

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF NAVY NURSES

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NORMA HALL SMITH

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The History of Navy Nurses

Interviewee: Norma Hall Smith

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of Navy Nurses

Date: June 24, 1997

C: This is the first oral history interview with Norma Hall Smith, of Lincoln, Rhode Island. Today's date is June 24, 1997. The interview is being conducted at her home at 1071 Smithfield Avenue in Lincoln, Rhode Island. Norma was a Navy Nurse during World War II. I'm so pleased Norma that you consented to the interview this morning. I'm very glad to be here and anxious to hear about your reminiscences about your time in World War II. I'd like to begin by asking you where and when you were born.

S: I was born here in Lincoln, not in this section, but in the Lonsdale section, April 12th, 1922.

C: What did your father do for a living ?

S: My dad was an electrician.

C: And your mother ?

S: My mother was just a house wife with occasional little part time jobs, like babysitting here and there.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters ?

S: No, unfortunately, I don't have.

C: Did you spend your growing up years in the Lincoln area ?

S: Yes, I did.

C: Where did you go to high school ?

S: Cumberland High School. At that time Lincoln had the primary grades, but didn't even have what they call a junior high today. Grades went from K through 8th or 9th and then we transferred to a high school of our choice. As Lincoln did not have a high school,

I chose Cumberland because of the nearness of it to where we were living and that is as simple as that. In fact, they did not have a full high school until after my children went to high school. My son went through 8th grade and then I sent him to a private school for 9 through 12 because we didn't have a high school, and my

daughter was only in the second class to graduate from Lincoln High School. The others followed.

C: When did you graduate from high school ?

S: 1939.

C: Before the war started.

S: Yes.

C: Did you decide to go to nursing school right after high school ?

S: Yes, I did, but I wasn't old enough to get in. I had to wait until I was within six months of my eighteenth birthday. So I graduated from high school in June, and wasn't able to start my nurses training until February when the next class was available.

C: Why did you decide to become a nurse ?

S: I had an aunt that I'm very fond of, and she is still living. She's about 87 and in a nursing home right now, but she was a nurse, and I always admired that. It was not my first choice however. My first choice, and upon the suggestion of some of my

teachers in high school, was that I should go into some form of public speaking. They were interested to know if I could get into Emerson in Boston. I would have loved to have done that. I had done some public speaking in high school, and I also had the lead in the senior drama and in things like that, so this gave the teachers the impression that I would like to do that. The only unfortunate thing, and this would blow anyone's head at this time when colleges are so expensive, it was a poor time, 1939. We were just getting out of the Depression, and we were building up to the war situation, so I had to turn it down. But everything reaps its rewards, and just about three years ago, my granddaughter graduated from Emerson with her Master's Degree, and I said, "I knew, Kim, that you'd get me to Emerson somehow."

C: So you decided to become a nurse. Where did you go to nursing school ?

S: Pawtucket Memorial Hospital.

C: How long was the course ?

S: It was a full three years.

C: And then you got your nursing degree. So you would have graduated about...

S: 1943.

C: The war was in full swing at that time. Did you decide at that point in time to join the Navy Nurse Corps ?

S: I happened to be one of the youngest people in my class and I was also held back from taking my state board examinations, which would entitle you to your R.N. and at that time I was doing quite a few things at the hospital, including that of a supervisor, when a lot of my classmates and the class before were coming back on leave and were telling great tales of the Navy, and so that enticed the rest of us to think about joining. So one day I got off around noontime and I put a sweater on and walked down to the Red Cross. I just had an urge that day to do it. I walked about a mile down the

street to the American Red Cross chapter in Pawtucket. I walked in and said, "Here I am. I want to join the service." They said, "What one do you want?" I said, "I think I want the Navy." But the Navy was tough to get in. They had a lot of strict requirements, perfect health, well established with your experience, you had your nurses license, and so I signed up, and took some forms back to the hospital. The pharmacist there was a notary public, and I got sworn in right there at the hospital. Then I had a period of time, that was in January of 1944.

C: How did your parents feel about your decision ?

S: My dad thought it was wonderful. My dad was a very independent type of man, and he thinks everyone should stand on their own two feet. My mother, I was her only child, she was not embittered, but a little afraid something was going to happen to me. I couldn't go away and take care of myself. I was still her little girl. But,

anyway, I made all the preparations. The Navy sent me to Boston to get uniforms. I went to Newport first and had a physical and that part of the procedure. They had me running up and down the stairs to get my blood pressure up, because my blood pressure was on the low side in that one time in my life. So that's where it all started. I came back to the hospital, finished out my term there, and then I had a few days at home and went with a friend, she was going into the army, and we both went up to Boston to do uniforms and so forth. I had my orders to report to Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Virginia.

C: When was that ?

S: 1944, in February, the early weeks. So we went to Norfolk Naval Hospital and we were indoctrinated.

C: How long was this ?

S: It was three weeks.

C: Do you remember what kind of indoctrination it was ?

S: They had us go to classes and learn all the paperwork that the navy required, which was plenty, and we went through that program, and then we had drilling sessions with marine officers. Preparation for parades and that kind of thing: how to march, and assemble, salute, and stay in line, conform to all the specifications of a group of trained military. So we did that and we worked on the various navy floors, knowing where things are put, it's generally uniform in most places, and we learned the terminology, the galley, the head, the bulkhead, the deck, so by the time you got out of there, you were really using Navy lingo. Everything along the way. That was kind of fascinating.

C: Where did you live at that time? Did you live on the base ?

S: I lived in Lincoln. They had barracks for the girls. So then we all got our various orders, and after we were leaving there, we had this little ceremony that we had completed the indoctrination. And

we were assigned various stations. We had girls from all over the east coast in there.

C: Was it a large group that was being indoctrinated ?

S: Oh, yes, I would say. I had the pictures of the parade. Golly, yes, I bet there were 100 nurses there that time.

C: Did you wear your white uniform ?

S: No, we wore our Navies, our Navy uniforms. We had duty uniforms through the Navy; we had dress uniforms; we had the dress whites, the various hats that you could wear, your nurse's cap, which had the band of your rank.

C: What was your rank when you first went in ?

S: We went in and were commissioned as ensigns. Then we were promoted by longevity. By the time I left my first station I was lieutenant junior grade. From there we just went on to the duties we were assigned.

C: Where were you assigned after ?

S: Newport Naval Hospital.

C: Oh, in Newport, Rhode Island.

S: Yes, came right back home.

C: Yes, isn't that amazing. Did you have to live on the base ?

S: Yes, we lived in the nurse's home.

C: And where was that ?

S: It was right on the corner of Second or Third Street and the other little street alongside. You could go through at that time along the waterfront, but then they put the bridge in so the approach to the bridges were different, so it was right next to the hospital compound, the road it went down, and then the nurses quarters was right in the rear of that.

C: How many nurses were in Newport ?

S: I'd say about a hundred.

C: What ward were you assigned to ?

S: When I first went in I floated different floors. I can't remember. The floors had different initials, like A, B, C, and D. I was first on a respiratory ward with the lung patients. Then the shifts worked from 8 in the morning till 4:30 or 5. Then if you were on a night shift, then there would be a coverage in between there and then if you were on the night shift you'd go in at 10 o'clock at night, and you stayed until 8 in the morning. You did that for 28 consecutive nights, with no nights off because it was a lot easier to just have you, when you finished your night tour, you got a couple of days off to compensate you.

C: That's exhausting!

S: Oh, yes. We were young. When we got off in the morning, and since we didn't have classes or anything, we'd go down to the beach and nap or whatever, and then you'd come home, take a shower and have your dinner and we all ate together at regular times.

C: Did they provide meals for you in the home ?

S: Oh, yes, meals, laundry, I think we made our own beds. T

he cleaning ladies would do the vacuuming.

C: Did you have your own rooms ?

S: Yes, I shared it with one of my best friends, a girl that had been in nursing with me. She joined after I did, but we requested that we be stationed together and live together and so forth. So when she came up to Newport, they assigned her a room with me. Just about everybody had two to a room.

C: Now the patients that you were taking care of, were they war time casualties at all ?

S: A lot of them were. Yes, guys that had come in from, they would send a shipment. I remember one night they were sending a shipment from the Pacific islands, because by this time the war in Europe was pretty well mopped up. So we had a contingent come in from overseas of combat fatigue people. We all had to be on duty and tag where these people were going. We had it all set up to take care of

them, and it was quite a few. That's the only time I remember doing that was once that we got a group in. But the rest of the people were, remember at that time, the naval hospital, the training station, the war college, all the facilities down there were really full of people. So mostly it was our duty to handle that. We didn't have any obstetrics at that time. They did later on. But the obstetrical, like the dependents, ladies would go to Newport Hospital.

C: I think they are doing that now.

S: We had 1000 beds in Newport at that time. That included the main building, and the pavilion, which were really like just barrack type buildings built on the ground, like a temporary building type thing. Not quonset that we had later on. These were just plain looking wooden buildings.

C: And they had patients in there ?

S: Yes, and they were all assigned different categories of patient. At one time in my duties there I worked down in the psychiatric building and we used to call it P-13 and that was just because it was the psychiatric unit. But I remember getting off nights. I had been stationed, as you know I had been assigned to different stations in the hospital, and the head nurse called me and said, "Ms. Hall, I understand you had been a supervisor and this and that, and she said, "I have a very difficult ward that needs attention, and I've got to pick a particular person to handle this ward" because it was all bed patients. It was a cardiac and rheumatic fevers and kidney problems, but it was a ward that needed somebody to organize it, and it was well staffed, but she wanted a director or head nurse, and she said, "I've been observing all the girls, and I think I have decided you're the one that should go there". I was at that ward for most of my duty, on that ward, as the head nurse.

C: Well, that was an honor and responsibility.

S: Yes, she called me in to talk to me a few months later, and she said, " I knew I was doing the right thing", and she loved it. I was a very organized person. I wanted the beds all aligned just so, and they couldn't leave things lying around. They had to keep it neat and clean, and she liked that part. I had about five other nurses and probably 10 or 12 corpsmen that worked under me, and I had to assign them the different scheduling. We did things like counting the linens and I had to keep a log of all the activities. Finally, she had to call me to the office after I had been there more than a year, and she said, "you know we have a policy in the navy where at least once a year you have to do some night duty, and I've been holding you off because you've been doing such a good job in Ward A. I'd like to keep you there". I said, "well, that's alright. You do what you have to do." And where do you think I got assigned ? the same ward, so I could keep an eye on things. So I

did my 28 nights there. Then she called me and asked me who I thought should take over the floor, because I had these nurses working for me so I could judge who could handle it, so I did and with that she transferred me out to P-13 which was the psychiatric ward, and I probably needed it because I had been on that floor for over a year.

C: Oh, you were on that floor for over a year. That's a long time.

So you were there in 1945. What time frame in 1945 ?

S: Until June. The war in Europe had ended. It was still going on in Japan, the Japanese I'm speaking of, so myself and my girlfriend we had asked to be stationed together. First of all we had asked for overseas duty.

C: Why did you want overseas duty ?

S: Because we didn't feel we were having much adventure. I mean it was fun in Newport, and it was very safe and we enjoyed the work and the assignment and everything, but we wanted to see something.

We were both from Rhode Island to begin with, and we wanted to see a little of the world. We both joined the Navy to see the world, and all we were looking at was Newport Bay, so we got transferred. She called us and said that she was sending us to San Francisco. She didn't know anything beyond that.

C: What time frame was this ?

S: We had to be there sometime in June.

C: So you got through relatively quickly.

S: So we flew out. First of all we took a train from Boston.

C: You and your girlfriend ?

S: Two other girls, another girl was from St. Joseph's Hospital and the other one was from some hospital in Springfield. So the four of us took a train from Boston. First of all we took a train to Boston from Providence, then we were assigned a train that went all across the country with stops in Chicago and several other places, but we were given roomettes.

C: Was it a train which took only military ?

S: No, I think there were other people, but mostly we were all under military orders. So it took us about five days, with various stops along the way. I think it was someplace along the way where we were allowed to get off the train and just walk around the station and get back on again. One time the heat, the cooling services broke down as we were going out west.

C: You must have sweltered.

S: Oh, it was really hot and we had to be in uniform because we were traveling.

C: Oh, I see, so you wanted to look crisp.

S: Yes, we had to look good. I guess we could put a robe on or something if we were in our compartment. We ate on the train and all those things, and then we arrived in San Francisco. You see the pictures of this terminal on cards and things of that time. We landed there and then we had to wait for transportation to the

naval district and we met the chief nurse of that particular naval district, and then we were given assignments to go further. So we knew we were not stopping, but we were going over. As I say, they war for all intensive purposes. I guess they were getting into several battles in the Pacific, and they sent us to a hotel and just told us we had to be on call certain hours of the day in case our orders came in and they were going to ship us. So we put that time in and the rest of the day we were free to travel and sight see, and we did that. Then one day the call came and all three other nurses were flying out, but there were no orders for me. So here I am in California, in San Francisco all by my lone self. We had met some people as we went along, but I waited and the next day, the call came for me, and I had to get down to the airfield, and they flew me Pan American clipper. I don't even know if they fly those anymore. I flew from San Francisco, and at that time everything was darkened because of the war, so you didn't see all

those lovely lights and things. So we went there and flew into Honolulu the next day. We had compartments that we could lay down and sleep in and they had a lovely lounge and they served food. I think at that time it took us about 12 hours to Honolulu.

C: And this was an American plane ?

S: Yes, Pan American. I thought I was in the lap of luxury. Somewhere among my effects are some of my early orders and the tickets for this flight, and I off hand can't think of it, but it wasn't very expensive in the military. So I think it was \$169.00 or something like that, which was probably a lot of money in those days, but not very much by today's standards. So I arrived in Honolulu, and immediately was taken to the naval district. And the minute I walked in, the chief nurse in that district was looking for me in particular, and she said, "Lieutenant Hall, I have a request from all the girls that want to be stationed with you for you to go to Pearl Harbor" little ol' me. I guess there were a few

other girls, people on the trip. So they had a bus there and they took me down, and my friends were waiting. They had gotten there 24 hours earlier, and they took me down and I was stationed with the same girls, and then we were given assignments by the chief nurse there of what wards we were going to take.

C: Where was Base 8 located ?

S: Base 8 was located right on Pearl Harbor. It had been a former sugar plantation and we were all assigned there. Some of us even in the plantation home and others of us were set up in various quonset huts around the home.

C: Did you live in a quonset hut ?

S: I did, with my friend that had been with me in Newport.

C: Is she still alive ?

S: Yes, but she is seriously ill. Right now she is living in Jacksonville, North Carolina, because she had married a marine. She was also assigned back to Korea, because she hadn't married at that

time. When I got out, I had met my husband, and we had serious intentions, and then when I decided to get married, I had to resign my commission. Because they didn't allow married women in the service at that time. Times have changed, but Dottie had gone back on the hospital ship REPOSE, and she sailed from Seoul to Panmunjon, and she had a course in anesthesia, so she was the anesthetist aboard the ship, or one of them anyway.

C: She must have some interesting tales.

S: Very. Because she served right through the Korean War. Then she was stationed up in Portsmouth and then in Jacksonville at the Lejeune. But I'm in touch with her. We talked just last weekend. We've been friends for years and years. But she's not too good right now. She had a tumor situation in her lungs a few years back and they removed a lobe, and then she had a recurrence a few years back in the plural lining, so she has been on chemotherapy. Dottie was older than I was, by about five years, and she was 80 last

March. I'm 75, so we had that. She had done other things before she went into nurse's training, like she had gone to the Rhode Island School of Design, and a few things before she settled into nursing.

C: So you lived in the quonset huts together...

S: Yes, we shared one quonset hut, at least one room in the house, they had divided it up. There was the two of us and we had our own cots and I think we had our own bathroom; it was one of these you go down the hall bit. It was fun, and, of course, Hawaii was just liquid sunshine. We never got wet. By the time we walked from where we were living to where we were stationed and it had a shower, you were all dry by the time you got there.

C: How long was your work day on the wards ?

S: About the same thing, 8 to 4:30, 8 to 5.

C: Were you stationed on any particular ward ?

S: Yes, I was on the communicable disease ward. I was the charge nurse of that floor.

C: What kind of communicable diseases were you treating ?

S: We used to get the boys from the ships, and we had anything from mumps to measles to several cases of meningitis. We lost a couple of people on that score. That was very serious. Remember we had not been on antibiotics for long, and they were using them so sparingly compared to what they do today. I never worked on another floor. I was always on that one floor for communicable diseases.

C: Did you have many patients ?

S: Yes, most of the time. Offhand, I can't think of the number we filled beds with. But I would say at any time we might have from 16 to 24 patients.

C: Did you have to work on weekends ?

S: We had rotatating shifts. I can't remember working nights when I was there. Because I was the charge nurse, and so I think I mostly worked days, and I can't remember working weekends, but I may have. It was such a long time ago.

C: What were your impressions of Hawaii, the island, because you must have had some free time?

S: Very, very barren. Not the crowds they tell me they get today. The territory was rather virgin in the fact that it wasn't heavily built up. We traveled around, went to the Mormon Temple and saw the other sides of the island, and trips around the island. I never left that island. Although there were a couple of trips planned for Molokai, I never got there, I don't know why. There was something else I had to do. So I stayed right there at Pearl Harbor. As I said we used to take trips down to Honolulu, and we'd have dates with the officers and the different marine bases, and the airforce base. Saturday night was a big night. You'd put your dress white uniforms on.

C: Where did you go on these dates ?

S: To the officers clubs. We had our own little officers club that they had built for us after we had gotten there. But we would go to

some of the other officer clubs because of officers that we had met. And I can remember one memorative thing, is that as the ships were being recommissioned and rebuilt, those that could be saved. The night before they sailed they would all have a big dinner and invite us aboard. I remember going on the WEST VIRGINIA the night before it sailed back to the states for commissioning again. But we did interesting things. We did things like that, went to the different clubs and shopping in the different stores, or go to the movies. Of course, we had movies on the bases wherever you were. There was always the officers club and the movies. You always had something to do. So that was the story for Hawaii.

C: The nurses were kind of popular there, weren't they ?

S: Oh, yes. They were everywhere because there was a scarcity of women.

C: Did you ever meet any of the WAVES or female marines when you were in Hawaii ?

S: Not WAVES, Red Cross girls on Kwajelein.

C: I meant in Hawaii.

S: Well, some of the girls that would have been called WAVES, but were hospital corpsmen and they worked with us.

C: When you talked about your nursing in Hawaii, did you do more paperwork, or more hands on ?

S: More paperwork, medications, that sort of thing. We had corpsmen, and they were all assigned. And some of the chief corpsmen and the senior corpsmen, they were very competent, so most of that was done by them, anything like a guy needs a shower or a bathing or that type of thing. Unless they were so seriously ill, then the nurse would take over, but mostly it was them.

C: Did you meet any important people when you were in Hawaii ? Any important admirals? Did you have any contact with Nimitz just in passing ?

S: No, no, not that I know. Only in the parade where many of the dignitaries were. But I couldn't specifically say that I had met any particular person.

C: Some of the gals had occasionally met a movie star or an admiral, that's why I asked. Now were you in Hawaii on VJ Day in August of 1945 ?

S: Yes, I was, but I was in Pearl Harbor where I was stationed.

C: Can you tell us anything about the celebrations that went on ?

S: First of all we had been anticipating this coming because we had all kinds of scuttlebutt, as the Navy put it. Finally, it happened and everybody ran to the O club or grabbed a bottle that was on the shelf, and we started toasting for about three days, and everybody had gotten their own bottle of champagne so they could pass it around. And the lights went on in the bay on the harbor, and the ships started to put flares up and hoses, and the planes over at Ford Island, and they were flying around, and all kinds of colorful

activity, and a lot of screaming and yelling, and whatever. And that went on for a long time. About two or three days right there with the ships tooting off their sounds and what not, and then we had the preparations for the final parade, which I think was September third. We went up to Aiea Heights, which is the main hospital up in the hills of Hawaii. We did some drilling and marching in preparation for this big parade that was going to be held.

C: Now did the military organize the parade ?

S: Yes, and it was very long and very active. And the amount of people and equipment they had, the tanks, and one thing or another.

C: Did you march in it ?

S: Yes, I did.

C: How long was the route, do you remember ?

S: We marched from Waikiki to Honolulu proper, and there were a great many divisions, and it was a fun experience.

C: I'm sure it was. You have some wonderful photographs.

S: The thing of it is that when you think of the war ending at the place that it started, it was especially. Because they really did a job on, when we first arrived, the navy yard, some of the ships were in. The ARIZONA was down but there was no memorial like there is now, but you could see the bubbles come up.

C: Did you see the ruins of.. ?

S: Oh, yes.

C: They were apparent.

S: Yes, all along the pier at the navy yard. There was evidence of it.

C: Yes, the bombing.

S: And you'd go to Hickam field, which was Army, and you could see where the buildings had been strafed with bullets.

C: Now you mentioned an interesting piece of information that you had found out about the route of the Japanese over your area towards Pearl Harbor. Could you tell us about that ?

S: One of the tales, and as far as I know it was a tale, whether there was any factual part of it or not, was that the morning of the initial bombing at Pearl Harbor, that the area that we were living in had been a sugar plantation, and we were told that the Japanese, or spies, or whatever, had either cut or burned arrows into the sugar cane marking the direction to Pearl Harbor. And they feel that that was a very important contribution that they were given by whoever did it. I don't know if they ever did, but we were right on the sugar plantation. Then our quonset hut hospital was built right out from the main house down to the road to where there was a railroad track that went through, and my ward was stationed right there near the railroad track, and every time they went by, it was a banana train, or a pineapple train, and they would throw a

case of pineapple off to us, or a big stalk of bananas as they went by.

C: So it was still used as a commercial route. That's interesting.

S: A lot of the little things, you know, your mind gets a little bit lesser concentrating on the memories as you get older, but at the time they were all very vivid events for us, even a ride into town on one of the jeeps. It was so dusty we had to buy plastic rain coats to wear over our white uniforms so that we wouldn't get all nasty dusty.

C: Yes, you were in all white. It's changed so dramatically since then.

S: They tell me. My girlfriend lived there for awhile because her husband was stationed there, and they wanted us to come over, but my husband's brother was stationed in Germany, and he was going to be coming home, so he said if you want to see any of this area you

better make it soon. So instead of going back to Hawaii, we went to Germany.

C: Yes, it's changed quite a bit.

S: Yes, she tells me that. It was so hard to get around, so many of the native people and the tourists that were coming in, and so forth. Well she was there, and, of course, there was none of that while we were there because it was all very limited due to the war.

C: Absolutely, kind of off limits to anything like that. How long were you in Hawaii ?

S: We got there in July of 1945, and we left on Thanksgiving Day.

C: Of 1945 ?

S: Yes.

C: Oh, so you were there less than six months. Now what occasioned this transfer ? Did you petition for reassignment ?

S: No, we just got called by the office and were told that we were being shipped out. They told us where we were going. We were going

to Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands. Never had heard of it. Had no idea where it was. They showed it to us on maps and we knew that it was about a thousand to two thousand miles away again.

C: Was your girlfriend reassigned with you ?

S: No, she wasn't. Somebody else was. But she wanted to go so she changed places. The chief nurse told her you can go if you can find somebody that will switch with you. And she did because this girl had a boyfriend in Hawaii and didn't want to leave.

C: Oh, that was good.

S: So Dottie came with me and we flew out on Thanksgiving Day. I can remember that when we were flying over the islands the pilot called us into the cockpit, and said, Girls, I want you to see something" and we looked down and it looked just like a little ant floating around in the water, and he said, That's where you are going to be stationed." You could hardly see it from the air.

C: How did you feel about being sent there ?

S: Not sure what we were going to find, not sure what it was going to be like. But interesting, you know, something different that we had never seen before. So the pilot landed us, and there we were, in fact, someone from the corpsman detail had been sent in a carry all to take the nurses and the luggage and everything down. That's another little tidbit I've got to tell you. They took us out to the end of the island, and there was a little hut, a regular wood building, and over the front door had been carved, Hell's Angels, which was the name they gave us. There were only six women, plus a couple of Red Cross girls.

C: Six nurses ?

S: Yes.

C: That's all ?

S: That's all.

C: It must have been a small hospital.

S: Well, it wasn't really what you'd call a special or organized hospital because the operating room was a quonset hut and the ward that I had, which was the officers' ward, and the orthopedic ward was one part, the upstairs of an Army barracks, a wooden building, no windows, a roof and just walls. No running water. You had to carry the water in those big five gallon tanks.

C: Did you have to do that ?

S: No, the corpsmen did and there was no place to dispose of the water. They were throwing it out the windows.

C: It sounds so primitive.

S: It was the most primitive place I'd ever been in. Anyway, we got together with the Seabees and we asked them if they couldn't get the water to get to the second floor, but they managed for the surgical floor to have the water come in efficiently. Whether they had pumps or not, I don't know. But they might have been using them for something else.

C: Well, they had to also desalinate it.

S: Yes, so we had these big drums of it from wherever they got it.

C: Sounds like South Pacific.

S: Oh, it was very, very primitive.

C: Was it all in one place near that wooden hut ?

S: Across the street, well, what you'd call a street, the system of having the road go by and then we went across the street to the conglomeration, which is the only thing I can think of for the hospital itself.

C: It sounds more like a small dispensary really.

S: It was more like a MASH unit really. We had one tent; it was a tent that we used for a psychiatric unit. We used to get a lot of combat fatigue people.

C: Sure

S: And we had one prisoner. We had one Japanese prisoner.

C: Oh, you did ? Where was he ?

S: He was over in one of the compounds. They had a tent. I don't know how damaging this prisoner could have been. He didn't look like much, but he was Japanese.

C: Was he guarded ?

S: Yes, they had a marine on him, and he kept him under control.

We delivered a lot of babies. We had a maternity unit for the natives.

C: So you serviced the natives.

S: We serviced the natives as well. We had a pretty good size native population. Some of them were workers on the island, then we had native girls that did our quarters, did our laundry, changed our beds and the kind of thing, but, as I say, the population was a good population of natives, but they mostly lived and they would come over by the boats.

C: Oh, they lived on the other islands ?

S: Yes, Carlos they called it.

C: Now why did you treat them ? You weren't duty bound to do so, were you ?

S: No, because the government took over their responsibility of taking care of them. The government took over the island after the invasion and they owned the island, and they provided the medical care, and they used them as workers on the compound, and on other things on the island. Because there was a whole navy station and an Army station, and a Marine division, and the Seabees were all there on that little island. It's a wonder it didn't sink right into the sea.

C: Right, you described it as being so small.

S: We ate in the mess, the officer's mess, and it was all ration type food.

C: What kind of food did you have?

S: Yes, we used to have, and I can't eat it anymore today.

C: Spam ?

S: Dinty Moore Stew, I haven't eaten it since I came back. They'd have things like S.O.S. was the word they gave it. It was chipped beef on toast. Things like very not gourmet at all.

C: Did you ever have any fruits ?

S: Yes, we used to get fruit. We used to get bananas, pineapples and oranges. They used to make their own bread, and we used to say they've got the weevils baking the bread, and they'd say, oh, that's good for you. It adds protein.

C: Did you lose weight ?

S: I wasn't heavy to begin with in those days. I was 114, but we were coming across from Hawaii, and we made one stop on Johnson Island which is about half way there, and I remember getting off the plane, sort of in the early morning hours, and they had an air station there, and we all went into the mess hall to eat, and there was this big black cook, and he said, "Welcome aboard, ladies, if

you like eggs you better have them now, because you won't have any after you leave here."

C: Did you get any after you left ?

S: No, I guess that anything we had was powdered eggs.

C: Yes, that kind of KP rations.

S: I can always remember that greeting we got on Johnson Island.

C: Warning !

S: Yes, this is it, you don't get anymore. The other interesting factor about Kwajelein was in the mess hall. And I don't know whether or not they lived on the island, but some of the atomic scientists were there.

C: Oh, preparing for the tests on Bikini and Eniwetok.

S: Yes, the tests. And they ate with us, and I'm sure that among them were some very brilliant scientists. But, as I say, I don't remember their names. But they were there for the testing, and we saw quite a bit of them. They ate with us. They lived somewhere on

the island. They came to our officers club, but that was what was going on.

C: Yes, planning for that and the tests in 1946. Where were you living with the six nurses ?

S: In Hell's Angels.

C: Oh, in the little wooden building ?

S: Yes, there was like a living room, and then there was a corridor we walked down, and we all had cubicles, small bedrooms with drapes on the doors. Nothing very tight at that point. We had a head that was like an outdoor privy with no flush toilets.

C: How about the shower ?

S: The shower was all brackish water.

C: Was that outdoors ?

S: No, it was in that. It was nothing like running water. They put the barrels up on top of the building and you wet yourself. You pulled a chain and you got wet that way. You saved rain water. We

had barrels out with rain water to do our hair with because that salinization, you know how it is so brackish. It had a funny feeling to it. It feels like you still have something on you. So you'd wet yourself, you'd lather up and you'd pull the chain and rinse off and that was it. That was a shower. Oh, I can remember getting back to Honolulu, I must have stood in the shower for 45 minutes. It had been so long, you know, because I had been out there from November until April.

C: So you were there almost six months.

S: Yes, I think all together the two stations lasted about 10 months. It wasn't quite a year.

C: Oh, that's fascinating. How did you react to the heat ?

S: Somehow I didn't mind it too much, because you always had a little ocean and lagoon breeze, or maybe the fact that I was younger, heat didn't bother me as much. We would walk right out our back door of our hut, and you were right on the ocean. You went the

other way and you were right on the lagoon. Different ships would come in to the lagoon to weigh anchor, and they would call up and ask if there were any nurses available for dinner.

C: Did you go out to them ?

S: Oh, yes. They'd send a long boat out to us and we'd go. They'd have steak and fresh fruit and all that good stuff. So maybe two or three of us at a time would go. Then other islands had staffing and they would invite us to the islands, like Majuro and Burna Burna and some of those smaller islands. I never got over to Bikini, but we took care of the personnel on Bikini. I had one day on my floor, this one young man who had been deep sea diving, and they brought him up to quickly and he had the bends, and his eyes popped. So they brought him in and his eyes were all swabbed and bandaged, and they took him into surgery and they slit the canthus so the eyes would recede, and plus he was bandaged quiet a bit, so I went over

to talk to him and he said, " you must be an angel." And I said, " not really. I'm just one of the nurses here." And he said, " oh, no. you've got to be an angel. I haven't heard a woman's voice in years." He was just a young man, too. And when he got his eyes all straightened out he was so happy that he had been with us for awhile. There were incidents like that along the way.

C: That's interesting, so you went to these other islands ?

S: Yes, down to Majuro for one weekend and they had a nice dinner party for us and dancing. They showed movies, but not all of us could go. I always went. For some reason, I was always available, but a couple of girls, my girlfriend had met a doctor that she was dating, so she never cared to go. She stayed on for the emergencies and worked with him. The chief nurse never bothered much with it, but I have kept in touch with almost all of these girls.

C: Oh, that's fabulous.

S: One of the girls was from Boston, Malden or one of those places, and she was married on the island. She married a Seabee officer, and the Seabees built them a little honeymoon cottage at the end of the island. I had left the island by that time, but I just got a card from her not long ago. They came to our wedding when we got back, and she said it's got to be nearly time for your fifty years, this was last fall, and I just want to congratulate you. But they had had a celebration for their fiftieth.

C: Oh that's amazing. What a wonderful story and wonderful experiences. Did the insects bother you on the island ?

S: I don't remember that they did. I mean we all had insect repellent, but I don't remember any particular thing that bothered me.

C: How was the morale of the nurses on the island ?

S: Oh, very good. One of our girls had a record, Frankie and Johnny. Whenever you'd go to quarters, you'd know she was in there because you'd here this "Frankie and Johnnie were lovers".

C: Yes, a popular song at that time. Was there any security for the nurses ?

S: Oh, yes. We had marines stationed at our quarters 24 hours a day.

C: Did you have to, when you went out, if you went out on a date or to the O club, did anyone carry sidearms ?

S: No.

C: So it wasn't that bad.

S: I was with my husband one night, long before we decided we were going to be husband and wife, and we were down behind the officers club. There was a birthday party for one of the girls, and we had cocktails and somebody roasted a turkey and the whole bit, and there was a general or an admiral coming through, and he came to

the party, and I sat right next to him. But the only trouble is, my husband had given me a couple of Manhattans on an empty stomach, and before it hit. I'm talking to this girl, and then all of a sudden I'm finding myself listing towards the admiral. But we had some fun things. There was the night he brought me back to quarters and the navy police stopped him for speeding. He was the only vehicle on the island, and I think he might have been going 15 miles an hour or something, the traffic was so little. They thought it was funny, He said, "Gee, I've got to get the nurse back to quarters by such a certain time." So he said, "ok, but slow down." He was going at a crawl anyway!

C: Yes, 15 miles per hour. Did you have hours that you had to be in by ?

S: Yes, we had to be in by twelve, unless it was a special occasion and then you could go until one. But mostly it was until 12 o'clock.

C: Boy, they took good care of you. Protected you.

S: We were very well protected, and everyone was very courteous. We didn't have any problem with harassment or anything like that.

C: Oh, it was a different world with different attitudes I think. How were you treated by the doctors ?

S: Good, like buddies.

C: That's good. Were there many of them there ?

S: We must have had five or six of them there. We'd go on hiking trips with them. Some of the girls played tennis with the commodore. We had a commodore as the chief commander of the island, and some of the girls played tennis with him, and one night we had a general coming through, and he was going to be put up in the commodore's home. So the chief nurse called me and said, "I've got a duty for you" and so I said, " what's that?" and she said, "well, general so and so is coming through, and he had eaten something on Johnson Island that had upset him" and she said, " the commodore is

very concerned and wants one of the nurses to stay in attendance," and I had medication and so forth to give to him. And when I first went there he said, "I've got something to show you" and I said, "you do ?" and he said, "yes, come here" and so I went into his bedroom and he took out of his suitcase a lounging robe that had been given to him by Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. And he said, I'd like you to wear it." So I put it right over my uniform. So I was the one that got suspicion. I gave him a good dose of what he needed, as far as a tranquilizer, or whatever I had to do, and he probably went to bed and went to sleep all night.

C: Good, that's sometimes the best. What would you say were the difficulties and the minuses of nursing in the Marshalls ?

S: The fact that our facility was so poor. As I started to say before, at least we got the Seabees to install sinks so we at least had somewhere to pour our waste water, not just throw it over the side which was not a sanitary thing to do. So we eliminated that

process. The guys didn't have any place to put their gear, so we got from supply, the commissary, some orange crates, and we got them all busy painting them white. And we painted the inside of the building so it would be brighter. It was very, very primitive. So that and our roofs weren't very good, and we had a lot of rain there. We had to push the beds around so they'd avoid the rain or put pails around. So we really lived a very, very primitive situation.

C: Would you say there were any pluses ?

S: I think the pluses were in the fact that the people themselves made the situation. They were a bunch of good guys and you'd have different tours of people coming through. I don't know if we had anyone really important at that time. But don't forget, the war was over, we were mopping it up, so you weren't apt to have many dignitaries coming through at that time.

C: Did you feel that the nurses had a strong sense of esprit de corps ?

S: Oh, yes. They were all great gals and they all loved the Navy. And they all got along very well with our counterparts. I don't remember any problems we had in that area. We were a small group and we were friendly.

C: You mentioned that you met your husband there. How did you meet him there and what was he doing there ?

S: The very first day that we were there, my husband must have been given the assignment to invite the nurses up to the club for the evening. So he took it upon himself to get the names of the nurses and then he paired the nurses up with some of the guys that had initiated the plan. So he paired himself up with my girlfriend, her name was Dorothy Read, and his grandmother's name was Read.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting ? Where was he from ?

S: New Jersey, and so he paired himself up with Dottie, and he put me with some major or something, that I think was a married man. But anyway they all came down and got us at the quarters. It was our first night there. After we got to the party, he started coming around and talking to me and dancing with me, and he said, "you know, I didn't pick very well". He liked Dottie, she was a nice girl, but he really fell for me. So that's what happened. That's how we met. And then after that I'd go out with him occasionally. But then there was one of his buddies who, every time he went out on a mission or a flight, he'd call me up and say "he's gone." In other words, he'd be down to get me.

C: Oh, you mean that was one of his friends ?

S: Yes.

C: Because your husband, you said, was a navigator in the Army Air Corps.

S: Yes, so this is how it happened. And then gradually we got friendly with the Seabees, and then we got friendly with the marines, and then I said to him once, "I'm not committing myself to anyone while I'm here." He said, "Well, I'll be in touch with you when you get out" and then I didn't hear from him for a long time. All of a sudden one day I came home from working at the hospital and my mother said, "who do you know by the name of Smith in New Jersey ?" I said, "oh, Smitty!" Never called him anything but Smitty until the day we were married. Then he wrote me, if you aren't too busy or doing anything he said I sure would like to see you. So I said, " come up, if you want." He let me know when he was coming up. He called me and I met him in the train station, the old one in Providence, and we went over to the Biltmore, to the Garden restaurant, and had dinner. We went to the Bachanti room at the old Biltmore Hotel, where the girls all wore the lace skirts with the see through and everything. It was supposed to be one of the

classiest places in town. It was right near the station, and I didn't have a car in those days.

C: Was this 1946 ?

S: This was in the summer of 1946, because I had just gotten home around April or May. But then he came up to see me and then invited me to go down to New Jersey to see his mother, and then we went to the shore. He used to work one of the hotel parlors in college and I remember boarding in a dormitory room and some of the girls were waitresses at the inn. So we did that a few times, back and forth, back and forth. The first time that I went down, he took me to see Oklahoma, and that was when it first came on the Broadway stage, it was the original cast. And then when we went on our honeymoon we saw Carousel, and Kiss Me, Kate, and something else was playing at that time.

C: When were you married ?

S: On Thanksgiving Day in 1946.

C: Oh, so that was pretty rapid courtship after you returned. That's great. So lets get back to the islands. Did you ever have any contact with any hospital ships in the Marshalls ?

S: No.

C: So they weren't there, the REPOSE or the SOLACE, or any of those. What kind of contact did you have with the natives ? Any personal contact or relations with them ?

S: Oh, yes, we had the native girls. There was one that was kind of a boss, and her name was Frieda. They were Micronesian and they used to clean up our quarters, and try our clothes on, and they loved perfume. Whatever perfume we left out they'd be doused with it. They smelled like a five and dime store most of the time, but what happened was, I wrote home to my mother and asked her if she could send me some bright colored cloth, and some cheap perfume from the dime store. When it came, I gave it to the girls and you'd think you'd given them the moon. They did all sorts of things with

the cloth, they made sarongs and they doused themselves with the perfume. And the guys liked that jelly that you could put in your hair and it made it shiny and slick, pomade, or whatever. So we'd get some of that for the guys that worked around us. I had one little native boy around that we called, for what reason I don't know, we called him Tojo. He would stay over in the hospital area and watch everything the nurses were doing. Then I'd get out of work and he'd say, "Ms. Hall, last night you went out with army guy. That's no good." He was always checking on what you did. Then when we were all done he came around and asked that we take him back to the United States with us.

C: They obviously spoke English.

S: Yes, they did because they were taught by the missionaries.

C: Oh, I see.

S: He wanted to come back to the States. He wanted to come back and be a missionary. So we all felt bad that we couldn't take him.

C: Do you think any of the collaborated with the Japanese ?

S: I don't know. Probably not. I think they were more afraid of them then anything. Because they were wiping out those little islands like nothing, and they killed everybody on them. Then they had built a non-denominational church, but we had a priest from the Catholic Church. So he called me one day and said, "I've got to baptize a little native kid, and I want you to be the godmother" So here I am traipsing down to the church with this native baby and the family all walking behind, and we christened him Joseph. You know, that's such a brief period in your life.

C: Yes, it's fascinating. It's so interesting.

S: You know, you actually took on the format that they did. You did things the way they did. You talked with them. You worked with them. Some of them worked in the hospital. We had so many corpsmen, too. We had good help.

C: Did you ever feel isolated on the island or get island fever?

S: No, I don't think I was there long enough, and I also know there was so much going on, you'd fly off to another island.

C: That's what it sounded like. You were very busy with your work.

S: Yes, it was working and redoing things in the hospital and taking care of the patients and then when you were off duty you had many opportunities to go off to the clubs or go off to another island. I flew over to Roi in a PBY, which is just a two seater plane. I don't even remember who the guy was, but he was a navigator and he was at the officers club, and he said, "I'm going over. I'll take you". So I just had to go down to the transportation pool and they'd take you anywhere on the island.

C: Were there beaches on the island ?

S: Oh, yes.

C: Did you go to those ?

S: They weren't what you'd expect to get there today, but we could go right out our back door and we were right on the beach.

C: Did you ever go swimming ?

S: My biggest venture in swimming was going out to one of the transports on the lagoon one day and we could jump off the ship. And the one day I jumped, I had a two piece suit on and the bra part broke. So I had to stay under the water until someone brought me a pin and pin me back together again. In those days you wouldn't have gone without anything on.

C: No, right, especially with all those men around.

S: And another big event for us must have been in the spring of that year. We had typhoon warnings, and we had to get some of the patients and people off of the island, and we went over in long boats. And I had six or seven pregnant women climbing the jacob's ladder to get on the ship. And they had food and everything ready for us to ride out the storm. Because we didn't know if it was coming or not, and ,you know, if we had gotten that typhoon, that island was gone. They told us to take anything that was important

to us. We couldn't think of anything to take with us. So we all grabbed, your money wouldn't have been any good. In fact, when I got home my money was all moldy because you couldn't spend it.

C: Yes, there was probably no where to spend your money.

S: Yes, you'd always just let your pay accumulate on the books until you got ready to go home. But it was quite an interesting situation. They had to evacuate the island and secure the people that were there as best we could, and we had to take all the bedridden people that were there because they couldn't fend for themselves very well, so the boys got them aboard, and we got all the kids and the pregnant women, and they had big bowls of fruit all over the tables in the mess hall. The kids were in seventh heaven. So we waited, and it veered off to the Aleutians, fortunately. So the next day we just reversed the process and got everybody off. That was the most exciting part of anything that ever happened.

C: What was your rank when you were in the Marshalls ?

S: Lieutenant Junior Grade.

C: You got that far. Well, how did you happen to leave the Marshalls ?

S: My service time was up. I was in the reserves, and I was in for the duration of the war, and I was due for being discharged, and they were cutting back down to size.

C: Were you getting many patients at that time ?

S: No, it was mostly maintaining the people on the island. Occasionally you'd get people in from forward areas that got an injury or something. One night they had an elderly man come through with a tracheotomy. I had to stay up all night with him. Because every time you had something like that, then there would be a necessity. So I took care of that gentleman, and then he was shipped out as soon as we stabilized him. They would go mostly from there out to Honolulu to Aiea Heights.

C: When you were discharged, or told you were going to be returning to the United States, how would you travel back ?

S: I flew back to Honolulu in a C-27 with a contingent of men that were being sent back for discharge. One of the guys happened to be a friend who had been a Seabee, so Mo stayed pretty much with me. He said. "I'll protect you, Norma." I said, "that's good. I know somebody is". So we flew back to Honolulu and went to the bachelor womens quarters. That's when I got in the shower and practically washed myself down the drain. Then I got dressed and I think I went downtown and went shopping and mosey around. I got back to quarters, and someone said there is a gentleman who has been trying to call you and reach you. I didn't know anybody there. I knew Mo and I had made a date to go out to dinner or a movie, but, finally, this guy called back, and he said, "I have been calling everywhere on this base for you". It was a guy that I had more or less dated his friend before I went to the Marshalls. I had gone out with him

and he said, "you were walking downtown and going into one of the stores, and I turned the jeep around and you had disappeared. But I knew it was you. So I started calling all the quarters and everywhere I thought you might be until I caught up with you." So he came over and got me and we went out to dinner. I think he was from Chicago. It was fun seeing somebody I hadn't seen in a long time, especially in a place where I didn't know any of the people. Now from that point, I had to wait for transportation, I didn't know what I was gonna fly. I didn't know what was gonna happen. But I got a call from the naval base and I was to report to this USS BALLOU, but it was going to be a duty. It was myself and this other girl I didn't know. Three nurses going back to the United States. So we had to go down and to the naval district and were given our orders and were assigned to the ship, and we packed aboard a lot of dependents. Apparently at that point in time in Hawaii, they had some of the dependent people come over. So they were going back,

and we took them aboard, and we had to take care of their health responsibilities while aboard the ship. And there were two or three medical officers, so just in case they got sick, one thing or another, you know, a bunch of kids. So we took care of them. We came down through the canal, and we dropped them off in Puerto Rico. Also, while we were going across, we had one of the sailors develop appendicitis, and the doctor had to do an appendectomy on him. I scrubbed in on that case. You had a little touch of everything as you went along. And we left the dependents at Puerto Rico, and we came up the coast with the bands playing Sentimental Journey and all that at New York.

C: Oh, fabulous, at the piers ?

S: Yes, at the piers there. And then we had to report there and they said we had to stay in New York for a couple of days for decommissioning for officers. Our ship was being decommissioned as well. So they said, " Where would you like to stay ? So I said, the

Waldorf Astoria." So they said, "No problem", and the three of us got to go to the Waldorf Astoria for three days that we were in New York, and we had to report and get all the papers done and everything. Then it was back to Providence and a cab home. And my mother, she was hysterical. She hadn't seen me in over a year. And an only child, so my dad had to shake her to calm her down. They knew I was on my way home, but they didn't know when it would be.

C: So did you contact them before ?

S: Just by note that I was going to be coming home.

C: You didn't call them from New York City ?

S: No, but she just went off the wall.

C: Oh, but you must have been happy to return too.

S: Yes, it was good to return, but then I was bored to death. After I was home for awhile. I didn't even collect the money they were supposed to let you have. What was it ? 52-20, You could collect if you were in the military and didn't go back to work right away, you

could collect \$20. a week for 52 weeks. It was some kind of a formula. It was too boring, so I went back to work.

C: Where did you go to work ?

S: Memorial.

C: In Pawtucket.

S: It was summertime and I relieved a lot of the other nurses for their vacations.

C: Did you stay on there after you were married ?

S: No, we moved to New Jersey.

C: Oh, you did move to New Jersey. Did you do any nursing there ?

S: No, I didn't go back to work. My husband was working in a Squibbs plant there, and he didn't like that inside stuff, so he applied for a sales job, and we got sent, he went to college in Ohio. We had a choice of Sacramento, California, or Mansfield, Ohio, and since we had both been away, I said, "oh, I can't go to California" because it was so hard to get back and forth. It's not

like it is today. So we went to Mansfield, Ohio, because he had gone to college in Wooster, Ohio, and I had David, my oldest son, in September. We were married the November before, and he was born just one day after we had been married ten months. He'll be 50 in September. So we went out to Ohio and found an apartment. They were hard to find after the war. You had to pay a ceiling or something a little under the table. So my husband got us an apartment, and then I came back home to have David, and then he took a vacation and came. But the doctor wouldn't let me go right away. I had kind of a tough delivery. So when he was old enough, my mother went with me, and we took the train and we stopped in New Jersey, so his parents could see the baby, and then we went there and then we made a couple of trips back, then he got transferred to Buffalo, New York. And my two daughters were born in Buffalo, and we were there for nine years.

C: So how did you happen to come back ?

S: Because of his job. He was a salesman for ER Squibb Pharmaceuticals.

C: So they could locate you here. How lucky.

S: Yes, he had his choice of a couple of areas to go into. But as long as he was going to be a regional manager, I said the folks have never had a chance to enjoy the kids. I said, " why don't we just move back to Lincoln ? It was hard to find a house in those days. So you had to take something that was already established and being sold. We couldn't build from scratch. We didn't have time for that because we had already sold the house in Buffalo, and we had to find some place to put these kids.

C: Did you ever do anymore nursing after the kids were grown up ?

S: Yes, I worked right along, I did some part time nursing up in Buffalo with the Sisters of Mercy Hospital. And then I came back here and didn't work for awhile until the older three were all in school. I went back to work in the operating room in Memorial.

C: Oh, I see so you've continued your career.

S: I had always kept working but on a part time basis.

C: Great, so you had always kept your hand in it. I'd like to ask you if you could sum up and give me the significance of your career as a nurse in the navy. How would you sum up that experience ?

S: One of the greatest experiences of my whole career. It was different. I met so many different people. It was gratifying to find the type of people and the type of work I was doing. I felt it broadened me a lot, because I was a small town girl from just a small background really, and to be traveling the world with everybody, it made you a much broader person.