

**Interview of Doris Evelyn McGraw Cobb on her life and family
and her long service in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps**

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5 Ruth Stewart: Doris McGraw Cobb is being interviewed as a member of the WOSL.
6 Doris was born on August the 11th, 1922. This interview is being taped at
7 the Army Residence Community in San Antonio, Texas. The interviewer
8 is Ruth Stewart, assisted by Carol Habgood. [00:27] Doris, how about
9 starting out with a little bit of your early life and then how you went into
10 nursing and the military?

11
12 Doris Cobb: I was born in Hopewell, Virginia. My parents were William Frances and
13 Elma Shelton McGraw. I had an older sister, Fra-, Edith Frances; and a
14 younger brother, William Frances, Jr. I recall asking my mother how I
15 happened to miss having the name of Frances, since my older sister had
16 been named for favorite honor of my mother. And of course, my brother
17 had to be a Jr. I don't think they thought much about the two of them
18 having the same name, particularly since my brother was always called
19 Bill.

20
21 I was educated in the schools in Hopewell; and graduated from Hopewell
22 High School in 1939. I went to school to take chemistry, since I had not
23 had it in high school. I knew I needed it for nursing school. I entered
24 Petersburg Hospital School of Nursing in August 1941. Of course, some
25 things changed after December the 7th, 1941. One thing was that we were
26 now allowed to have radios in our rooms. Another was that the plant my
27 father worked for decided to build plants in the [interior 1:49] of the U.S.
28 And so, my dad was transferred first to Henderson, Kentucky and then to
29 Ironton, Ohio. My mother moved with him.

30
31 While in nursing school, we affiliated with two hospitals in Philadelphia.
32 First, for three months of obstetrics – for obstetrics – at Philadelphia [Y &
33 N 2:11] Hospital; and then at Children's Hospital for pediatrics for three
34 months. I was there from June to 19-, to December 1943. While at
35 Children's Hospital, I remin-, remember being told never to go out alone.
36 The hospital was located at 18th and Bainbridge, a fairly poor section of
37 Philadelphia.

38
39 One day, they asked us if we would like to go see the slum area. Having
40 come from a small city in Virginia and recalling the warning, I asked,
41 "Where – where are we now?" I was told that the area down near Front
42 Street was much worse than where we were. When I visited Philadelphia
43 many years later, I discovered that the area around Front Street had been

renovated and was now some of the highest priced real estate in the city.
Times do make a difference.

Also, while a student at Children's Hospital, the American Red Cross was doing nurse recruiting for the military nurse corps – army and navy. I joined the student – senior student reserve of the American Red Cross, which meant that I was willing to join one of the services after graduation. I went back to Petersburg and that year was, excuse me, was given, uh, vacation for Christmas week to visit my parents in Ashland, Kentucky, [inaudible 3:52] to Ironton, Ohio. I made the trip on the Norfolk and Western train; got to Kentucky okay, but a lot of rain caused flooding and I was unable to get back to the train station to get the trip back to Petersburg.

There was, uh, no closer train station other than Portsmouth, Ohio or Kenova, West Virginia, so I was – would have to go to Portsmouth, Ohio, to get the train. But there happened to be a little stop across the bridge from Ashland, Kentucky, in a little town called Coal Grove, Ohio, where they had, uh, just a fuel-type stop. And so, they – we went over and asked them if they'd stop the train, so I could get on it. They said, well they'd call Portsmouth and see if they could stop the train; and they did. So, I got – they – went home and got my suitcase and came back. And when the train came, I got on it. The other passengers were sitting there, and they would say, "I wonder why we're stopping here. This is not a regular stop for the Norfolk and Western train."

Well later on, in the middle of the night, we were going real slow. I asked the conductor why we were going so slowly. He said they were sounding the bridges to see if the tracks were still there. [chuckle] I wondered if I had been smart in trying to get back to Virginia on time. All went well though and I got back to school in time for another classmate to have vacation for New Years.

After graduation in 1944, I took state boards in Richmond, Virginia. Following that, I went to Kentucky to visit with my parents while I waited to hear from state boards. After passing state board, I was ordered to Fort Thomas, Kentucky, for a physical examination. I went by train and took a bus to the fort. The young sentry gave me directions to the clinic. While undergoing a brief visit with the psychiatrist, he asked, "Why are you joining the army?" I replied, "I heard some patriotic music." He said, "That's as good an excuse as any." On my way out, the young sentry said, "You'll be sorry." Truly, I was not sorry then and I'm not sorry today.

1 On 15 January 1945, I went to ANC basic orientation at Billings General
2 Hospital at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. I don't know that we saw
3 the ground during the 30 days we were there. The ground was covered
4 with snow. It was difficult to learn to march in snow. We made it,
5 however. From basic, I was assigned, along with about 10 other
6 classmates, to Fletcher General Hospital at Cambridge, Ohio. I was
7 assigned to duty in an officer's ward. Most of the patients were casual-
8 casualties from Europe; although a few had been in the Pacific.
9

10 In April 1945, I received orders to Indiantown Gap, preparatory to going
11 overseas. It was there that we received field equipment and clothing. We
12 did not know where we were going. Orders read, "Prepare for cold
13 climate". I thought we would surely be going to the Pacific, since I
14 thought it was – the war was about over in Europe. From Indiantown Gap,
15 we went to Camp Kilmer for another week of preparation. And then on
16 May 1st, 1945, we departed the U.S. from Fort Dix, New Jersey, on the
17 French – former French line of the Ile de France. Now a British troop
18 ship. There were 500 nurses: 7 1st lieutenants and 493 2nd lieutenants,
19 with fewer – with four male officers in charge of our group.
20

21 Needless to say, they did not have an easy time of it. We zig-zagged
22 across the Atlantic Ocean and landed in Glasgow, Scotland on 9 May
23 1945, a day after the war was over. We took the train to Southampton and
24 were quartered at a camp in there for about two weeks. We were then
25 assigned to various hospitals in the U.K. From the 102nd General Hospital,
26 which had been the re-, reinforcement depot where we were located, on 10
27 May 1945, we were reassigned on the 25 May to the U.S. – to the 111th
28 General Hospital, which was packed up and ready to go home. Not very
29 happy to see us either – new nurses.
30

31 This is when I had my first martini. They had a large container in the
32 officer's club. I had a glass. Later wrote my parents a letter. They saved
33 it for me. Learned that – right then never to write letters after you've had
34 a martini. [laughter]
35

36 On 31 May 1945, I left the 11th-, 111th General Hospital and was assigned
37 to the 136th Station Hospital. Here I was assigned to a nursing ward of
38 NCOs. One day, to me, an older master sergeant asked me a question; and
39 I said, "Yes, sir". He corrected me by saying, "Lieutenant, officers do not
40 say 'sir' to enlisted people." My reply, "I was taught to say 'sir' to older
41 people." Did he get razed by the other patients in the ward. A good group
42 of patients to work with.
43

1 Stayed at the hospital until 16 July 1945, when I joined other nurses, most
2 of whom had come overseas with me to go to France. We were assigned
3 to the 813th Hospital Center while traveling to France. A very rough
4 voyage across the channel. We sat up, up on deck in the front fresh air to
5 avoid being seasick, as long as we could. 30 July 1945, I was assigned to
6 the 189th General Hospital. Not many patients, so I was given a pass to
7 Paris. I attended the [Folies Bijoux 10:59]. Quite an eye opener for a
8 young lady from Petersburg, Virginia.

9 After two weeks with the 100-, we went to the 173rd General Hospital at
10 Camp Marmalade, France. While there, we were living in tents. Nothing
11 much to do, so was given another three-day pass to Paris. We were
12 waiting for orders to go to the Pacific. While there, it, it became rather
13 strange because they, they had built some new latrines for, for the women.
14 And it got real funny because you sat back-to-back – first, first time you
15 had such a latrine situation. And then there were lots of people who said
16 they just couldn't go when anybody else was around. So, they would get
17 up in the middle of the night and have the guard escort'm down to the
18 bathroom; and then they'd find out that the place was packed with people
19 that couldn't go when other people were around. [laughter]

20
21 Ruth Stewart: [laughter]

22
23 Doris Cobb: I went up to, uh, while we were in the, at the 173rd General Hospital, in the
24 tents, they tried to do things to keep us occupied. And a lot of the people
25 were playing bridge. So, if you didn't play bridge, they planned tours for
26 us each day. I decided the better part of that was to go on the tours. So,
27 we saw a lot of cathedrals and a few wineries. Returned from my past trip
28 to Paris to find that we were ready to leave to go to Marseilles. But we
29 were delayed one day and so I was able to unpack and repack my bedroll,
30 which had been packed by friends in my absence.

31
32 We took the train to Marseilles, riding in what they called The Forty and
33 Eights. It was 40 men or 8 horses. We stopped along the way to take
34 fresh, uh, to get food breaks. They'd have these little, uh, camps set up
35 along the, the way. And that's – the military had'm set up and then we
36 could stop and then we'd get off and eat. And then we'd get back on the
37 train and drive, drive – ride some more. We'd also have, the French
38 people would come over and, and, whenever we would stop along the
39 way; and they would come over and want to buy our shoes, our shirts.
40 We'd stop and they'd say... And one of'm wanted to know if I'd sell'm
41 my shirt and I said, "No. This is the only shirt I have." And they said,
42 "Well your friend down the way did" – sold hers. I said, "Well maybe she
43 had two". [chuckle] But I didn't have but the one with me at the time.
44

1 We parked along the, the tracks frequently because the – apparently, they
2 only had one or two engines that were working at the time. And so, they
3 would leave us parked along the tracks while they'd take the engine and
4 go take cattle and all this kind of stuff into Paris. And then they would
5 come back and pick us up and go a little bit further down the line. And
6 then they'd come back and park us again. There weren't enough bunks on
7 the train for everyone to sleep, so most of us sat – or some of us sat in the
8 open doorway, which gave us a good view of the countryside.
9

10 Finally, we arrived in Marseilles – found the place teeming with people,
11 going either the United States or to the Pacific. Then came V-J Day.
12 Several of us were put on TDY to the Riviera. Now that was great duty.
13 We arrived back at Marseilles to find that we were not going to the
14 Pacific; and that we were going to be assigned to the 50th Field Hospital at
15 Swanson, France. This hos-, this hospital unit had gone overseas with the
16 101st airborne and followed them through the, the war. They were ready
17 to go home. That was in August. We stayed there with few patients until
18 October.
19

20 While at the 50th Field we worked a light schedule. One patient I
21 remember was an older French lady who had been hit by an auto-, an
22 American ambulance. And she had to have an amputation.
23 Communicating with her was not easy. She spoke no English and I spoke
24 only a little French. Fortunately, my ward master could speak more, much
25 more French.
26

27 Another incident that occurred was rather humorous. I was dating an
28 engineer officer who coached the enlisted football team. After a victory
29 one weekend, the team invited us to the EM club. My roommate and I
30 went to the game and were the cheering section. One young ME, not a
31 member of the team, a wee bit intoxicated, had decided that as officers, we
32 were not – should not be in the enlisted club. So, he asked, asked us to
33 leave. Although the team insisted that we stay, we left. Afterall, it was
34 his club. Well, you could guess what happened. In his intoxicated state,
35 he fell out of a second story window and fractured an arm. Imagine his
36 chagrin when I walked into the ward the next morning to take care of him.
37 He apologized for his actions the evening before.
38

39 In October 1945, I was again reassigned. I went to the 98th General
40 Hospital in Munich, Germany. Now I was in the army of occupation. I
41 was assigned to work [two wards 17:26], which had dermatology patients,
42 male medical patients and a mixture of women patients. I worked with
43 nuns for the first time – discovered they were like the civilian nurses
44 where I had worked. Some nice, some crabby. I was fortunate to get

1 leave to go to Switzerland while there. Elected to go to Zermatt, where I
2 took ski lessons, but did not venture down the Mont Blanc Trail.

3
4 Late April 1945, I was asked to complete a form which gave me three
5 options: Number one, to extend for one year; number two, to stay in the
6 service indefinitely; and number three, to get out as soon as I could. Since
7 I had applied to Western Reserve University School of Nursing before I
8 committed to the military – and had been accepted – I decided to elect
9 number three. By the end of April, I was on the way home on the day that
10 the MacAndrews, a medium sized troop ship, which I understand had been
11 built in WWI.

12 I went on and was separated from the service on 21 May 1946. My
13 parents had moved back to Virginia and I went back to Hopewell to stay to
14 get ready to go to Cleveland, Ohio, to school in August. I did some
15 private duty in the meantime.

16
17 While in school in Cleveland, I met a man to whom I became engaged.
18 Then at the end of the summer school term in 1947, I returned to Virginia
19 to prepare for my wedding. I had a change of heart and returned his ring
20 and canceled wedding plans. I worked as night supervisor for the
21 remainder of the year; and then in September 1948, I went to the
22 University of Virginia in Charlottesville, to complete my bachelorette
23 degree. Finishing all requirements in August 1949. Too late for the
24 summer graduation exercises, so I'm considered in the class of 1950.

25
26 After graduation, I went to work as a clinical instructor in medical surgical
27 nursing in the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Hospital in Clifton Forge,
28 Virginia. I remained there until June 1952, when I went to Petersburg
29 Hospital School of Nursing to become director of nursing education. In
30 1954, I recommended that the school of nursing be closed; and I went
31 to Teacher's College, Columbia University, for my master's degree in
32 nursing service administration. While in school, I had three classmates
33 who were in the army, navy and air force. Each of them suggested I return
34 to the service. And they had information sent to me. I read each of the
35 brochures and decided to reapply to the Army Nurse Corps.

36
37 After processing papers necessary, I re-joined the Army Nurse Corps in
38 19-, February the 2nd, 1956, reporting to Fort Jay, New York. I had been
39 out of the army 10 years. I returned as a captain; was assigned to the
40 women's ward. Learned a lot of about the army and nursing.

41
42 In August 1956, I was assigned to ANC recruiting with office in Boston,
43 Massachusetts, covering Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts
44 and Rhode Island. I had about 98 schools of nursing in my area. I learned

1 a lot about people, publicity, public relations and civilian schools of
2 nursing. It was a great assignment for 3-1/2 years. In March 1960, I was
3 assigned to Brooke Army Hospital in Fort Sam, Houston, Texas, for three
4 months before going to the advanced nursing course at the Medical Field
5 Service School in San Antonio, Texas.

6
7 While at the hospital, I was asked if I would like to go out with the 250th
8 Field Hospital for pre and AT&T three days each time. I went along with
9 my roommate and colleagues from recruiting – in recruiting, uh,
10 [inaudible 22:10]. Two other nurses comprised of the team. We had a
11 wonderful learning experience and I thoroughly enjoyed back – being
12 back in the field living in a tent and learning to improvise. The chief nurse
13 said we gave such glowing reports about the good time we had while we
14 were in the field, that she had no difficulty getting volunteers to go the
15 next time.

16
17 I attended the advanced nursing course for six months, from June to
18 December 1960. In January 1961, I flew to Okinawa, and was assigned
19 first as head nurse at – on the EM-, ENT unit and the officer orthopedic
20 unit. Learned that 99% of fractured jaws are the result of a fist hitting the
21 jaw. Later, I became the educational coordinator, planning training
22 programs for the officers and enlisted men and women assigned to the
23 nursing service.

24
25 While in Okinawa, I had two trips to Hong Kong and two trips to Dupath.
26 A good assignment; beautiful sunsets. From Okinawa to Madigan General
27 Hospital in Tacoma, Washington, as a nursing methods analyst.
28 Wonderful training for a chief nurse. After a year and a half at Madigan, I
29 asked to go to Germany; but was asked to return to recruiting as ANC
30 coordinator, 3rd Army Recruiting District with an office at Pearson,
31 Georgia. Stayed there one year and was then assigned to recruiting
32 headquarters at Fort Monroe, Virginia, as chief ANC recruiting to replace
33 my predecessor, who had had a heart attack and was expected to retire.
34 She returned to active duty and I became the operations officer.

35
36 In 1966, I went to Washington, D.C. for a conference and went to the
37 surgeon general's office and asked for an assignment to Vietnam. I was
38 told to go back to Hampton and be quiet. Instead, I went back to
39 Hampton, met a fella, and was married in February of 1967 – to [inaudible
40 24:42] C. Cobb, Jr.

41
42 In early 1968, I was told that I was going to Bangkok, Thailand, as chief
43 nurse of the 5th Field Hospital. My husband was assigned to JUSMAG;
44 and was assigned to Bangkok also. We lived on the economy. We moved

1 from a Thai hotel, which had – the hospital moved from a Thai hotel,
2 which had been converted into a hospital – into a new hospital. Although
3 the new building was an improvement over the old – over the hotel – it
4 was not up to American specifications and standards.
5

6 It – I was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1969. The first summer I was
7 there, we were asked to train American teenagers for volunteer jobs in the
8 hospital. We had done this for two years in Okinawa and had a successful
9 program. American teenagers are unable to work and were bored. We
10 agreed to plan and conduct a program. We had 98 teenagers apply; and all
11 98 completed the training program; and then the 60 hours of volunteer
12 work, which we required. Several worked more than their required hours,
13 because they enjoyed it.
14

15 My husband retired in 1969 and returned to the United States. In
16 September of 1969, I was assigned to the Medical Field Service School as
17 class-, uh, as a basic ANC/AMSC orientation course. About this time, two
18 of my husband's children came to live with us in San Antonio. The older
19 daughter had been married in 1970. After three years, I asked if I could go
20 to Germany; and was assigned in 1972 to the 130th Sta-, Hos-, Station
21 Hospital in Heidelberg as an army nurse – I mean, as chief nurse. A very
22 rewarding and satisfying job.
23

24 My husband and step-son occu-, sometime – accompanied me to
25 Germany. We were able to do some traveling to Holland, France,
26 Switzerland and Italy; also, to England. In September 1974, I returned to
27 the U.S. and had a retirement ceremony at Fort Lee, Virginia, since this
28 was close to where my parents were living.
29

30 After retirement, we returned to San Antonio. In 1976, I became involved
31 in helping to establish the Retired Army Nurse Corps Association, now the
32 Army Nurse Corps Association. I was the first president. We also
33 established the Army Nurse Corps Foundation to help in building and new
34 AMEDD museum and collect memorabilia for the museum. About this
35 time, we started working and building a new AMEDD museum. It took
36 many years to accumulate the money, but it finally came to fruition.
37

38 My marriage ended in December 1978. I have been active in traveling,
39 bridge, American Legion and the Women's Overseas Service League;
40 served as national president from 1990 to 1992; San Antonio Chapter
41 Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge; served as awards – an awards jury
42 in 1991, as president of WOSL.
43

1 Throughout my career, I have attended, I attended army chapels; and
2 continued to do so until about 1995, when I joined the John Calhoun
3 Presbyterian Church, where I served as circle moderator in 1999 and
4 moderator of Presbyterian Women from 2000 to 2002. Was recently
5 profiled in a book by Cindy Weigand, *Texas women in WWII*, published in
6 2003 by *Republic of Texas Press*. That's my life in...
7
8Ruth Stewart: Very interesting career Doris. [29:28] Uh...did your activities in the
9 service affect your views of the military or of war?
10
11Doris Cobb: No. Other than it made you – makes you look at the situation with a, a
12 different kind of view, I think, than one does as a civilian, because you,
13 uh, you know what the troops have got – had to go through. And you
14 know, uh, sometimes how decisions are made; and you don't, uh, you're
15 not as quick to, uh, criticize or be negative, I don't think if you would, uh,
16 as sometimes civilians are – people who have never been in the military at
17 all.
18
19Ruth Stewart: Okay. [30:24] Is there anything else that you'd like to add about your...
20
21Doris Cobb: No.
22
23Ruth Stewart: ...reflections on your years in the service or your years since then?
24
25Doris Cobb: Can't think of anything. It's been a long rewarding life.
26
27Ruth Stewart: Thank you very much Doris.
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29/al