

**Interview of Katherine Wilson on her service in the American Red Cross  
in Europe during WWII**

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4  
5Dorothy Harrison: This is Dorothy Harrison of the Louisville Unit of Women's Overseas  
6 Service League interviewing Katie Wilson from Cynthiana, Kentucky.

7  
8 Uh, Cynthiana is a good distance from Louisville, Kentucky. Otherwise, we  
9 would hope to have Katie Wilson as a member of our group, but it's just a  
10 little too far. Um, I think it's rather interesting the way Katie Wilson and I  
11 met. Um, we were both of us, uh, at the home of a mutual friend in  
12 Cynthiana because Katie had asked to meet me. I had written an article for  
13 the *Sunday Magazine of the Courier Journal* for June 4, uh, 8-, 1984. This  
14 was the 40th anniversary of the landing on Omaha Beach, and Katie had  
15 also landed on Omaha Beach, and so we, we felt that, uh, uh, we had  
16 something in common and indeed we did have. We were both there at, at,  
17 uh, the same time. I had landed on D plus 21. Katie had come earlier. I had  
18 heard that there were women that were arriving – that had arrived early, and  
19 I was so pleased to meet her. And I think her story is most worthy of being  
20 recorded, uh, and kept, uh, on file for future reference. There weren't very  
21 many women who got there very early. So Katie is an exception in this  
22 respect. Now, uh, Katie, um, I wish you would go ahead and tell us, uh,  
23 since we need to back off a little bit from the actual landing on Omaha  
24 Beach and tell, tell us a little bit how, how you got into the Red Cross.

25  
26Katherine Wilson: Well, as you know, uh, 44 years ago yesterday, Pearl Harbor was attacked.  
27 At that time I was, uh, running the Armored Force Library at Fort Knox.  
28 And the – of course war was declared after Pearl Harbor, and all of my  
29 friends at Fort Knox were going to war. So I decided I'd better go to war  
30 too, and I didn't know any other – better way to go than to join the Red  
31 Cross. So I joined the Red Cross and joined the Duke University General  
32 Hospital Unit, and, uh, over, a little bit over a year later, we sailed from  
33 New York to Scotland.

34  
35Dorothy Harrison: [2:44] That was then in 1942?

36  
37Katherine Wilson: That was in 1943...

38  
39Dorothy Harrison: Forty-three.

40  
41Katherine Wilson: ...that we left. We trained at Fort Bragg, and, um, St. Elizabeths in  
42 Washington for over a year. And so we sailed, I think it was September of  
43 '43, and we sailed on the Queen Elizabeth.  
44

1Dorothy Harrison: How interesting.

2

3Katherine Wilson: And I don't remember very much about the Queen Elizabeth, but I do  
4 remember that there were thousands of men onboard. They were sleeping all  
5 in the swimming pool, all over the pool tables. They were thick on the floor  
6 playing cards and shooting craps. There was just no place to walk. Finally I  
7 found 1 empty corridor, and I thought this is interesting. I'll explore a little  
8 bit. So I went down this e-, empty corridor, and all of the sudden this  
9 loudspeaker boomed out woman off limits, get back to your quarters. So I  
10 flew back to my quarters, and the rest of the time we spent pretty much in  
11 the bowels of the ship giving out cigarettes. And, as you know, there were  
12 only 4 brands of cigarettes then, but we were kept busy giving out cigarettes  
13 to the men in the bowels of the ship. We were all out on deck, um, part of  
14 the time, and I remember one thing about that. We could see by our watches  
15 that the boat was changing course every 7 minutes, and they explained to us  
16 that was so we wouldn't be hit by a torpedo, and every 7 minutes, it would  
17 change course entirely. I have no idea how long it took us to get to Europe.  
18 [chuckle] I've forgotten that entirely.

19

20Dorothy Harrison: On that zigzag course. Right.

21

22Katherine Wilson: A zigzag course. But anyhow, we landed in, um, Scotland, and started out  
23 on the night train for London, so we really didn't get to see anything of  
24 Scotland. London was blacked out too, so we didn't see very much of  
25 London by night, but we were there a few days before we were sent to this  
26 small town in Southern England called Malvern. And Malvern is one of the  
27 most beautiful towns I ever saw. Built on 7 hills. I've always wanted to go  
28 back, but I've never gotten there. But our hospital was set up out in a cow  
29 pasture, and the people there laughed at us for saying it was cold. They said  
30 well if we lived in a cow pasture in America, we'd probably be cold too.

31

32 But here I was with 5 other girls in the Red Cross Unit, and most of our  
33 patients were coming from the campaign in North Africa, and nearly all of  
34 our patients were either syphilis patients or mental patients. And one day,  
35 this man came up to me and said do you know we have a lot of talent in this  
36 hospital? He said I've run into men that have been in shows on Broadway,  
37 and he said I've written musicals for Broadway. Well I just thought he was  
38 one of the mental patients. I didn't pay much attention. And I said well, why  
39 don't you write a musical, and we'll have a show. So sure enough, the next  
40 day he came, and he'd written, uh, written this show. And he said I've gotten  
41 the boys lined up now. When are going to put this on? I said well good, the  
42 sooner the better, that's just fine. So the next morning came, and we were to  
43 have rehearsal. No man showed up. I [inaudible 6:08].

44

1Dorothy Harrison: He'd recruited all the mental patients?  
2  
3 [laughter]  
4  
5Katherine Wilson: Yeah. Yeah. I went to his ward, and he said I just don't feel like getting up  
6 and dressing, but I got him out of that bed, and I dressed him. And we  
7 started that rehearsal, and he had recruited these men. Every morning I had  
8 to go and dress the man, but believe it or not, that was one of the best shows  
9 I had ever seen in my life. And they were so pleased with themselves that  
10 they wanted to lead the war and go in special service [laughter] and just  
11 entertain the troops, but the higher-ups didn't think very much of that, so  
12 they were sent back to the front. Uh, that was my first and last brush with,  
13 uh, producing...  
14  
15 [laughter]  
16  
17Dorothy Harrison: Yeah, for Broadway shows.  
18  
19 [laughter]  
20  
21Katherine Wilson: ...shows for Broadway. [throat clearing] Um, oh, and another interesting  
22 thing we learned there at Malvern was don't try to do things like you did  
23 back in the states. We sat up for 3 nights, cataloging the library that the  
24 English people had brought in and contributed books, and we catalogued  
25 these books and classified 'em, had 'em all set to go, and then the patients  
26 began to roll in. We never looked at a book again. We said take it, bring it  
27 back sometime, take, bring it back sometime. You don't need to, you don't  
28 need to sign anything. So we learned a lesson right there. It was gonna be a  
29 little different over here. [throat clearing] Uh, one day we were invited into  
30 town to be bodyguards for L-, Lady Mountbatten because, of course, she was  
31 big on Red Cross, and we didn't have any other transportation but our  
32 bicycles, and I had my best suit in the cleaners. So I didn't have any place to  
33 change, and I just put on my clean suit over my other suit, and I was stuffed.  
34 It was a hot day, and I was boiling hot. So to this day, every time I read  
35 about Lady Mountbatten, I begin to get hot.  
36  
37 [laughter]  
38  
39Dorothy Harrison: [8:10] What sort of a, what sort of a person was she, Katie?  
40  
41Katherine Wilson: Well she was beautiful I thought. She was real – she was frail and fragile,  
42 and I don't think she was very well even then, but she was a beautiful  
43 person. [throat clearing] Um, while we were – I was riding around on my  
44 bicycle one day, I ran into another Red Cross girl that I had never seen

1 before, [throat clearing] and she said do you know we are not going to get  
2 anywhere. We are not going to get to the war. These general hospitals are  
3 going to stay right here in England. Said why don't we volunteer for an  
4 evacuation hospital. And I said okay, that's fine. I would like that. So we  
5 volunteered to go with an evacuation hospital, so we would get to go across  
6 the channel.

7  
8 So then we were transferred to Maidenhead, uh, with the 44th Evacuation  
9 Hospital, and it was located 27 miles from London. It couldn't have been  
10 better if you were on a guided tour. It was, uh, [throat clearing] um,  
11 downstream – or upstream, there was Bray, this darlin' little town with the  
12 Hinds Head Inn, and, uh, this – and Marlow, eh, that we all know from Izaak  
13 Walton, and downstream was Eaton, the boys school, and Windsor Pal-, um,  
14 Castle where we visited often. And, um, we could go in to London. [throat  
15 clearing] The most scared I ever was during the whole war was in  
16 Paddington Station. When they let me go in one night at midnight, I landed  
17 at Paddington Station at midnight, and there was an air raid, and I had a  
18 drunk sitting next to me, so I decided I would, s-, uh, s-, just wait a while  
19 and let him get out of the way. So I waited on the train there for a while.  
20 When I got into Paddington Station, the air raid was in full swing.  
21 Everybody had disappeared. I couldn't find – it was all blacked out, just  
22 barely little blue lights. I couldn't find anybody, couldn't find any taxis,  
23 couldn't find anything I wanted around, just like a nightmare. Finally I  
24 found a door and got down into the [chuckle]...

25  
26Dorothy Harrison: [10:22] Into the shelter?

27  
28Katherine Wilson: ...in-, into the shelter. But that was the most scared that I was in the whole  
29 war.

30  
31Dorothy Harrison: [10:27] And with that nice glass roof over your head.

32  
33Katherine Wilson: [laughter] Yeah.

34  
35Dorothy Harrison: [10:31] Or what was left of it.

36  
37Katherine Wilson: Oh. Um, [throat clearing] them, um, oh, eh, in our unit, it was a whole lot  
38 like MASH, and we had, um, a brain surgeon was just exactly like  
39 Hawkeye. He was always trying to entertain people. So when we would go  
40 to London on the train, he would, um, always pull some kind of a joke. He'd  
41 go back between the cars and yell out the wrong station, and the people  
42 would all begin to get off at the wrong station. Then he would just die  
43 laughing, you know, and say joke, joke, joke. This isn't the right one. And  
44 then one day, he got up in the middle of the aisle, and started taking off his

1 pants, and we were just horrified and so embarrassed, but he had on another  
2 pair underneath, [laughter] but he was just always...

3

4Dorothy Harrison: He p-...

5

6Katherine Wilson: ...doing things like that, and everybody was crazy about him, just like they  
7 are in Hawkeye. And while we were here at Maidenhead, of course, we  
8 weren't getting any patients because we were – knew we would have to go  
9 sail right after D-Day, and um, but we decided, Mary and I decided that we  
10 would fix the clubroom. And so we, um, took old sheets and dyed them  
11 every color of the rainbow and stuffed them with straw. We took old barrels  
12 and made chairs out of 'em. We had scrap lumber and the men made, um,  
13 furniture, and we had a real attractive clubroom by this time. Just as we got  
14 the clubroom ready to open, we were ordered out into the field to set up a  
15 hospital right across the river from Lady Astor. Lady Astor's place,  
16 Cliveden, you know was on the River Thames.

17

18 So we were invited over there one day for tea, and as we were walking up  
19 the path of this huge estate, a little man joined us, swinging his cane and, eh,  
20 just to make conversation, I said well, I just wonder if the ol' girl's gonna  
21 live up to her reputation. And the little man said, oh, you mean mother? It  
22 turned out to be Lady Astor's son. But he wasn't offended at all. He just  
23 laughed, and he gave us tickets to Parliament and said go on in and see if  
24 mother's as bad as you think she is. So we went on in to Lady Astor's for  
25 tea, and she was just like I'd heard. She took one look at us in our fatigues  
26 and our browns and boots, and we did look bad, and she said tell your  
27 parents not to ever worry about you over here, said you all would be safe  
28 anywhere you look terrible. [laughter] But she was a lovely hostess and a  
29 real pretty woman. Um, um, of course, um, D-Day came on June 6, 1944,  
30 while we were at Maidenhead, and after that we stayed pretty close in  
31 waiting for our call to follow in to, um, over to Omaha Beach. And, sure  
32 enough, the call came June 18th, and we were shipped right away down to  
33 Southampton, spent one night there, and then we boarded. Our unit boarded  
34 2 LCIs. They were small boats. Um...

35

36Dorothy Harrison: [14:04] I think that means Landing Craft Infantry, doesn't it?

37

38Katherine Wilson: Yeah, Landing Craft Infantry. And they were not cruise ships. [laughter]  
39 They were not of design for luxury. There were 2 holes, 1 in the front and 1  
40 in the back, and they were really holes. There were 40 officers in one hole.  
41 And the nurses were in the other hole. And the bunks were 4 deep.

42

43 And we set sail just about, uh, sundown, and as we went out – we were with  
44 45 other ships in the convoy – small, not ships, they were smaller boats, and

1 as we went out, it got rougher as we went, rougher and rougher and rougher.  
2 And all I can remember about my companion, Red Cross companion, Mary,  
3 on this ship, who was a Catholic, every time she could get her breath from  
4 vomiting, she would say, oh Jesus, Mary and Joseph, oh Jesus, Mary and  
5 Joseph. To this day, whenever I meet Mary in New York, I say oh Jesus,  
6 Mary and Joseph. [laughter] But then, [throat clearing] uh, we did sleep in  
7 the hole, and the next morning we went on board because we were supposed  
8 to be near to land, and we really were close to land. I don't remember what  
9 we had for breakfast. All I remember was the pea soup. They kept passing  
10 pea soup around, and I was so intrigued with these little cans because they  
11 had fire in the middle. You could strike a match, and they would heat  
12 themselves, and I thought oh, this is great, and I would drink that pea soup  
13 and get sicker and sicker, and everybody on that ship was deathly sick. But  
14 when we got close to shore, [throat clearing] they told us that we wouldn't  
15 land for a long time, and finally our – the enlisted men's LCI got close  
16 enough to let down their ramp, and they waded ashore.

17  
18 But we just were buffeted back and forth by the waves. And, uh, it was  
19 midafternoon when they finally told us that we were gonna have to make an  
20 emergency landing. We heard that there were enemy planes, and we thought  
21 oh, this sounds exciting, but we didn't see any enemy planes come. But  
22 finally they did put us out on this, um, landing, uh, pier, and we found out  
23 later that it was because a hole had been ripped in our boat. There was the  
24 Liberty ship on one side and a Victory on the other, and they – the waves  
25 had rammed them up against us until the – there was a hole ripped in the  
26 side and we had to land, so we got ahead of a lot of the other boats. But it  
27 was midafternoon when we landed on Omaha Beach. And I felt like I had  
28 jaundice because it was rain, and it – everything looked yellow. I don't  
29 know why, but everything just looked yellow. And there was every kind of a  
30 boat and landing craft wrecked on the beach, and we saw pieces of what we  
31 thought were bodies, but I think they must have just been garments because,  
32 after all, it had been 13 days since the – since D-Day.

33  
34Dorothy Harrison: [17:15] Let's see, if you were – if you landed – if you spent one night on the  
35 boat, then you landed on D plus 19, did you?

36  
37Katherine Wilson: Yeah, D plus 19.

38  
39Dorothy Harrison: Okay and, and...

40  
41Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.

42  
43Dorothy Harrison: No, not D plus 19. [17:24] On the 19th of June?

1 Katherine Wilson: The 19th of June [inaudible 17:26] 13.  
2  
3 Dorothy Harrison: [17:26] Uh, sub-, subtract 16, that would be the 13th...  
4  
5 Katherine Wilson: Thirteenth, the day after.  
6  
7 Dorothy Harrison: ...of, um...  
8  
9 Katherine Wilson: Yeah. Mm-hm.  
10  
11 Dorothy Harrison: ...of d-, D-Day. D-Day [inaudible 17:33].  
12  
13 Katherine Wilson: Anyhow, they told us that our pier was destroyed by the waves right after  
14 we landed, so I imagine it took the other boats a long time to land. Uh,  
15 [throat clearing] we were taken right away about 8 miles inland to a place  
16 called La Cambe, Cambe, I guess it was, and [throat clearing] so they set up  
17 our hospital, and on one said of us, they had set up an airstrip, and on the  
18 other side was an artillery battery. [throat clearing] Across the road was a  
19 cemetery. Of course, we were kept pretty busy with casualties, but in  
20 between times, we'd run across and watch 'em bury these bodies. And nearly  
21 all of 'em were from the 29th Division and from Virginia, and we were  
22 perfectly furious. We thought are they gonna let Virginia fight this whole  
23 war? We didn't realize that there were other things going on all around us,  
24 [chuckle] but we thought the whole war was being fought, and sure enough,  
25 they said that there were hundreds of boys from one town and half of 'em  
26 were killed...  
27  
28 Dorothy Harrison: Good gracious.  
29  
30 Katherine Wilson: ...in the landing. And I don't know why they would let so many from the  
31 same state come in on the first wave like they did. [throat clearing] But, um,  
32 [throat clearing] here we were in Normandy, and the hedgerows were really  
33 murder. Uh, one wounded man said here I am wounded. They're sending me  
34 back home tomorrow, and I've never even seen a German. He said they get  
35 behind those hedgerows; you can't see a thing; you're just fighting blind.  
36 And the tanks would go up, eh, they said these hedgerows had been there  
37 ever since the Roman, um, campaigns, eh, way back in history, and [throat  
38 clearing] there was dirt all piled up and then these huge hedges growing up  
39 above that, and the tanks would try to get over, and they'd get stranded right  
40 on top of these hedges. And [throat clearing] of course, they were just sitting  
41 ducks, so [throat clearing] there was one little man they claim was a private,  
42 and he'd been an engineer back home, and he concocted the idea of putting  
43 some sort of a blade on the tanks, and they were able to get these blades, and

1 then the tanks were able to cut through these hedgerows, so the casualties  
2 weren't quite as bad after that. But...  
3  
4Dorothy Harrison: I remember that.  
5  
6Katherine Wilson: You remember that?  
7  
8Dorothy Harrison: I remember that...  
9  
10Katherine Wilson: Yeah. Mm-hm.  
11  
12Dorothy Harrison: ...it came out in Stars & Stripes...  
13  
14Katherine Wilson: Yeah.  
15  
16Dorothy Harrison: ...as a matter of fact.  
17  
18Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm. And, um, of course, uh, the, the tankers were terribly burned, uh,  
19 on – in the face, and, uh, I remember the doctors would wrap bandages  
20 around their heads until they were nearly as big as bushel baskets. No place  
21 for the eyes, no place for the nose, but they'd leave 1 hole for the mouth, and  
22 we had to feed these boys through this hole. We'd stick in a straw and feed  
23 'em through this hole. And we were just crushed. We said oh, they'll never –  
24 they'll just be disfigured for life. But they'd take those bandages off, and  
25 sometimes they wouldn't even have a scar, and we were just amazed how  
26 well they did look. One little tanker we were crazy about, and we said you  
27 must belong to that 3rd Division, must be a swell outfit, and I never will  
28 forget what he said. He said we ain't so awful good; we just ain't got no  
29 more sense than to do what they tell us to do. And I think that was really  
30 true.  
31  
32Dorothy Harrison: True.  
33  
34Katherine Wilson: They, they, they did what they were told to do. Um, about this time,  
35 Cherbourg was captured, and you know the importance of Cherbourg was  
36 that it had a good harbor. And there was so terribly much destruction of all  
37 the supplies trying to bring 'em in those artificial harbors that they had.  
38 They'd put down that concrete thing that Churchill concocted, but that still –  
39 we still had terrible waves. But Cherbourg was finally captured, and when  
40 we had a lull in our work, we were allowed – Mary and I were allowed to go  
41 to Cherbourg. So they took us down in a jeep, and as we drove into town,  
42 here was this man's restroom that – like the ones they had in Paris, you  
43 know – here was the handsomest man I've ever seen in my life with his head  
44 and shoulders showing only, and he waved [inaudible 21:49] as we passed



1 by, and here he was [laughter] in the little restroom, and we went on in to  
2 town, and finally in an hour or two we went to the headquar-, Army  
3 headquarters and who should we see sitting back of the desk than the same  
4 officer that we'd seen in the men's room, and he was so embarrassed he  
5 turned every color. He was more embarrassed than we were. He didn't think  
6 he'd ever see us again, I guess [laughter] when he waved to us from the  
7 restroom.  
8  
9 I don't remember anything else about Cherbourg, except on the way back,  
10 we had a gas alert, and we never were gassed, but we had gasmasks with us,  
11 so we put on our gasmask, and we arrived back in the hospital covered with  
12 gladiolas. They must have had a bumper crop that year because in  
13 Cherbourg they had sh-, gave us all these bunches of gladiolas. Here we  
14 landed with gasmasks...  
15  
16Dorothy Harrison: And gladiolas.  
17  
18Katherine Wilson: ...on and gladiolas all over. So I'd like to have had a picture of that. And the  
19 next place we moved was [throat clearing] [the backing of 22:51] Saint Lo.  
20 [throat clearing] Of course everybody's heard about Saint Lo, and we were  
21 stationed at Bricqueville right in back of Saint Lo.  
22  
23Dorothy Harrison: [22:59] How is Bricqueville spelled?  
24  
25Katherine Wilson: B-R-I-Q-U-E-V-I-L-L-E.  
26  
27Dorothy Harrison: Yeah.  
28  
29Katherine Wilson: Bricqueville...  
30  
31Dorothy Harrison: Yeah.  
32  
33 Katherine Wilson: ...a little village. And, uh, here we were for a whole month because, um, the  
34 enemy was dug into a cliff and was just almost impossible to get 'em out,  
35 and they were terrible casualties here, and the strain was tremendous. We  
36 even ran out of blood at one time. We had 8 operating tables going day, and  
37 night and extra surgical teams had to be brought in to mand the different, uh,  
38 uh. Here I might say that the, the biggest man in our outfit had to be sent  
39 back because he would automatically jump under the operating table when  
40 there would be – when they were bombed.  
41  
42Dorothy Harrison: Bombed.  
43  
44Katherine Wilson: And he was brave, and he was so ashamed of himself.

1  
2Dorothy Harrison: But it was an involuntary action.  
3  
4Katherine Wilson: But it was just a reflex, and his other partner, uh, he – one was named Bud  
5 and the other was named Ned, Ned would take over for Bud, and so Ned  
6 never would tell on Bud, but finally Bud had to ask to be sent...  
7  
8Dorothy Harrison: To be moved.  
9  
10Katherine Wilson: ...to be moved because he was so ashamed when he would jump under the  
11 operating table [chuckle] and leave it all to Ned. Uh, uh, here it was [throat  
12 clearing] at Saint Lo that you remember, uh, General, um, Roosevelt,  
13 General Theodore Roosevelt was killed, and he was the only general that  
14 came in with the first wave of men on Omaha Beach. He requested it, and,  
15 uh, so they, they let him come. He wasn't killed on the beach, but he was  
16 killed here at Saint Lo. And here it was that we had Strom Thurmond as a  
17 patient. Do you remember Strom Thurmond is the...  
18  
19Dorothy Harrison: Oh, yes.  
20  
21Katherine Wilson: He's a senator, of course, from South Carolina, and he told us that he was  
22 gonna be s-, senator when he got back, and we just laughed at him, and he  
23 thought – we thought he was an ol' blowhard. And the nurses said oh, he's a  
24 fanny pincher. He just, they didn't like him very much. But sure enough, he  
25 really must have been a lady killer because I heard not long ago from  
26 somebody in South Carolina that he's now married to a beautiful young wife  
27 and has a whole bunch of young children, and he's over 80.  
28  
29Dorothy Harrison: Good gracious!  
30  
31Katherine Wilson: But the nurses called him a s-, a fanny pincher. [laughter]  
32  
33Dorothy Harrison: A fanny pincher. [laughter]  
34  
35Katherine Wilson: Yeah. [throat clearing] As, um, as the Red Cross people probably know, our  
36 job was divided in 3 main parts. We had a receiving tent and the wards and  
37 the recreation tent. And in the receiving tent, uh, we would follow doctors  
38 around, and they would tag the men on the stretchers that we're going on the  
39 operating table and tell us not to feed them or give them coffee. And so then  
40 we would bring coffee and sometimes food to the others, and we had a  
41 terrible time. The ones that were going o-, on the operating table said we  
42 don't care; we want coffee; we want food, [chuckle] but we couldn't give it  
43 to 'em because we had orders not too, [throat clearing] but that was the  
44 hardest part of it.

1  
2 Um, then on the wards, we went through the wards every day where the bed  
3 patients were, and, uh, our job there was to write letters for 'em and to give  
4 'em cigarettes and candy and writing paper and paperback books, and, and  
5 help the ones that couldn't write at all and do every-, anything that the  
6 nurses wanted us to help 'em with. I remember one boy was brought in on a  
7 stretcher and had a – and he was from Texas, and he had a dog on his chest,  
8 and we tried to feed him, and we said look, we'll bring a plate for the dog,  
9 just put him over here, he said no, this dog is gonna stay on my chest until I  
10 leave here, and he fed him out of his plate. and, sure enough, when he left,  
11 that dog was on his chest. He said the dog had saved his life, that the dog  
12 could tell when a bomb was coming and had, uh, pulled him back...  
13  
14Dorothy Harrison: He made a noise or...  
15  
16Katherine Wilson: ...and he made a noise so he got back in his foxhole. So he left with the dog  
17 on his chest. Uh, [throat clearing] and then a recreation tent, uh, we tried to  
18 make it as attractive as we could. We brought those old bright pillows that  
19 we'd made out of sheets and dyed and stuffed with straw, and we used  
20 those, and we had a radio. [throat clearing] Didn't have television then. Um,  
21 we had radio and records and paperback books and card tables, and of  
22 course, we had to play bingo, which I've never especially liked, but we did  
23 have the Zippo lighters, and they loved those. And then as we got on in to  
24 Germany, the bingo even was more fun because they would bring in loot  
25 from the Germans.  
26  
27Dorothy Harrison: [27:45] And th-, you made those the prizes?  
28  
29Katherine Wilson: Yeah, we made those the prizes, and we had fabulous prizes then. [throat  
30 clearing] We sent one boy back to the front with a raccoon coat on, and he  
31 had a thermos bottle under one arm and a cane in the other hand, and we  
32 knew he threw 'em in a ditch the minute he got out of sight, [chuckle] but he  
33 tried to make us think that he just loved those prizes. Uh, [throat clearing]  
34 let's see. I believe I stopped right – oh, in the recreation tent, um, we always  
35 had a stove in the middle of our recreation tent and one of the favorite forms  
36 of entertainment, which made it pretty easy for us, was letting the boys  
37 make fudge. We had a great big kettle, and we always had plenty of sugar  
38 and plenty of milk and plenty of chocolate, so we would mix up the  
39 chocolate, and they would sit around that stove and stir and stir and stir, then  
40 they'd beat the fudge and then they'd wait for it to cool, and then they cut it  
41 and they'd pass it through the wards and loved that. They never got tired of  
42 it. Um...  
43

1Dorothy Harrison: And I'm sure that's understandable because we didn't have, uh, very much  
2sugar.  
3  
4Katherine Wilson: Very much? Oh. Well we did.  
5  
6Dorothy Harrison: We were allowed...  
7  
8Katherine Wilson: We had just plenty of sugar.  
9  
10Dorothy Harrison: Sugar. We were...  
11  
12Katherine Wilson: We didn't have nuts, but we – they sent 'em from home sometime to us, the  
13nuts, and we'd put nuts in it.  
14  
15Dorothy Harrison: We could, uh, we, we were allowed 2/5 or maybe it was 3/5 of a teaspoon...  
16  
17Katherine Wilson: Hm. Really? [Inaudible 29:14].  
18  
19Dorothy Harrison: ...of sugar per cup of coffee. And it was never...  
20  
21Katherine Wilson: Hm.  
22  
23Dorothy Harrison: ... never enough for the, uh...  
24  
25Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
26  
27Dorothy Harrison: ...for the boys, and they would s-, if they complained, we'd explain about  
28the, the allowance, and they'd say oh, well then...  
29  
30Katherine Wilson: Yeah.  
31  
32Dorothy Harrison: ...just your finger in it, sugar, that'll sweeten it up. [laughter]  
33  
34Katherine Wilson: Oh, well we just had plenty. And I remember one time especially when they  
35were stirring their fudge, we came in and said oh, Edwin G. Robinson is  
36over in the receiving tent, run over, and they said hell no; we've got to stir  
37this fudge; we've seen plenty of men. [laughter] They said if it's an – if it  
38was a woman we'd go. [laughter]  
39  
40Dorothy Harrison: We'd go. Well that... [chuckle]  
41  
42Katherine Wilson: Uh, [throat clearing] another thing, uh, eh, I used to draw, and they would sit  
43by the hour and let me sketch their faces. They loved that. Another thing

1 they liked was dressing them up in evening dresses. Were you told that you  
2 had to take an – 1 evening dress.  
3  
4Dorothy Harrison: No, uh, we were not. I did but...  
5  
6Katherine Wilson: We were, we were told that we should take 1 evening dress, and even the  
7 nurses were told that they should take 1 evening dress. Well the minute we  
8 landed on Omaha Beach, we knew that we would never need an evening  
9 dress.  
10  
11 So the nurses all brought their evening dresses and dropped 'em on us,  
12 [throat clearing] and we used 'em for the boys to dress up in for costumes,  
13 and they would put on shows and dress up in these evening dresses and  
14 parade through the wards and, of course, we didn't know anything – you  
15 didn't hear much about gays in those days, and they all just got a big kick  
16 out of dressing up in those evening dresses. That was one of their favorite  
17 things. [throat clearing] Well after we finally got past Saint Lo and where  
18 we were from a month, we went next to Percy. It was a little village and I  
19 remember – the only thing I remember about that was there was this  
20 farmhouse across the road and one of the doctors came in one day and said  
21 the farmer across the road is inviting me over for dinner; will you go with  
22 me, so we went over there for dinner, and sure enough, the barnyard was  
23 right up against the house like the in – you know they all were, you know, in  
24 Normandy, and, um, but in the house, it was clean as it could be, and they  
25 had the wonderful dinner, just course after course, and this doctor was trying  
26 to be, um, gr-...  
27  
28Dorothy Harrison: Gracious.  
29  
30Katherine Wilson: ...gracious and trying to speak French, and the children were studying  
31 English, and they could speak English, but he was trying to speak French,  
32 and he was trying to say we are happy – I'm happy to be there, and he said je  
33 suis jolie...  
34  
35Dorothy Harrison: [laughter] I am...  
36  
37Katherine Wilson: ...I am beautiful. And so...  
38  
39Dorothy Harrison: Or gay or happy.  
40  
41Katherine Wilson: ...after that, we – after that we called him beautiful.  
42  
43Dorothy Harrison: Yeah.  
44

1 Katherine Wilson: Called him Jolie [chuckle] after that. I don't know whether it was Domfront  
2 but I think it was where in the courthouse square we saw them shaving the  
3 heads of any – the women who had collaborated with the Germans while the  
4 ger-, while the Germans were in the town, and they were actually shaving  
5 their heads off [to punish] [inaudible 31:11].  
6  
7 Dorothy Harrison: I can remember seeing them with their...  
8  
9 Katherine Wilson: Uh-huh.  
10  
11 Dorothy Harrison: ...kerchiefs on afterward.  
12  
13 Katherine Wilson: Yeah. Yeah. That, of course, that was the most horrible thing you could do  
14 to a French woman. Uh, [throat clearing] then we went on to Senonches, I  
15 guess is [inaudible] [announce 32:24] that, and here we were set up in an  
16 orchard.  
17  
18 Dorothy Harrison: [32:27] How do you spell that?  
19  
20 Katherine Wilson: S-E-N-O-N-C-H-E-S. Senonches. Just a little village. But it was close to  
21 Paris, and here we, uh, had some spare time. When-, whenev-, whenever the  
22 other hospital would jump over us, then we would have a little time, uh,  
23 before we moved again, and, uh, and when we were close to Paris, they let  
24 us go in. And we had – we were always armed with plenty of cigarettes, and  
25 so we could trade, eh, get anything nearly for cigarettes.  
26  
27 Dorothy Harrison: Yes, I remember.  
28  
29 Katherine Wilson: And, uh, we could get almost anything we wanted for cigarettes, but most  
30 everybody got Chanel No. 5, especially the men. They were crazy about  
31 taking th-, that perfume to their wives. Um, after we, um, we crossed over –  
32 and then we crossed over into Belgium, and the first place I remember was  
33 Saint-Hubert and the, uh, Argonne Forest, and here the snow has began  
34 because I think that was around the 1st of December, and the snow was knee  
35 deep when, eh, when there wasn't snow, there was mud knee deep. And we  
36 never had, uh, floors in our tents like they do in the MASH on television.  
37 Ours were – we just had dirt floors. So the minute we s-, set up a hospital,  
38 we looked for our haystack, and we'd run and get straw and put all over our  
39 floors [chuckle] so we sink – wouldn't sink into the mud. But nobody ever  
40 had a cold until we got into heated buildings in Germany, and then people.  
41  
42 Dorothy Harrison: That, that is exac-...  
43  
44 Katherine Wilson: It was the strangest thing. Mm-hm.

1  
2Dorothy Harrison: Yeah. That is exactly the same experience we had.  
3  
4Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
5  
6Dorothy Harrison: [34:00] Now, by the way, I want to k-, keep my timeframe, uh, right. This is  
7 the winter of 1943/44?  
8  
9Katherine Wilson: Yeah. Mm-hm.  
10  
11Dorothy Harrison: Yes. Okay.  
12  
13Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm. First of December. [throat clearing] And, um, oh [throat clearing]  
14 uh, where we, uh, the Belgians seemed to like us real well, uh, in this part of  
15 Belgium, but then we went on to Malmedy, and Malmedy, you know,  
16 means, uh, you told me wrong, and, uh, at Malmedy they didn't like us. You  
17 could tell they didn't. It had been, uh, occupied. It was a German town  
18 really, and it had been taken during the First World War, so they were really  
19 German at heart. But Malmedy was the weakest point in the whole front  
20 line, and they said that it was a calculated risk, but we never understood why  
21 they left it unguarded like that because there were 3 million drums of  
22 gasoline, uh, stored there at Malmedy. [Inaudible 35:01] decided to come  
23 through at Malmedy. Um, here's where we had our only casualty. Um, one  
24 thing I remember about that was the Massacre of Malmedy that everybody's  
25 heard about. It was 3 miles from our hospital. And the Germans captured  
26 this unit, um. There were 150. It was an engineering unit, and they, uh,  
27 formed these men into, um, square and got in the middle and just mowed  
28 'em down with machine guns.  
29  
30Dorothy Harrison: Guns.  
31  
32Katherine Wilson: And but one little man was not hit, and he – there may have been others, but  
33 this is the only one we know of, and he rolled over on the ground and  
34 crawled down the bank into a little creek and got in the – under the water,  
35 and he said he breathed through a reed...  
36  
37Dorothy Harrison: I've heard of that, and I...  
38  
39Katherine Wilson: ...until the Germans were g-...  
40  
41Dorothy Harrison: Gone.  
42  
43Katherine Wilson: ...gone. So then he got out and walked to our hospital, and by that time he  
44 was nearly frozen because it was really cold weather. And I think it was

1 about the next day then after that that, um, eh, uh, one-, in the morning we  
2 heard gunfire, heavy gunfire, heavy guns, but we thought they were our  
3 guns, and they nearly knocked us out of bed. We were not up, but the – our  
4 bunks actually shook, and, um, all of the sudden the head nurse came in and  
5 said, eh, we are having – we're under attack. The Germans are breaking  
6 through. We have to retreat immediately. Don't take anything...  
7  
8Dorothy Harrison: Just go.  
9  
10Katherine Wilson: ...except what you can get in your pockets. So we got up and put on our  
11 fatigues and left. Uh, there were not enough trucks in the motorpool because  
12 they were – had, um, um, taken part of them to move this gasoline, so our  
13 doctors had to start out walking, and they put us in a 2-1/2-ton truck and we  
14 rode all day until we got to Spa. Then at night, uh, they put us in a barn, and  
15 I remember we sat around on this dirt floor in this barn, and the doctors had  
16 gotten there. They must have gotten a ride somehow, but they had all gotten  
17 there. And we sat around in a circle, and everybody got out the things out of  
18 their pockets that they had rescued, that they had brought with them. The  
19 doctors had nothing but perfume. They didn't even have a toothbrush. They  
20 had just brought perfume that they had bought in Paris and had not had a  
21 chance to send back home. And we didn't have – the Red Cross had nothing  
22 but Zippo lighters.  
23  
24Dorothy Harrison: Zippo lighters. [laughter]  
25  
26Katherine Wilson: That's what the men loved in the foxholes because the, you know, the wind  
27 didn't blow 'em out. So we had nothing. We just kept bringing out Zippo  
28 lighters. [laughter] I don't know how many we had in our pockets, but we  
29 were not going to let them get away. Um, then, um, eh, this air motorpool  
30 was then ordered to go back and rescue another hospital, and they were  
31 captured by the Germans. Most of them...  
32  
33Dorothy Harrison: [38:15] The hospital or the motorpool?  
34  
35Katherine Wilson: Eh, eh, the mo-, just the motorpool...  
36  
37Dorothy Harrison: Pool.  
38  
39Katherine Wilson: ...that went back in trucks. But then another American unit came along and  
40 rescued them, so only one of our men was killed. The others all got back all  
41 right.  
42  
43Dorothy Harrison: All right.  
44



1 Katherine Wilson: And that was our only casualty really during the war. Um, then we retreated  
2 all the next day until we got to Huy, and at Huy...  
3  
4 Dorothy Harrison: W-, how do you spell Huy?  
5  
6 Katherine Wilson: H-U-Y. And there we joined another hospital because we had lost all of our  
7 equipment, had to leave it all behind, so we joined this other hospital at Huy,  
8 and it was set up in a convent, and the nurses had all gone, eh, to the  
9 basement to live because they were bombing a bridge nearby, and they were  
10 afraid to live up there. Anyhow, so we lived in nun's cubicles. And I had a  
11 l-, I remember each one of us had a little tiny bed and 1 chair in this cubicle,  
12 and that's all we had. I don't remember anything else about. We – except  
13 the patients began, the wounded began to pour in and pour in from the Battle  
14 of the Bulge. And, uh, we were there Christmas day. And there were so  
15 many men lying around on stretchers that, uh, the only way we had of  
16 feeding them was out of huge lard cans. We had these big lard cans full of  
17 turkey [chuckle] and we'd carry 'em around, and the boys would reach in  
18 and get turkey out of the lard cans and eat it.  
19  
20 Dorothy Harrison: By the way...  
21  
22 Katherine Wilson: Hm.  
23  
24 Dorothy Harrison: Uh, excuse me, but I think we have – I, I think I mis-, mis-said something  
25 back here. I asked you whether this was the winter of '43/44, and it wasn't.  
26 It was the winter of '44/45.  
27  
28 Katherine Wilson: Yeah, '44.  
29  
30 Dorothy Harrison: Forty-four to five.  
31  
32 Katherine Wilson: Yeah, that's right, '44.  
33  
34 Dorothy Harrison: That's right. Excuse me. 'Cause this was the time of the...  
35  
36 Katherine Wilson: Yeah, that's right.  
37  
38 Dorothy Harrison: ...Battle of the Bulge...  
39  
40 Katherine Wilson: Yeah, '44. Mm-hm.  
41  
42 Dorothy Harrison: That's right.  
43

1 Katherine Wilson: Um, [throat clearing] while we were at – oh, and you know it was here at the  
2 Battle of the Bulge that you probably all read about General McAuliffe,  
3 uh...  
4

5 Dorothy Harrison: And his Nut [stage 40:22].  
6

7 Katherine Wilson: ...eh, at Bastogne. Yeah. Um, they were trapped for 5 days at Bastogne,  
8 and, uh, the Germans, eh, sent them word that they – said, uh, surrender now  
9 or you'll every one be killed. And General McAuliffe sent back a messenger  
10 with one word – nuts – and the Germans didn't understand w-, said what  
11 does that mean, and he said it means go to hell. So sure enough, about that  
12 time, General Patton broke through and rescued them at Bastogne. Um, you  
13 know most of the fighting took place in that triangle between Malmedy and  
14 Bastogne and Spa, and, uh, after we got back to Huy, uh, Malmedy was  
15 taken back, most of it was, was pretty safe, so, uh, some of our men were  
16 ordered to go back and try to retrieve some of our hospital equipment.  
17

18 Dorothy Harrison: Because you were absolutely helpless. You couldn't function.  
19

20 Katherine Wilson: Yeah. We couldn't do too much with this other hospital. So, um, Mary, the  
21 other Red Cross girl, decided she would go with them.  
22

23 Dorothy Harrison: [41:29] What was Mary's last name?  
24

25 Katherine Wilson: Mary Maher.  
26

27 Dorothy Harrison: [41:31] Mary Maher?  
28

29 Katherine Wilson: Yeah.  
30

31 Dorothy Harrison: [41:32] M-A-R-R?  
32

33 Katherine Wilson: M-A-H-E-R.  
34

35 Dorothy Harrison: M-A-H-E-R.  
36

37 Katherine Wilson: So she decided that she would go back and retrieve some of our personal  
38 possessions and did I want to go, and I said no, thank you. I don't care about  
39 those little ol' perfumes and material things. I can get some more later. I'm  
40 not going back under fire, and I didn't go.  
41

42 And she came back, and she must have been scared to death. I told her. I  
43 said if you see my paratroop boots, that's all I care about. They were real  
44 hard to come by. So we did love our paratroop boots. She got back. She had

1 thrown things into these sheets and tied the sheets at the corner and throw  
2 them in the truck. I had only one paratroop boot, a bunch of perfume, and  
3 she really – it didn't do any good to go back really because she didn't get  
4 anything that amounted to anything, but she was braver than I was. Um, uh,  
5 after the [throat clearing] our first army took over, um, Belgium and took  
6 Malmedy back, we went on across into Germany. And our 1st Division  
7 under General, uh, Hodges was the 1st Division to cross the Remagen  
8 Bridge over the Rhine, and we followed them and went on in to Germany.  
9 Uh, the hospital I remember best in Germany was Nordhausen, and then I  
10 think the reason I remember that so well was because that's where the buzz  
11 bomb factory was, and were allowed to go down into the buzz bomb factory.  
12 It was a mile underground, and there were 2 parallel tunnels, huge tunnels  
13 connected with other tunnels, and, uh, that's where – and they had thousands  
14 of slave laborers.

15  
16 They weren't under there when we went because they'd all been freed by  
17 that time. And, uh, they were under there. They were half starved, and they  
18 were never allowed to come above ground. They were just kept under there  
19 to make those buzz bombs. And we'd been seeing those buzz bombs. They  
20 were V-1's and V-2's going over our heads for months, and we were glad to  
21 see the factory. And all I can remember is just, eh, mountains of what  
22 looked like this angel hair. I guess they must've stuffed 'em with that.  
23 [chuckle] I don't know what it was. But then we also visited a concentration  
24 camp there, and it was, it was smaller than Auschwitz, but it was a just like  
25 it had all those terrible places in it. And, um, another interesting, funny little  
26 thing that happened – they sent me over to an army unit to pick up  
27 stovepipes, and the major that I contacted was named Major [Pignet 44:15],  
28 Major [Pignet McElroy 44:17], and he said where are you from, and I said  
29 oh, Cynthiana, Kentucky. Um, you never heard of such a place. And he said  
30 oh, yes, I'm from there. I said oh, no, you're not. He said oh, yes I am. When  
31 I was a little boy, my father preached there, and it turned out that my mother  
32 had babysat with him.

33  
34Dorothy Harrison: Goodness gracious.

35  
36Katherine Wilson: So he invited me to stay for lunch, and he said we're gonna have Crepe  
37 Suzettes. We have a wonderful German cook, and you'll enjoy it. So I had to  
38 sit and wait while he interviewed this German woman, and they were talking  
39 in German, and he was – she was furious. And afterwards, I said what was  
40 she – what was the matter with her? And he said oh, she was telling me that  
41 the Poles were stealing her pigs and wanted me to do something about it  
42 right now, and I told her, I said wait until we defeat you, then we'll protect  
43 you. [chuckle]  
44

1Dorothy Harrison: Very good.  
2  
3Katherine Wilson: But [throat clearing] this was, um, oh another interesting place, uh, thing  
4 about this that makes me remember this, uh, hospital was because our prison  
5 camps with our boys were being freed, and, uh, the first ones that came into  
6 our hospital were so pitiful, uh, nearly all of 'em had lost 100 pounds.  
7  
8Dorothy Harrison: Good gracious.  
9  
10Katherine Wilson: And they would show us pictures of themselves before and after. You'd  
11 never recognize them. And the doctors told them that they could eat all of  
12 the chicken they wanted that night. They could eat a whole chicken if they  
13 wanted, but they would be sick, said, you know, your stomachs are drawn  
14 up, you'll be sick, but they went on. Most of 'em went on and ate that  
15 chicken and, sure enough, they were...  
16  
17Dorothy Harrison: Sick.  
18  
19Katherine Wilson: ...sick all night. And I can remember 'em standing around, just huge groups  
20 standing around this water spigot washing their teeth. They hadn't washed  
21 their teeth, I guess, for all the time they were in the prison camp. So they  
22 loved that. And we didn't have enough pajamas to go around, so we gave  
23 half of them the pajama tops and the other half pajama pants, so here they  
24 were [laughter] running around in half a pajama suit, and they really, really  
25 were a funny sight. Uh, this was really our last serious work in hospital. Um,  
26 in all, we had 22,000 wounded pass through the 44th Evacuation Hospital,  
27 and 9,000 of them – on 9,000 surgical operations were performed. Um, after  
28 our real work let up, uh, a notice came that one of us could go to the French  
29 Riviera. Did you ever get to go down there?  
30  
31Dorothy Harrison: Yes, I did.  
32  
33Katherine Wilson: Yeah. Well, I guess we drew straws. I don't know what happened, but I got  
34 to go, and I didn't have any clothes, of course, any resort clothes, so...  
35  
36Dorothy Harrison: [Inaudible 47:04].  
37  
38Katherine Wilson: ...they brought in some, uh, confiscated draperies from a german house, and  
39 the nurses helped me, and we made shorts and bathing suits out of this  
40 different colored drapery, and they were just really gorgeous, but you would  
41 have had a good time at the French Riviera then no matter what you had on  
42 because there were 50 men to every girl.  
43  
44 [laughter]

1  
2Dorothy Harrison: Yes.  
3  
4Katherine Wilson: You were bound to have a good time.  
5  
6Dorothy Harrison: I remember.  
7  
8Katherine Wilson: And everybody was sort of celebrating. I remember one dignified old  
9 colonel was wading in the fountain in front of the hotel, and everybody was  
10 just going crazy, and it was really fun. Uh, on the way back, I flew back to  
11 Brussels and but there I was stuck in a hotel with a bunch of real highbrow  
12 English women and in uniform, and I never will forget them. At dinner one  
13 night, one of 'em said, uh, we will – we'll never be able to get any help  
14 anymore and said you're solders have ruined our working class by telling  
15 them all that their our equals. So they were a little bit snooty.  
16  
17Dorothy Harrison: They were. They were.  
18  
19Katherine Wilson: But I enjoyed meeting them anyhow. Uh, [throat clearing] then, uh, from  
20 Brussels, back to Germany, I took a troop train, and that was really an  
21 experience. It was on this troop train that we celebrated V-E Day. That was  
22 May the 8th. And, uh, the boys all said to us, now we'll serve your dinner.  
23 You don't have to do a thing. We'll serve dinner. So they put down a piece  
24 of tin in the aisle of the train and built a fire in the aisle of the train and got  
25 out their K-rations and cooked 'em and served our dinner. So [inaudible  
26 48:46].  
27  
28Dorothy Harrison: Why that's amazing. I've never heard of a...  
29  
30Katherine Wilson: Yeah.  
31  
32Dorothy Harrison: ...of a, alfresco on a train. [laughter]  
33  
34Katherine Wilson: Well they did. And then after dinner, you would have thought, you know,  
35 enlisted men would be so rough and tough, they began to repeat poetry,  
36 these long narrative poems. I've never heard anything as beautiful in my life.  
37 I sat there and cried. Some of 'em are real sad, you know, and I was just sick  
38 that I couldn't contribute, that I didn't know even "The Cremation of Dan  
39 McGrew." I couldn't even do that. But I never will forget those soldiers  
40 knowing all that narrative poetry. And one little sergeant told me, we were  
41 talking about Malmedy and the breakthrough, and he said, you know, our  
42 outfit probably saved your lives. Uh, he said, uh, the officers, a lot of them  
43 were off in Brussels on leave, they thought the war was over, and said, uh,  
44 when the Germans began to came through, said my sergeant took gasoline

1 and spread over miles of the road, just went up and down and spread this  
2 gasoline and set fire to it and said that held 'em back for a long time. And he  
3 said another little, uh, sergeant in my outfit turned a sign at the crossroads in  
4 a different direction and said the Germans all went the wrong direction.  
5  
6Dorothy Harrison: Wrong way.  
7  
8Katherine Wilson: And said we probably saved your lives.  
9  
10Dorothy Harrison: They probably did.  
11  
12Katherine Wilson: Yeah. And we just thought here Churchill, uh, you know, we hear how he  
13 concocted this concrete harbor and how Mountbatten laid – had the idea of  
14 laying the gasoline pipes under the channel, you know.  
15  
16Dorothy Harrison: Yes. Yes.  
17  
18Katherine Wilson: And that's the way we had plenty of gasoline all during the war and they get  
19 credit for all those big things, but our little me, a lot of 'em didn't get credit  
20 for the things they did. And, uh, this – but this time, the war was over, and  
21 so our, um, uh, Chaplain [Walthour 50:43] took us on a trip to the Bavarian  
22 Alps and the Austrian Tyrol, and we went to Nuremberg and Munich and  
23 Oberammergau, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, the ski resort, and Rendsburg,  
24 Salzburg, and Berchtesgaden, but Berchtesgaden, you know, was where  
25 Hitler was and his Eagle's Nest during D-Day. They didn't even wake him  
26 up because they didn't think it was anything but a diversionary attack. He  
27 wasn't even awakened until noon. But anyhow, he wasn't there, of course,  
28 at the end, he was back in Berlin. But we went to the Eagle's Nest up on top  
29 of this mountain. There was no road to it, but we had to go up in an elevator,  
30 and the first thing we saw was this huge coffee table in the middle of the  
31 floor, and the 101st Airborne had built a bonfire in the middle of this coffee  
32 table and here was the big charred place.  
33  
34Dorothy Harrison: Charred place. Yeah.  
35  
36Katherine Wilson: That was the main thing I remember about it. Of course, it was glass all  
37 around and beautiful view of the Alps. But then there was a hotel and a  
38 restaurant halfway up to the Eagle's Nest, and here we stopped for lunch.  
39 And we looked over at the next table, and they had the most beautiful crystal  
40 and linen you've ever seen, and we said well, why is it that we didn't get  
41 this kind of treatment. And about this time, in walked General Eisenhower  
42 and his whole retinue, all dressed in their summer whites, and they were  
43 perfectly gorgeous. And this little Jewish nurse, uh, with us was real  
44 emotional, and she'd had too many drinks. She jumped up, and she said I'm

1 going over and tell them how beautiful they are and how proud I am of  
2 being on their side. We had to grab her and hold her by main force to keep  
3 her going over and...  
4  
5Dorothy Harrison: From interrupting.  
6  
7Katherine Wilson: ...and interrupting Eisenhower. Uh, the trip home was pretty uneventful, but  
8 we were all seasick except the General's wife in our state room, and we  
9 made her take the [inaudible 52:44] because we didn't care anything about  
10 protocol, we were so seasick. This was a smaller boat than the Queen  
11 Elizabeth. Uh, and in the midst of all seasickness though, an officer came  
12 around and drafted me to go around with him into all of the state rooms or  
13 into the boys' bunks and confiscate the dogs they'd taken aboard. So I knew  
14 there were dogs because when we boarded, we would see dog' tails sticking  
15 out from under their coats and out of their duffle bags. You know, they'd  
16 picked up dogs all along the way and loved...  
17  
18Dorothy Harrison: And they loved them.  
19  
20Katherine Wilson: ...loved 'em and gotten attached to 'em. So I went around with this officer,  
21 but my heart wasn't in it and I never found a single dog and neither did the  
22 officer.  
23  
24Dorothy Harrison: Aww.  
25  
26Katherine Wilson: I don't think his heart was in it either.  
27  
28Dorothy Harrison: He'd been ordered to do that so.  
29  
30Katherine Wilson: Yeah, been ordered to. But this is not a very fitting climax, but like the old  
31 song, now you may this is the end, you may hope this is the end, well it is.  
32  
33 [laughter]  
34  
35Dorothy Harrison: Well, thank you, Katie. That is a marvelous account.  
36  
37Katherine Wilson: Oh, well I [inaudible 53:47]...  
38  
39Dorothy Harrison: I'm sorry I gotta stop there and the...  
40  
41Katherine Wilson: ...[inaudible 53:50]. Now you end up – you finish up this [stuff 53:53].  
42

1Dorothy Harrison: Well as I, I, um, as I said, when – before we began this interview at all that  
2 there was a series of questions, which I could have asked, but as a matter of  
3 fact, you have answered them all in the course of your account.  
4

5Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
6

7Dorothy Harrison: [54:09] The, um, I notice that, eh, eh, during your, your, um, story, you, um,  
8 mentioned the fact that you were feeding, um, patients the burn patients  
9 through...  
10

11Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
12

13Dorothy Harrison: ...straws, a, a hole in the, in the bushel basket...  
14

15Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
16

17Dorothy Harrison: ...of bandages, and so I presume that, eh, eh, in an evacuation hospital that,  
18 um, your recreational duties were many times set aside to be...  
19

20Katherine Wilson: Yeah.  
21

22Dorothy Harrison: ...assistants to...?  
23

24Katherine Wilson: It was. Yeah. Whatever the nurses asked us to do, we did.  
25

26Dorothy Harrison: You did.  
27

28Katherine Wilson: Because, uh, there were other things a lot of times more important than the  
29 recreation.  
30

31Dorothy Harrison: Of course, there were and particularly in a, in a, in an evacuation hospital.  
32

33Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
34

35Dorothy Harrison: [54:54] And then I also wanted to, um, ask you where your evacuation  
36 hospital was on, on Omaha Beach? Was it at strip A1? Do you remember?  
37

38Katherine Wilson: No. No, I really don't. M-, m-...  
39

40Dorothy Harrison: [55:10] Eh, was it the, was it, was there, um, an airstrip near it?  
41

42Katherine Wilson: Uh, well after we – we were 8 miles back in our hospital when they had the  
43 airstrip. We had our airstrip on one side and the artillery on the other and the



1 graveyard across the road, but right on the beach, I don't know whether  
2 there was any airstrip or not.  
3  
4Dorothy Harrison: Yes, there was an airstrip there. It was A1.  
5  
6Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
7  
8Dorothy Harrison: And, um, but I thought when I arrived that it, it was the only, um, airbase  
9 that was, uh, in that vicinity.  
10  
11Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm. Well this was...  
12  
13Dorothy Harrison: [55:45] So I'm very interested to know that there's another airstrip?  
14  
15Katherine Wilson: Well this was a sort of, um, I guess it was just a makeshift sort of thing.  
16  
17Dorothy Harrison: Mm-hm.  
18  
19Katherine Wilson: But, uh, they were landing planes there because I know we, we thought we  
20 were in a pretty vulnerable place between the artillery battery and the, and  
21 the airstrip.  
22  
23Dorothy Harrison: Yes. Yes.  
24  
25Katherine Wilson: Yeah.  
26  
27Dorothy Harrison: [56:04] Uh, and you say you were about 8 miles from Omaha Beach?  
28  
29Katherine Wilson: I think it was about 8 miles inland. Mm-hm.  
30  
31Dorothy Harrison: [56:10] Uh, that – you must have been fairly close to the frontlines then  
32 because I remember that when we arrived on the D plus 21, it was the day  
33 that Cherbourg fell.  
34  
35Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
36  
37Dorothy Harrison: Uh, that they said that the depth of the front was, of course, um, un-, uneven  
38 but that it was approximately...  
39  
40Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
41  
42Dorothy Harrison: ...um, 8 to 9 miles...  
43  
44Katherine Wilson: Yeah.

1  
2Dorothy Harrison: [56:31] So you must have been very close at that particular point?  
3  
4Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
5  
6Dorothy Harrison: [56:34] Um, now just, eh, to finish up this tape and we seem to be getting  
7 again close to the end, um, you were born and brought up in Cynthiana?  
8  
9Katherine Wilson: Yes. Mm-hm.  
10  
11Dorothy Harrison: [56:48] And may I ask what the date was?  
12  
13Katherine Wilson: [laughter] Born in 1908, January 10th.  
14  
15Dorothy Harrison: Tenth. January 10, 1908.  
16  
17Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
18  
19Dorothy Harrison: [56:57] And you went to school in Cynthiana?  
20  
21Katherine Wilson: Uh-huh.  
22  
23Dorothy Harrison: [56:59] And w-, did you got to the university or college?  
24  
25Katherine Wilson: I went to University of, of Kentucky.  
26  
27Dorothy Harrison: Kentucky. [Inaudible 57:04].  
28  
29Katherine Wilson: Went to Western in Oxford, Ohio, first year.  
30  
31Dorothy Harrison: Alright.  
32  
33Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
34  
35Dorothy Harrison: [57:08] And then, um, when you came back, you did, uh, what?  
36  
37Katherine Wilson: When we came back, Mary and I weren't quite ready to settle down, so we  
38 took a job on the Moore-McCormack ships. She was on the Argentine, and I  
39 was, was on the SS Brazil. And we had gift shops on these ships going to  
40 Buenos Aires.  
41  
42Dorothy Harrison: [57:30] So you traveled again?  
43  
44Katherine Wilson: So I did that for 8 voyages. Mm-hm.

1  
2Dorothy Harrison: Very good. And...  
3  
4Katherine Wilson: Yeah.  
5  
6Dorothy Harrison: ...that must have been a very interesting, uh, experience. Now, I think we  
7 are...  
8  
9Katherine Wilson: Mm-hm.  
10  
11Dorothy Harrison: ...at the end, and so we'll say farewell for this particular tape.  
12  
13Katherine Wilson: Goodbye.  
14  
15  
16/lo