG?

MH: Yes. And after that what did I do? Oh, I went to nurse administration. And I was associate director of nursing service at [North Carolina] Baptist [Hospital]. And then I went down to Wilmington [North Carolina] to help them. They closed two hospitals down there, black and white hospitals, and they opened up another one. So, I helped them—I directed the nursing service for that for awhile. Then I went there. So I went around. I moved around.

BC: And it sounds like you've been to a lot of reunions and stayed in touch with some of the men—

MH: All my—

BC: —and women from your unit?

MH: Yes. All of the reunions. My army reunions, my nursing school. My nursing school always has the—This is where they meet. We just had one—When that article came out, it came out the Sunday morning after we had the big celebration at nursing school. And Coy Carpenter Foundation, they gave us a complimentary breakfast. You would think that it had been for me, because they put me in the front line and they gave me flowers and everything, because my article came out in the paper.

BC: Wow.

MH: Don't tell anybody that, but that's really funny. Anyway, that was a big—And see my class always meets here with me. And I kept in touch with most all of them. I keep a record of them.

BC: Do you consider yourself to be an independent person?

MH: Very much so. That's the reason I never managed to—I was not the person to ever be married.

BC: Do you think the military made you more that way, being overseas?

MH: I was that way to begin with.

BC: From the beginning. Do you consider yourself to be a pioneer or a sort of a trailblazer?

MH: I don't think so.

BC: Women going into the service and the work that you did?

MH: I don't think so. I don't think so. I was just one of the many. I don't think—When I tell this story, I don't think that it's unique. I don't—I do think that the unique part about it was that I was married and was able to stay with my husband. That's the unique part. Because nobody else—some of my friends did get married. Some of them got married in England. But none of them were—none of their husbands were as close as mine was.

BC: Right. You got to—

MH: No, my story is unique. That is the only thing that is unique about it. Other than that I was just like the rest of them.

BC: How has your life been different because of your time in the military?

MH: How?

BC: How has your life been different—

MH: since I was—

BC: —because of your time in the military?

MH: How has it been different since that time?

BC: What kind of effect do you think it had?

MH: It made me to try to keep on doing and everywhere I worked was trying to get the nurses out of the office to the bedside. I was at the bedside in the army. The only time. Because any other time that's what—it has become so technical now. Nurses are technicians now. And I dropped my license fifteen or twenty—a long time ago because when it got to where it was so technical, I knew that it wasn't safe for me to be a nurse.

BC: Well, that is my last question.

MH: How about that.

BC: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

MH: I think I've talked too much already.

BC: Okay, well, I would just like to thank you very much for participating.

MH: Do you want to see any of the pictures?

BC: Yes, we will take a look at some of your pictures. Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]

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