

SUMMARY

In this oral history interview, three nurses share their memories of the years they spent in military service with the 46th General Hospital during World War II. Ruby Hills, Kay Fisher Hilterbrant, and Edith Moore Richards were all working at Good Samaritan Hospital in downtown Portland when Col. J. Guy Strohm, urologist at the University of Oregon Medical School and veteran of the First World War, received orders to assemble a volunteer unit in 1940. For two years before they were called up, the unit attended lectures and classes at UOMS to learn about the various conditions and diseases they might encounter in battle, and to become familiar with Army procedures. In July of 1942, the unit was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas, to begin preparations for a possible mobilization overseas. The call came in August, 1943, when the unit left Kansas for Oran, Algiers. Thirteen months later, the unit was moved to Besançon, France, for the remainder of the war.

Ruby, Kay, and Edith begin by talking about their nursing careers, and how they all came to be on staff at Good Samaritan Hospital when Col. Strohm began his recruitment of volunteers for the 46th General Hospital. They talk briefly about the classes at UOMS before describing their departure for Ft. Riley and the train trip eastward. At Ft. Riley, days were filled with drills, rotations in the various hospital departments, and preparations for wartime service. Finally, the call came, and the unit left Kansas for an undisclosed overseas destination. The women describe the ocean voyage and their eventual destination: Oran, Algeria. They talk about the conditions and facilities at Oran; the Italian prisoners that provided much of the labor; and the patients treated at the hospital.

After the invasion of Normandy, the unit was moved up to France. The women describe the trip north through France, by truck and train, to the city of Besançon. The hospital was set up in a cavalry caserne recently abandoned by retreating German troops, and soon it had over 3,000 patients—almost double its intended capacity. After D-Day, the flow of American and French battle casualties ebbed, and the unit began treating liberated Russian slave laborers. The women describe the condition and behavior of these freed prisoners of war, who feared being returned to Russia upon discharge.

Soon the war was over, and the unit began demobilizing. Before leaving Europe, the nurses were able to travel to certain areas; Ruby talks about her trip through Hitler's mountaintop residence, the Eagle's Nest. The women together describe the long trip home on the liner *Vulcania*, and their return to civilian life. Finally, they share their impressions of Col. Strohm and explain the importance of the unit flag, which was subsequently donated to OHSU Historical Collections & Archives.

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Interview with Ruby Hills, Katherine Fisher Hilterbrant, and Edith Moore Richards
Interviewed by Linda Weimer
April 11, 1998
Site: Home of Ruby Hills and Katherine Hilterbrant
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

WEIMER: This is Linda Weimer. I'm interviewing today, on a lovely, sunny morning on April 11, Ruby Hills, Katherine Fisher Hilterbrant, and Edith Moore Richards, who were nurses in the 46th General Hospital in World War II.

I think, first of all, I'd like to ask everyone a little bit about where they were born and where they went to nursing school, and then we'll talk about the 46th General Hospital.

So since you're right next to me, Edith, I'm going to ask you first where you were born and just a little bit about your family.

RICHARDS: Well, I was born in Portland, Oregon. I'm a native of Oregon. I went to school here, both grammar and high school, and worked a while before I was able to go into nurses' training, and I trained at Good Samaritan Hospital. So a lot of the people that I knew in the 46th were from the Portland area, from Good Samaritan.

WEIMER: What made you decide to become a nurse?

RICHARDS: I always wanted to be one.

WEIMER: Just always felt that since childhood?

RICHARDS: Yes.

WEIMER: Good Samaritan, was that what they called a diploma program at that time?

RICHARDS: Yes.

WEIMER: Can I ask what years you went?

RICHARDS: I finished in '41.

WEIMER: Did you have any formal relationship, with the Oregon Health Sciences University, or as it would have been known then, the University of Oregon Medical School?

RICHARDS: No. No, none at all, except that we went to Doernbecher for some of our training.

WEIMER: Was that common at that time?

RICHARDS: Yes, that was part of the curriculum.

WEIMER: For pediatrics, to learn how to take care of children?

RICHARDS: Um-hmm.

WEIMER: How did you get into the Army, then?

RICHARDS: Well, they called us up. They wanted us, and so I thought, well, why not [laughter].

WEIMER: Did they personally call you up, or was it like a newspaper ad?

RICHARDS: No, it was—you know, it was just news media, and in conversation and so forth. I suppose I thought it was going to be glamorous [laughter]. What a let-down.

WEIMER: In World War I the nurses had to go through the Red Cross to become Army nurses. But that was not the case?

RICHARDS: Yes, it was.

WEIMER: It was still the case in World War II? So you actually had to contact the Red Cross. How did that work?

RICHARDS: I can't remember whether I was a member of the Red Cross before that or whether I joined. I don't remember that.

WEIMER: About what time was this when you became a member of the armed forces?

RICHARDS: Well, it was right after war was declared.

WEIMER: After Pearl Harbor?

RICHARDS: In fact, I was working in the pediatrics department at Good Samaritan when war was declared, so I suppose that was the turning point.

WEIMER: What was the general feeling at that time, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the United States declared war?

RICHARDS: I think it was a shock for everybody.

WEIMER: So that put you into the army. So I think we're going to go next to Ruby Hills and ask her a little bit about herself and where she was born and a little bit about her family.

HILLS: Well, I was born in a little town in the western slope of Colorado, in a little town called Hotchkiss, and my folks lived—well, it was raising lots of fruit, and so on, over there. A beautiful country in that area. And, then, the last few years of our time in Colorado, we were on a dryland farm over in the northeastern part, around Sterling, where my mother's folks had homesteaded over there. Our farm was blowing away during that dust storm, so we came—my father had a sister and her husband in Newberg, and they'd always wanted him to bring his family out to the Northwest, in God's country, so we had a sale out in the yard and sold everything and sent a trunk or two on, and it took us ten days to drive out. We had quite a time [laughter].

And we were six children of us, and we settled in Newberg, in that area; and we lost Father a couple of years later with cancer, so it was a little struggle. But I finally got through school, and then I was working at Portland Sanitarium, the one up on 60th and Belmont, up here, in the kitchen there for a while, and then all of a sudden they said, "Well, you're accepted for nurses' training in this next class," and I said, "Well, that's queer, because I haven't even applied" [laughs]. My aunt knew the administrator, and so she had said, "You're going to go." I really hadn't intended to be a nurse, but, anyway, that's where I ended up. And I graduated—I had to work a few years, like Edith, so I graduated in 1936.

WEIMER: And what was the name of the nursing school at that time?

HILLS: Portland Sanitarium and Hospital.

WEIMER: So they did have their own nursing program?

HILLS: Oh yes, a three-year program. They sent us to Walla Walla College. It's the same church affiliation, so we're alumni of Walla Walla College. In a couple of weeks I'm going up there for our alumni gathering, and a few girls that are left will be there.

WEIMER: So you continued working, after graduation as a nurse, at Portland Sanitarium?

HILLS: No, I went down to Woodburn and worked for three years there for a private doctor. He had his own hospital. Then I went and took a three-month course—at the time that I was in training, it was just a very short time there that we weren't affiliated with Doernbecher for some reason or other. Before and afterward they were. I was undecided at that time whether I wanted to go to California and work or not, so I took the three-month graduate course at the City and County Hospital in San Francisco to get my registration in California. I came back to Portland and started working at Good Sam [laughter].

WEIMER: Oh. So you two knew each other?

HILLS: So Edith was still a student. There were quite a few girls that went in the unit that had been students, and I was one of the head nurses for the first two years, and then I was assistant head nurse the last year before our unit was called to go into the service. Most of us knew who Dr. Strohm was, who was going to be the commanding officer of this little unit –big unit [laughs]. So he was recruiting personnel to be in this. For about a year before our unit was called up, we had meetings up at the library at the School. Every month we would have a meeting. We'd have lectures on any subject that we—we wouldn't have any idea where we would be sent, and so, like you were saying, the communicable diseases and the tropical diseases were all discussed, and any kind of situation that we might run into; and then acquainting us with Army procedures, too.

WEIMER: So in other words, if I have this correct, you signed up for the unit, but you were here for a year of prep work, and you continued your regular job, still?

HILLS: That's right. We'd get no credit, of course. I think, ordinarily, a person would have gotten credit for a Reserve.

RICHARDS: I think you would now.

HILLS: You would now, but we didn't at that time.

RICHARDS: But, then, we weren't even officers for a while, you know, after we were in.

HILLS: No we were just Red Cross nurses, and that was...

HILTERBRANT: Relative rank.

HILLS: Relative rank.

WEIMER: So there was no pay, either, at this time?

HILLS: No. But Dr. Strohm, he was very insistent that we all go down to Nuddelman's and have a uniform made [laughter]. So we all had to pay for those uniforms. We went in the army wearing them, you know, and then they took them away and gave us issue [laughter].

I don't know if Nuddelman's is still in business or not, but, anyway, they were quite a company for making uniforms.

WEIMER: Well, we've got you and Ruby into the Army, preparing, taking classes up on Marquam Hill with the Medical School. So next we're going to go to Katherine Fisher Hilterbrant, and I think you are called Kay by your friends?

HILTERBRANT: Yes, right.

WEIMER: Why don't we ask you a little bit about your history, too.

HILTERBRANT: I was born in Roseburg, Oregon, and I lived on a farm. My father farmed. I had two sisters, three of us. I decided to go into nursing when my mother broke her leg when I was a senior in high school. Up until that time, I thought I wanted to teach physical ed, but I went to the hospital when Mother broke her leg, and I held traction while the doctor put the cast on, and so I decided that I would like that. So I went into training in 1933 and graduated in '36 from Good Samaritan. Then I worked at Corvallis, Oregon, in the operating room for two years. Then I went to the University Hospital at Cincinnati, Ohio, and took my course in anesthesia, and then I came back to Good Samaritan and was a staff nurse anesthetist. I did anesthesia for Colonel Strohm and all the other surgeons at Good Samaritan.

Colonel Strohm was heavily recruiting nurses from Good Samaritan, so I joined the Red Cross first, and have their pin, and then we went up to the Medical School and had the classes up there until we went. Actually, I got my orders to go in the Army, and I got it one day to report the next; and the next day, I was booked to do four cases in the operating room the next morning. So I went to the superintendent of the hospital, Miss [Hombeck?], and she says, "Well, you can't do that. The patients are coming in and the doctors are booked. You have to get somebody to take your place" [laughs] I called Colonel Strohm and told him I couldn't report the next day, and he says, "You will report" [laughter]. And I called everybody that I knew that had ever given anesthetic, and I finally got a gal that worked for me the next day. Then they changed the booking after that.

WEIMER: They didn't give you much time.

HILTERBRANT: No. Then we went first over to Vancouver Barracks; and that was at the time of Dutch Harbor, and so they thought they were going to get lots of casualties, and they didn't get a lot. They got a few quite serious casualties. Then, we were there—I don't know what, six weeks?—before the rest of the unit was activated. Anyway, we were in the Army a little previous to the rest of the unit.

We all went in as second lieutenants, a relative rank, and at that time a relative rank only got the pay of enlisted men, so we got, what was it, \$68 a month?

RICHARDS: Something like that.

HILTERBRANT: And, then, in about, I don't know, within a year, nurses had permanent rank, as second lieutenants when we went in. And we went to Fort Riley, Kansas.

WEIMER: Do you remember when you went to Fort Riley?

HILLS: Oh yes, I should say we do [laughter].

HILTERBRANT: I remember because four of us at Barnes did not get our orders. Everybody else left.

HILLS: Oh, you were on that duty?

HILTERBRANT: Yes. Marge [Plant?] and I, and I can't remember who else, but there were four of us. So we just really haunted the chief nurse's office every day. "Have they come in, have they come in?" We thought for sure we'd be left behind, not knowing they were going to be in Fort Riley for thirteen months [laughter]. We thought they were on the high seas. But our orders came, and we joined the rest of them.

WEIMER: Did you all go out by train to Fort Riley?

HILLS: Well, outside of the thirty girls that went to Barnes, the whole unit. There were about a hundred enlisted men from the Portland area. The other four hundred were called in from all over to make up the five hundred enlisted personnel. And so all the nurses and doctors and this hundred men, we took up a whole train, there, at the station, and it was the most crowded place you've ever seen on the evening when we left. I was glad to get going, because the day before we left we moved all the patients. I was in obstetrics at Good Sam, and we had an overflow from the Wilcox Memorial Hospital, there, and first east, second east was all OB patients, and on third east, even. They were building a new Wilcox at that time, and the last day there, we moved all of those patients across the street over to the Wilcox. And we had fourteen deliveries during that day, so I guess I wasn't moving patients [laughter].

But we left that evening, and one of our doctors—there were several doctors who were full colonels, see, because they'd been keeping up their Reserves from way back. So one of them, Dr. Seabrook, I remember, we got as far as—we didn't have sleepers on the train or anything [laughs]. And the whole train was our unit. We got to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and it was warm—it was in July—so every time the train would stop, why, people would get off and try to straighten their legs out, and so on. Colonel Seabrook...

RICHARDS: Colonel Lind.

HILLS: Seabrook was a full colonel, too. But Colonel Lind, he missed the train, and left his hat on it [laughter]. So from then on he was Cheyenne Lind. Well, he got the next train and met us down in Denver. And the girls were already there. They were there a day before we were.

WEIMER: So you're in Fort Riley, Kansas. What did you do during those thirteen months that you were stationed there?

RICHARDS: We drilled, and we worked in different areas. I was assigned to the tailor's shop. I adjusted pant legs [laughter], which really wasn't a nursing activity, but that's where they needed me, so that's where I was assigned.

We did drill quite a lot. Colonel Strohm insisted that we keep up our activities, and so forth. And one time, particularly, we were out on the drill field in our white uniforms and our

caps and all, and this thunderstorm came, and it poured down rain, and we looked like drowned rats with all of these things drooping, but we drilled [laughter].

WEIMER: You even had to drill in a white nurse's uniform?

HILTERBRANT: Um-hmm. We did that time.

HILLS: Remember that evening? A friend of Colonel Strohm's had sent salmon, enough for the whole unit for a dinner, and we had that dinner that evening after the girls had drowned. I was on duty, and I could watch it from...

HILTERBRANT: [Laughter] Oh, that was miserable. We kept thinking, "They're going to dismiss us, they're going to say 'go'." They didn't [laughter].

WEIMER: Did you ever question the Army? Like, here war is going on, and you're stuck in Fort Riley, Kansas, as you said, in the tailor shop, wondering what you were doing there?

RICHARDS: No. I guess I went in with the idea that I was there to, you know, follow orders, and that was it, because everybody else was doing various things, too.

HILLS: That was only a short time, though, that you were assigned to that.

RICHARDS: I never did work on the wards.

HILLS: Even after we went down to [Whiteville?]?

RICHARDS: Never did.

HILLS: Well, for goodness sake. Now I'm hearing things I never knew before.

WEIMER: [Laughter] Did you, Ruby, work on some of the wards while you were there?

HILLS: I did. I worked on a psychiatric ward. An open ward, they called it. The locked ward was next to us. There were a lot of personnel that were taken into the service that had problems that should never have been taken in, and a lot of them usually had a discharge, a lot of those personnel. But I was there for a while.

And then we would rotate in surgery. Dr. Hamilton was our anesthesiologist, and Kay had her registration, and that was about it. So Dr. Hamilton had classes for five or six of us that were interested in anesthesia. I had been exposed to it a little bit when I first went down to Woodburn, because we didn't have any—the three of us nurses that were down there took turns giving the anesthetic for anything, you know, that Dr. Pemberton was doing. So I was assigned part time, but they tried to give us training in all the different specialties as much as

they could, and rotate us. And, then, I was assigned to anesthesia permanently after we left Fort Riley, all the time we were overseas.

WEIMER: And, Kay, how about you? What did you end up doing in Kansas?

HILTERBRANT: I was assigned to anesthesia from the day I arrived, and there were two of us that took call for anesthesia. And when you got an increase in rank—and I'd already had my course in anesthesia, and so I think, I forget how long, two years before you could increase in rank? Anyway, I had worked part-time in OB nights, but I covered anesthesia, too; and I got my first lieutenantcy early because I was already a nurse anesthetist when I went into service.

WEIMER: So you got the call to go to Africa. Oran, North Africa?

HILLS: Yes. We left by train from Fort Riley.

HILTERBRANT: But we didn't know where we were going.

WEIMER: Oh, they just said you were leaving?

HILLS: We didn't have any idea, no.

WEIMER: And by train you went to where?

HILLS: New York.

WEIMER: And then from New York you must have taken a ship?

RICHARDS: Yes.

WEIMER: When did they tell you North Africa was your destination?

HILTERBRANT: They didn't ever tell us.

HILLS: We stopped when we got there [laughter].

HILTERBRANT: I can remember somebody on board ship, somebody with authority, told us when we were part way there that we probably wouldn't get into much fighting, battles and so forth, because most of the battles had been over and they were moving up to someplace else. But that's all we knew.

HILLS: We were with a convoy, with forty Liberty ships, I guess they were, and, then, the destroyers out around the edge. And it took us thirteen days, because in those days they had no radar, and so they had to change course every five minutes, and we would just zigzag.

WEIMER: To avoid the U-boats?

HILLS: To avoid the U-boats, uh-huh. So we went quite a ways south and then on in through the Rock of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean, and then about two hundred miles from there up to Oran, where our ship turned off. But they were bombed that night: the rest of them that left, they were bombed between there and Algiers that night. We never did hear what the result was because there was so much going on.

RICHARDS: Then we went to a staging area outside of Oran. I don't remember how long we were there.

HILLS: A thousand girls there. All these units, you know.

WEIMER: Almost all nurses?

HILLS: All nurses at that time.

HILTERBRANT: And cold showers.

WEIMER: Oh.

HILTERBRANT: Yes, and salt water [laughter]. A lot of the girls thought, "Oh boy, a shower and shampoo," and so forth. So they got their hair all lathered, and then this cold salt water...

RICHARDS: It didn't come out. It was a gummy mess [laughter].

HILLS: We washed our faces and linen and everything else in our helmets [laughter]. They had racks built so you could put your helmet in there.

RICHARDS: You used your helmets for everything.

WEIMER: Very resourceful.

HILLS: Field kitchens, of course, all during that time.

WEIMER: Now, your General Hospital, the 46th, that wasn't established yet. Were you establishing that when you got there, or were there some people ahead of you that had actually set it up?

HILLS: The General Hospital was; that was put from the time when we started as a Red Cross unit.

RICHARDS: They built it while we were in the staging area, and it was a tent hospital. So our men were out helping. I think the frames, maybe, were there, but they were putting the tenting up while we were in staging.

HILLS: There were a few permanent buildings, like surgery and headquarters, x-ray. They had help with a lot of the Italian prisoners, because Sicily, the island of Sicily, the Allies had already taken it. So there were quite a few Italian prisoners, and they were sent back, and they were very willing workers.

HILTERBRANT: And they helped with setting up, as well as in the mess halls...

RICHARDS: They were wonderful.

HILTERBRANT: ...and entertainment, and so forth. They had bands, and so forth, afterwards.

WEIMER: Well, who were your main patients, then, at the 46th in North Africa?

HILTERBRANT: Well, as I remember, most of them were wounded who had been transferred from one place to another. Each time they moved, they thought they were on their way home, and they were just shuffled from one place to another, so the morale was very low.

WEIMER: As a general hospital, you didn't receive front-line casualties?

HILTERBRANT: Well, at that time we didn't.

HILLS: Well, of course, in front lines I think you have a chain of command down. You have the...

HILTERBRANT: Aid stations.

HILLS: Aid stations, and then the...

HILTERBRANT: Station hospitals. There was another one up there someplace.

HILLS: Evacuation. And they sent them back; if there was something life-saving, you know, they had to do it right there, if possible, but they weren't equipped to do a lot, and so they would be sent back as fast as they could.

RICHARDS: Later, we had casualties from Italy, but the war was almost over in Africa when we got there. So we got a lot of casualties from Jeep accidents and that.

WEIMER: Just normal things that would happen.

RICHARDS: Normal things. But then we started getting casualties from...

HILLS: Well, they invaded Italy two weeks after we arrived, in through Salerno and Anzio, and that was a blood bath up there. Terrible.

RICHARDS: And so we got lots of those; they were the patients that we were taking care of.

HILLS: Later on, I think most of our patients that winter were from Salerno, the monastery. It was on the very tiptop of a hill south of Rome...

HILTERBRANT: ...that they tried so hard to get.

HILLS: The Germans were really dug in there, and the planes couldn't get off the ground, so the boys weren't getting supplies, and they were losing feet and toes and everything from not having the proper supplies get to them. It was terrible.

WEIMER: But all three of you were working as nurses when you finally got to Africa?

ALL: Yes.

WEIMER: How long were you there in Oran?

RICHARDS: About thirteen months.

WEIMER: And then you got the orders to go to France?

HILLS: This was right after Normandy.

WEIMER: The invasion of Normandy?

HILLS: Then they invaded through southern France about a month later, and then our unit went across into southern France.

WEIMER: Did you go by ship to France?

RICHARDS: A hospital ship.

HILTERBRANT: We did, the men didn't. They went by LSTs.

WEIMER: Where did you first establish base in France?

RICHARDS: Kay was in an advance group. There were a few that went up by car, wasn't it?

HILLS: Oh, in a truck convoy.

RICHARDS: Within about three or four days after we landed, they went on.

HILTERBRANT: They were going to make a field hospital out of our unit, temporarily, because they were getting so many casualties, because they went up through France so fast.

HILLS: Scorched earth thing, where they'd destroy bridges and everything.

HILTERBRANT: They tried to divide up all our equipment and send that for a field hospital, and they sent that in a truck convoy, and we had red crosses on the top of the canvas of the trucks. There were seven nurses that went, and we traveled in an ambulance, but the old army ambulances didn't have any windows on the side, so you could duck down and see out the front, or you could see out the two little windows in the back.

RICHARDS: Four hundred miles.

WEIMER: Oh, quite a journey.

HILTERBRANT: Yeah. And we stayed overnight in Grenoble. There had been terrible battles around Grenoble, and the sewer systems had been blown up and the water supply had been blown up; and Grenoble was just a mess. We stayed at a little inn there, and it was pouring down rain. And enlisted men in this little inn had just left—we were assigned to a room, but the beds had been slept in. I remember Peg Graham was who I was with, and it was a double bed, so we turned the sheets over and crawled in there [laughter].

HILLS: You were lucky to have a bed [laughter]. The men had to throw their bags out on the ground in the pouring rain.

RICHARDS: For enlisted men they scoured around.

HILLS: They finally found a chicken house they could put them in. They sprayed it with DDT, and the kids had to stay in that chicken house [laughter].

HILTERBRANT: And going up in the convoy we'd hear planes go over, and we didn't know whether they were American or German.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1/Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

WEIMER: We're on side two. Go ahead.

HILTERBRANT: Well, on the trip north, they would stop once for a rest stop, once in the morning and once in the afternoon, beside the road, and so it wasn't so bad for the men, but—so we'd make a circle, and we had raincoats, and we'd all spread out with our backs in a circle and take turns [laughter]. Anyway, it was quite a trip.

They were trying to get supplies through. Our troops were traveling so fast, to keep the supply line up, just truck after truck would pass us on these little, narrow roads, because they were so pressured to get supplies up north. And, then, they'd get all of these ammunition

and whatnot trucks mixed in our convoy. So we'd stop every once in a while, and we'd get to a place where they could get all together to get our unit together, and let all these supply trucks by. It was a real trip up—but nothing compared with the girls that came on the train or the rest of the unit that came on the train.

HILLS: In the meantime, this Dr. Begg, who was an orthopedist—he was a wonderful person. He had stayed back with the 70th General from St. Louis. They hadn't gotten their orders to go anywhere yet. But he stayed back there to help, and he kept hearing Berlin Sally saying, "Why don't you take your sign down, 46th? We know you're out on the high seas" [laughter]. Well, he was really worried. And he finally got back—and he had a time getting back up to where we were, and, then, he had to find his own transportation, and so he came with the Red Ball, you know, these supply trips that you talk about. So he finally found one that he could come up on. It was Black unit, with a Black driver, and this driver said, "I am so tired. I've been driving for twenty-four hours," or thirty-six or whatever it was, so Dr. Begg drove that car all the way up that four hundred miles in that big truck [laughter].

RICHARDS: All the time the roads, of course, had been bombed, and so forth, and on the train we had to stop every few miles so they could repair the track ahead of us, because we were right behind the troops. So it was stop and go. We never knew, when the train stopped, how long we were going to be there, and they just started and stopped.

HILLS: It took us four days and five nights to go that four hundred miles. All we had was canned food.

RICHARDS: C rations.

HILLS: We didn't have our clothes off at all. I mean, you had to fight just to sleep.

RICHARDS: And there were six of us to a compartment, so you couldn't stretch out or lie down or anything.

HILLS: Some of us up in the little hammocks up above.

RICHARDS: I slept on the floor, on the steel grating, finally, the last night or so.

HILLS: I think in our car we finally had them bring boxes of C rations, and we built it up between the two seats, and then we could stretch out, about four of us.

RICHARDS: And there was no communication between the cars. Each car was separate, so you couldn't go and see how your friends were doing, or what they were doing.

HILLS: We had to pour water in the toilets to flush them.

RICHARDS: And they were awful [laughter].

HILLS: And the boys got the idea - the boys, of course, they were in a boxcar with nothing. They were sleeping out on the floor. So they finally found gallon cans of coffee. Every time we'd stop, they were just scattered out to find wood to make a little fire to make some hot coffee.

RICHARDS: Well, we did that, too. Every time we got stopped, why, we'd get out and build a little fire to heat, you know, chocolate or whatever.

HILLS: There'd be about a dozen fires up and down the line.

RICHARDS: Sometimes we got to eat or drink, and sometimes we didn't.

HILTERBRANT: Well, when we finally got to Besançon, it was an old French casern. It had been a cavalry casern, and the Germans had just left—their plates were on the tables, with food, and some of them left their guns, and so forth. And there were tanks and all sorts of things in this casern that we were to set up in.

So I worked in the operating room, of course, and there was straw about six or eight inches deep, and there were bunks, bunk beds, and so they took out the bunk beds and they swept out all the straw. Well, they didn't realize there was so much ammunition that had been dropped down through the straw. Then, finally, when they got everything out of this wing where we had eight operating rooms that were probably twenty-by-twenty, and they had a potbellied stove for heat—so anyway, we got these rooms, and then they tried to scrub the walls and windows and ceilings—and, of course, they were high ceilings—to get it cleaned up for operating rooms. When they got all this trash out of this wing where I was—that's the only place I knew anything about—they lit a match to all this straw and debris and bunks and so forth, and pretty soon, here it was banging away—the ammunition was exploding [laughs]. Nobody got hurt. Then they realized what had happened. But everybody stayed well away from this junk pile that we were burning out on the parade ground.

HILLS: I think the French farmers around there helped them clean that out—there had been a horse cavalry. I think they said there were 147 wagonloads of debris that they hauled out of that thing.

WEIMER: Quite a mess.

RICHARDS: It was.

HILTERBRANT: Well, anyway, we were trying to get it cleaned up, and so we had part of this equipment that we had scaled down to be a field hospital. We had passed field hospitals as we were coming north. So, then, we started putting our equipment on tables, and gas machines and so forth, and one thing—the people that sorted the supplies didn't put any soda lime in, so if we'd seen casualties, we wouldn't have been able to use anything but spinals or penicillin.

RICHARDS: Soda lime filters out the carbon dioxide which is a byproduct of respiration that is very lethal if you get it over a certain level.

HILTERBRANT: Well, we could have just given high flows and not have rebreathing, but anyway, we didn't have to do that. We were immediately a General Hospital, and, then, the rest of the unit arrived five days later.

HILLS: We were in south France two weeks, waiting for the engineers to build these bridges, is really what we were waiting for.

HILTERBRANT: Well, anyway, we had quite a period of time to get this place cleaned up, so it would be operable when the rest of the unit came.

HILLS: Kay, you weren't in Saint-Tropez and Saint-Maxine, then, you went right straight up to Saint...?

HILTERBRANT: No—well, yeah, we were there two weeks, and then four or five days on the...

HILLS: Saint-Tropez.

HILTERBRANT: Which is one of the...

HILLS: Fancy places in France.

HILTERBRANT: [Laughing] Was one of the fancy places. It wasn't when we were there [laughter]. It was in shambles.

HILLS: Weren't you staying in the Latitude 43?

HILTERBRANT: Yeah.

HILLS: There was no elevator—well, the elevator wasn't running.

RICHARDS: That's where the Prince of Wales and the Duchess stayed at one time.

HILLS: They had their honeymoon on the top floor, and so...

RICHARDS: Long gone when we were there.

HILLS: We had some French ladies that were trying to do the cooking for us, and, of course, all they had to use our canned food and crackers and so forth.

RICHARDS: They did all right.

HILLS: They tried to fancy them up, you know [laughs]. It was so funny.

RICHARDS: [Laughing] The crackers, they would put designs with pink coloring on them.

HILLS: Using dehydrated eggs to do it [laughter].

RICHARDS: They were limited, but they did all right.

WEIMER: So the rest of you made it to your final staging area, Besançon?

RICHARDS: The train was four or five days.

WEIMER: While you were there, who were the main patients that you got? What kind of cases did you see?

RICHARDS: They were all battle patients.

HILLS: Right off the front line, not enough beds. So many of them...

HILTERBRANT: They'd just bring them in on stretchers.

RICHARDS: We would get as many as three and four convoys in twenty-four hours.

WEIMER: And when you talk about convoys, how many people are in a convoy?

HILLS: They came by train, didn't they, mostly?

HILTERBRANT: Well, I guess they did, but we got them from the...

HILLS: We didn't see them till they got into surgery.

HILTERBRANT: Well, we got them—you know, the ward men would collect them from someplace and put them in the trucks and then unload the trucks to the wards. And I always appreciated the ward men, because besides taking care of the casualties—I mean transporting, and so forth—they helped with the care, and they transported the food from the mess hall—which was way across the compound, is where we were—up two flights of stairs, and served them, and then would have to collect all these things and transport them back.

HILLS: There was no elevator.

RICHARDS: They came through a triage first from the trucks.

HILTERBRANT: Oh yeah, when the casualties came in.

RICHARDS: When they actually came to our hospital, our doctors triaged them: which went straight to surgery, which went to where.

HILTERBRANT: I can remember one man—when the convoy arrived, here they were on the floor and everywhere else, and here was this red-headed, dirty, battle-scarred patient. And then the next day I went in, and I said, “Well, I don’t remember you.” “Well,” he says, “I’ve had a bath, and my hair’s combed” [laughter]. I didn’t even recognize him. I quit saying “I don’t know you” anymore.

HILLS: Of course, the campaign in Italy was over with by that time, and so they immediately sent personnel from that area, doctors and nurses that had gone through very similar experiences that we were going to be going through—and, of course, they stayed with us for months. We were equipped to take care of fifteen hundred battle casualties, a General Hospital unit is. We were getting Allied casualties from the French, because they had been under the Germans all that time, and, of course, they didn’t have any backup for their medical help, and so they were coming to us, too. After those patients were ready to be transferred on to a backward unit, there was no place to send them. So instead of our unit, our census increased to about three thousand for months.

WEIMER: Quite a bit. Well, since you had almost double what your capacity was designed for, how did you handle supplies, whether it was food or medical supplies?

HILLS: Well, it was amazing to see. We never had to go without a meal.

HILTERBRANT: We always had food, but we ran the operating room day and night. We finally, after I guess it was two days, decided, gosh, we had to divide the staff in two because we just couldn’t keep going.

HILLS: Dr. Hamilton was in the hospital with something, and he had to come home.

HILTERBRANT: He knew when to leave [laughter].

HILLS: He was so frustrated, he didn’t know what to do.

HILTERBRANT: So anyway, we divided the staff in two, and half of them slept. Of course, we worked twelve hours in the operating room.

HILLS: And we’d stay on a couple of more hours to get the supplies ready so that the next shift could last over that twelve hours, so we really had a fourteen-hour shift.

WEIMER: You were getting very little sleep.

HILTERBRANT: Well, you just slept, you were so tired.

HILLS: All you did was work and sleep.

WEIMER: What did you do for antibiotics at this time?

RICHARDS: We didn't.

HILTERBRANT: We had penicillin.

RICHARDS: We had penicillin that came when we were in North Africa, but it was so restricted, it was only very, very severe patients that they expected to have terrible infections that got it, and the doctors had to write a history, and it was rationed. So it was several—wasn't it a couple of years before we...?

HILTERBRANT: Well, in France we didn't have any restrictions, because I used to fix a big tray like this.

RICHARDS: Well, the first year, I guess, it was.

HILTERBRANT: And you know, just walk in the ward, and the boys would say, "Turn over. Here she comes." And you'd just go down the aisle or the ward and give them penicillin.

RICHARDS: They were all dirty cases, of course, because they were all battle casualties.

HILLS: Contaminated.

RICHARDS: Contaminated, yes. So they all were potential infections.

WEIMER: How long were you there in France?

HILTERBRANT: Fourteen months.

HILTERBRANT: Wasn't it longer than that?

HILLS: Let's see. We came home in November.

HILTERBRANT: It seemed like longer than that.

HILLS: We were overseas twenty-seven months, and we were in North Africa thirteen months, and then fourteen months in France.

HILTERBRANT: I guess you're right.

HILLS: And the war was over in, what, June? I think about June the war in Europe was over, and then they dropped the bomb over there in August. So in the meantime, they had liberated a lot of the slave-labor camps that the Germans had had; they had mostly Russians laborers that they had. They took all of our GI patients away and sent us trainloads of these slave laborers from these prison camps, and the ones we got were from Cologne. They had been in these coal mines for three and four years, not ever out of them, and the only

food they were getting was bread made with half sawdust. There were a lot of them dying on the way in. TB and typhus and you name it. Malnutrition terrible.

HILTERBRANT: And you talk about the food: we had trouble because they hoarded all the food that they could have...

RICHARDS: It was crazy.

HILTERBRANT: ...because they were afraid they wouldn't have another meal, you see. So we would find food in very odd places.

RICHARDS: Tucked in their beds.

HILTERBRANT: Oh yes.

RICHARDS: And they would go through the garbage cans, thinking they weren't going to get another meal—and they were giving them double rations. And they wouldn't eat corn. That was cattle feed.

WEIMER: Even though they were starving, they would not eat the corn?

HILTERBRANT: Well, there was so much else on their plates.

WEIMER: Oh, if that had been the only thing, they would have eaten it, but since there was a choice, they refused to do that?

RICHARDS: Well, and they all were sick because they hadn't had decent meals, and they were vomiting. They all had lots of lice and so they stripped them all and shaved all the hair, didn't they, and then put louse powder on them, and then hospital gowns.

HILTERBRANT: And they burned all their clothes.

RICHARDS: They were just tattered. And, of course, their shoes were worn out. Then, so many of them, they gained so much weight after they'd find them. And they had, where they'd been hit with gun butts, many fractures and compressed sternums.

HILTERBRANT: Old fractures.

RICHARDS: Fractures everywhere from gun butts. Anyway, these were in terrible condition. But, then, when we started issuing them clothes, they wanted boots, and we didn't have enough boots to issue our own casualties, and so we gave them low-cut shoes. Oh, they were just furious about having to have low-cut shoes [laughs]. New ones, but...

WEIMER: How long did you take care of the slave-labor prisoners?

HILLS: Well, they were a little hard to get rid of, apparently [laughs].

HILTERBRANT: After they had gotten into a condition that they were able to. Edith, you know more about that, don't you?

RICHARDS: The only thing I can remember is when they had the trucks to send them home, one of the men in the ward disappeared, absolutely disappeared. Nobody could find him, because they knew that as soon as they got off the trucks in their home country or wherever they were going, they would be shot as traitors. So he disappeared, period, until the trucks were gone. Then he appeared out of nowhere. We never did know where he was or what he'd done, but they scoured that camp, and they couldn't find him. Then he was shipped out later on.

HILTERBRANT: How these people happened to be in the concentration camps: of course, Germany was paying pretty good salaries before the war, and these men had come down from Russia to work in the war effort to build up supplies for Germany. Well, then, the minute war was declared, then they were taken as prisoners, and so they were prisoners of war from then on.

WEIMER: But that's why they were considered traitors, because they had gone earlier to help the German war effort?

RICHARDS: Yeah, and they were prisoners of war.

HILTERBRANT: By that time, most of our doctors had been sent home, because they needed them in the states, so there was just a skeleton crew.

WEIMER: But the nurses—you were still there?

HILTERBRANT: The nurses were, and then they told us that we probably would be sent over to CBI [China Burma India]—because it was still going on over in Japan—right away, and so several of them were shipped out. Let's see, Scotty went down to Marseilles to go back to the States.

RICHARDS: I know Freddie had her orders.

HILTERBRANT: We even expected to be sent on over to that war.

HILLS: It was a global thing.

HILTERBRANT: But in the meantime, they dropped the bomb.

WEIMER: The three of you, when did you get back home and how did you get back home?

RICHARDS: Well, we went to another staging area where all these nurses were, and we waited for our ship to come in. We could see groups every day being shipped out and wondered when our turn was coming. So finally it did.

HILTERBRANT: Well, we went to Rheims first, and then Le Havre.

RICHARDS: I thought it was Cousée.

HILTERBRANT: We went to Le Havre.

HILLS: There was a period of time where—well, first they sent in a whole other general hospital unit's personnel; they got mixed up, I guess. The 7th and—I don't know, we heard a rumor that there was a French secretary that got the numbers mixed, and they sent this group down to pack up all of our things, and we were sent to a hotel downtown, all the nurses. And then when they finished packing up for us, that was fine [laughter]. They sent us back to our quarters. And there was a period of time where we could do a little traveling, like to Switzerland. Everyone was anxious to do a little traveling if they could, and it had been a neutral country during World War II, so no one was allowed there. But, then, as soon as the war was over, then the Red Cross set up a program where they had five different entrances to Switzerland. They'd send in a thousand troops a day, so that there would be five thousand going in every day and staying a week. That made 35,000 that were allowed in the country at one time.

RICHARDS: And we were only allowed so much money to take with us, forty dollars. So that somebody, you know, that went first didn't buy everything. We all had a limited amount of money.

HILLS: Our transportation and housing were taken care of through the Red Cross. So we were able to do that. And I guess one of our nurses was going to stay in the Army of Occupation, and she was assigned to a General Hospital unit over in Munich; and she had kept in touch with someone that she knew from Fort Riley, way back there, I think. And so Ann [Dorn?] and I, they let us—our unit was going to send transportation taking her over there to Munich, and this was just within about two weeks after the war was over, and Ann and I thought, well, what a shame that they were sending a command car with a little trailer on the back with their little bags [laughter].

RICHARDS: “We'll just go along and see that she gets there.”

HILLS: [Laughing] So we thought, well, there's room for three people in the back of that command car, and so we went to Harriet. And by that time they weren't letting any—no one was supposed to be going back and forth because there were just troops all over the place, of course. So they said, “We can't give you a pass, but if you girls want to take a chance—“ Of course, the drivers had their orders.

So Ann and I got to go along with them, and we had a ball, because this friend that Elizabeth had known, she went right straight on through Munich on down to the little

[Sabergensee?], which is south of Munich, and they had requisitioned a whole private home that the three of us rattled around in. Then he took us on up to Berchtesgaden, and on up to the Eagle's Nest. While we were in Berchtesgaden, then, we visited Hitler's home that had been bombed by the RAF, and half the house was gone, and Goering and Bormann and all, and even down into—well, the Germans had built three levels below his home, and you'd go down a flight of steps, and there would be a whole section of all paved rooms off of the side for living quarters. There were three levels of those, and by the time you came out, it was on the side of the hill, way below the house. We were back there on trips later on, and that was all sealed off because they didn't want the German people to make it a national shrine. But that was an experience to see all of that. My goodness.

And up in the Eagle's Nest, of course, was something else, too, because there was a great, huge coffee table in the main room, and by that time there'd been enough GIs up there that they had just completely carved all their names on this coffee table [laughs]. But it was one of his headquarters up there.

So that was one thing. Then, later on, of course, I guess, I went with you and a group to Switzerland, and by the time we got back, all of our things were packed and they were on their way to Rheims, and we got back just in time to crawl in the truck. Someone had packed for us.

HILTERBRANT: Our roommates had packed our things.

RICHARDS: Well, that's the way it was—you know, we all worked together. I mean, the same with me: I got back, and everything was packed, which was nice.

HILLS: At Rheims we made the trip over to Roullien, the no-man's-land from World War II.

RICHARDS: World War I. The Maginot Line, you know.

HILLS: In part of that area I remember seeing just piles of human bones left over from World War I. And, then, of course, all the battlefields there.

WEIMER: Well, you went home by ship again?

HILLS: Um-hmm.

RICHARDS: To New York, and then by train.

WEIMER: By train back here to Oregon?

HILTERBRANT: We flew down to...

HILLS: Fort Dix.

RICHARDS: Yeah, we flew to California, that's right, and then took the train.

HILTERBRANT: And then to—wasn't it Camp Meade?

RICHARDS: Anyway, I remember we landed in Texas, and then the pilots had to have so much time to sleep, so all of us just were in the airport for, I don't know, six or eight hours.

HILLS: I was on the one that went through Wyoming.

HILTERBRANT: Yeah. I was, too.

RICHARDS: Well, anyway, the one I was on went south, and we got to Camp...

HILLS: Beale? Down by Sacramento.

RICHARDS: Well, anyway, we had been paid. We hadn't been paid for a long time. I don't know where we got paid, but we had all this cash for about two or three months' pay, and Ruby and I wanted to go to Letterman and...

HILLS: We decided to stay in a little while longer [laughter].

RICHARDS: We wanted to stay in the Army a little longer.

HILTERBRANT: I thought you were smarter than that [laughter].

RICHARDS: Anyway, we went to—what was it, the Princess Hotel?

HILLS: When they told us, in order to be—we thought it would be nice to be stationed in San Francisco, in the anesthesia department, wasn't it?

RICHARDS: Uh-huh.

HILLS: They said the only way to be sure of it was to go and talk to the chief nurse and she'd send in a request. So we made a little side trip to San Francisco and had to stay overnight, and it was in the Palace Hotel. The Palace Hotel is where they sent us. So, here, all we had was our little musette bag, and we hadn't been out of our clothes for I don't know how long.

RICHARDS: And anyway we had all this money, and we had the Eisenhower jackets, you know, which have that little pocket in the inside. Here, we had all this cash, and never had so much money in our lives at one time [laughter]. So at this hotel the gal said, "Well, since you don't have any luggage"—well, we had just this little musette bag [laughter]—"you have to pay in advance."

HILLS: We brought out our roll of cash and paid in advance.

RICHARDS: That wouldn't be safe nowadays.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2/Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

HILLS: They sent me up to Camp Atterbury, south of Indianapolis, and that was a good experience, because it was like a General Hospital unit, but it was a plastic center. They had some board plastic men then there, and they said during civilian life all they did was noses [laughter]. But they did some marvelous things in redoing hands and, oh, everything that you could think of.

WEIMER: Reconstructive work?

HILLS: Big pedicle grafts that they were doing. And they did other surgery, too—we ran about forty cases a day—but it was a plastic center. So that was very interesting. And Dr. Howard, who was doing the plastic work, and Dr. [Minai?], I think, had written the textbook on plastic hand surgery, and he was well recognized and still is, I'm sure, but he's no longer living. But he used to come and watch Dr. Howard, I think was his name. Then Dr. Howard later went down to San Francisco and set up a practice there. I think probably Dr. [Bedells?]. But he used to come and watch him, and he said he was better than he had ever been in his life.

Anyway, then, Dr. Terry Nye, who is right over here in Good Sam—I mean, he has his practice there—trained under Dr. Howard, then, in San Francisco, and he did my carpal tunnel four or five years ago. He does just hand, and he's very, very good.

WEIMER: So after this little extra stint that Ruby and Kay did, what did you do?

HILLS: Oh, came back, and we both started working. One of our doctors, one of the surgeons that we hadn't known before World War II, was from Vancouver, and he was trained at Johns Hopkins. They needed nurse anesthetists there, so that's where we both worked, then, until we retired.

HILTERBRANT: He told us to be sure and apply before we went someplace else, and they offered us a hundred dollars a month more than Good Samaritan, which I had stored in my trunk and so forth, and intended to go back to. So I collected my wares and went to Vancouver Memorial for a hundred dollars more a month, which was three hundred dollars a month, and I think we were getting ninety a month at Good Samaritan when we went in the service, so inflation during those four years or five years was...

RICHARDS: Well, then, you had an apartment there, or something, didn't you, or a room or whatever?

HILLS: They had one wing that they built on there for key personnel that had to take call. There were six rooms.

RICHARDS: That's what I thought.

HILLS: And then later, when the hospital got to be so busy, they needed those rooms for private rooms, so they moved everybody out, but excepting one—the apartment that the superintendent and her husband had been living in, that apartment, so three of us lived there.

RICHARDS: The x-ray technician and you two anesthesia nurses.

HILLS: And it continued being the call room for the anesthesia department.

WEIMER: And how about you, Edith? What happened? You didn't do this extra little duty?

RICHARDS: No, no, no [laughter].

WEIMER: She was smarter.

RICHARDS: However, one of the girls and I decided we wanted to go to California, so we applied at Letterman, but they didn't need us at that time. So then we worked at San Mateo at the little community hospital there for a while, and I became disgruntled for some reason or other and came back to Portland. I don't know how long Naida stayed. Not too long after that. Then I worked at Veteran's Hospital for a short time, and then I got married, and that was the end of that.

WEIMER: Looking back on your experiences, there were some memorable people. I know you talked about Colonel Strohm before we started the interview. Could you just tell me a little bit about him for the tape? He was the one who recruited all of you, apparently.

HILLS: Kay had given anesthetics for him, there, at Good Samaritan. You knew him much better than I. I didn't know him, but he was...

HILTERBRANT: Well, he was the big urology man at the hospital. And the chief nurse in our unit "specialed" his patients at that time. Patients had specials, you know, around the clock, and so forth.

HILLS: And he knew her and asked her to be the chief nurse.

HILTERBRANT: Well, I think she did all of his patients, specialed for all of his patients.

WEIMER: And her name was?

HILTERBRANT: Harriet Dixon.

WEIMER: Colonel Strohm was also the Base Hospital commander in World War I?

RICHARDS: No, he was a private; he was an enlisted man.

WEIMER: But he was in the war.

HILLS: That's where he knew Bradley, and probably Bradley was an enlisted man too...

RICHARDS: Or corporal, I think.

HILLS: You see, there was quite a period of time between there, so that would have been 1918 to 1942, you see, that they would have been in the Reserves and working up their rank.

RICHARDS: He was a short, chunky, little man, but a very, very good surgeon. And, boy, he really recruited in the operating room.

HILLS: And I guess Kay would pass on the word from me. I don't know how that worked [laughter]. We were all living in the graduate nurses' ward at that time.

WEIMER: Well, before we conclude, I'd like to talk about the flag that you were so generous in giving to the Oregon Health Sciences University history program; and it has a history of its own, if you'd tell us a little bit about that.

RICHARDS: Well, it was given to the first 46th unit, and then it was—I don't know who had it all those years. But then when our unit was...

HILTERBRANT: Reactivated.

RICHARDS: Reactivated—thank you, Kay—it was presented to the unit. So it's the same flag that served in World War I and in World War II.

HILLS: By Dr. Joyce, who you mentioned.

WEIMER: Oh, Dr. Joyce, Tom Joyce was involved with the First World War.

HILLS: Yes. It's written up in that history that we've got, and it was presented during that. Edith's been hanging on to it.

RICHARDS: Ruby did a lot of research on the history, so if you read that, you'll get background information.

WEIMER: I know. I'll make note of that, and that will be also catalogued in our library, our Pacific Northwest Archives, for a wonderful historical addition, of the contributions of the medical people here in Oregon to World War II.

I'd like to thank you all very much. This had been enjoyable. If you have any further comments, you can add them right now, or we will just conclude as it is.

HILLS: You mentioned what happened right at the time of Pearl Harbor.

HILTERBRANT: We were working, all three of us, at Good Samaritan, and immediately all of the blinds were...

RICHARDS: Blackouts.

HILTERBRANT: And everything was blacked out.

WEIMER: Blackouts here on the West Coast?

HILTERBRANT: On the West Coast, yes. Even our train going to New York was blacked out, and on our convoy going overseas, everything was blacked out.

WEIMER: Talking about here at home, I guess I have one last question. Were you able to keep in contact with your family very much during these two to three years that you were gone?

RICHARDS: Well, our letters were censored, of course. I remember the only way I could tell my folks that I was going east and not west was that I had an aunt in Chicago, and in one of the stops we made between other cars—we couldn't be seen—I wrote and said, "If I'd been able to, I would have contacted Aunt Clara." So they knew I was going that way. But that's the only way I could tell them.

HILTERBRANT: When we'd come into a railroad stop, there were always boxcars or something, the troop train would be buried in so that you couldn't see, and they couldn't see us, and the only way we knew which way we were going was we'd see the signs of what town. And so, then, after we left Chicago, we knew we were going east for sure.

And another interesting thing, I really was kind of in trouble. I had a brother-in-law who was in the Pentagon in the adjutant general's office, so he knew where all the troops were going [laughter] . So he knew our unit was; he knew where we were going, and he knew where I was going to be, at Camp Shanks. It had been a mental hospital originally, but it's where we took off from. So Herb wanted to call and tell me good-bye, and so he did, and I was in trouble because nobody was supposed to know where we were or where we were going or anything. Then, so the telephone call came in, and Colonel Strohm intercepted it first, and then the chief nurse, and so I was called before the carpet. [Laughing] How in the world did my brother-in-law know to call me? So anyway, I explained that, and they believed me. So anyway, I was out of trouble.

But his brother was also in the same convoy that we were in, but I didn't know that, but he was on a different ship. He was going to Algiers, but I never did talk to him to find out about the bombing that the convoy had.

RICHARDS: That article that Dr. Burns wrote has a lot about the Russian prisoners and so forth.

WEIMER: He mentioned that, and we do have a copy, so that will be a great asset to the collection.

HILLS: When we arrived at Le Havre to come back home, the reason we had to wait such a long time was because the unions back in the states were having a strike, the longshoremen.

WEIMER: Were they allowed to have a strike? I mean, at this time?

HILTERBRANT: They were having one, and the ships were tied up.

HILLS: When we finally got to Le Havre, then, we were there for a couple of nights, I think, and then they put us on the *Vulcania*, which had been a luxury cruise liner of the Italians in peace time, and it was made over for a troop transport, like the *QE II*. A couple of our boys came back on the *QE II*. Langston and Jimmy Booth came back on the *QE II*. They'd done some traveling on their own in England.

RICHARDS: All the personnel on board, the staff, were Italians, so there was not much communication [laughs].

HILTERBRANT: And it was a rough trip home.

HILLS: Well, not too bad, because it was heavily loaded.

RICHARDS: I don't think we really cared, Kay. We were on our way home.

HILTERBRANT: [Laughing] Oh, I was seasick the whole way. I went on rounds with the doctors to give the ones that were vomiting the worst...

RICHARDS: Yeah, some of them were pretty sick.

HILTERBRANT: ...a phenobarb, and what else did we give them?

HILLS: Atropine, probably.

HILTERBRANT: Atropine and phenobarb. And most every bathroom, I would be vomiting, and then we'd go to the next and give the next person a shot [laughter].

HILLS: I was okay, because I just sat outside all the time where I could get the fresh breeze.

But when we went on to that thing, they put us on at six o'clock in the evening. There were two gangplanks leading into the *Vulcania*, and they put us on about six at night, and all

night long there were troops coming in on these two gangplanks, just continually. There were ten thousand troops with full packs that came on that. So it wasn't until the next morning that we finally left, and it took us four days coming across, but it was a very large ship and heavily loaded, so it wasn't nearly as rough as it could have been.

RICHARDS: That's for sure.

WEIMER: Well, I'd like to thank you all. It's been an enjoyable morning, listening to all your memories, and I want to thank you all for bringing the articles and the photographs.

This is the end of our interview.

[End of interview]

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