

1 **Interview of Betty Van Kirk on her eleven months of service in the American Red Cross**
2 **in the Pacific Theater during World War II**

3

4

5Betty Van Kirk: Uh, very little. Very little.

6

7Interviewer: [0:04] They were just sent over to New Guinea?

8

9Betty Van Kirk: They – we were to – we were s-, we were train-, well we were all trained a
10 certain amount. I don't know exactly what training the, the, uh, those women
11 had. The – those of us – I think we all had a certain am-, we were all sent
12 back to Washington, DC...

13

14Interviewer: Mm-hm.

15

16Betty Van Kirk: ...and I can't remember whether it was 2 or 3 weeks.

17

18Interviewer: Mm-hm.

19

20Betty Van Kirk: That was a great plum as far as I was concerned because I hadn't been East for
21 several years, and so I was able to spend weekends in Swarthmore and see old
22 friends before I left...

23

24Interviewer: Mm-hm.

25

26Betty Van Kirk: ...and see my family, and, and that was great. But, uh, we – everybody – all
27 Red Cross were sent to Washington for this, this training, which was done at,
28 um, oh, what's the university there, eh...

29

30Interviewer: [0:50] American University?

31

32Betty Van Kirk: American University.

33

34Interviewer: Mm-hm.

35

36Betty Van Kirk: Yes.

37

38Interviewer: Mm-hm.

39

40Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, uh, then we were sh-, we were shipped out from there.

41

42Interviewer: Mm-hm.

43

1 Betty Van Kirk: And I was, uh, eh, I was shipped out with a group of casuals. [laughter]
2 That's what they said. And we, we crossed the country on a troop train...
3
4 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5
6 Betty Van Kirk: ...and so forth. And came back to California, all of which pleased me very
7 much too.
8
9 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
10
11 Betty Van Kirk: And we were stationed at st-, Camp Stoneman...
12
13 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
14
15 Betty Van Kirk: ...for about a week before we went o-, out on our Liberty Ship...
16
17 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
18
19 Betty Van Kirk: ...to New Guinea.
20
21 Interviewer: [1:24] What did you feel about the relationships that you developed, and I'm
22 sure that you [inaudible 1:28]?
23
24 Betty Van Kirk: They were very close and very dear.
25
26 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
27
28 Betty Van Kirk: And right now, now, uh, 2 weeks ago, um, I was with a friend of mine that
29 was also in New Guinea. Actually, we were not good friends in New Guinea.
30 We were mutu-, we had a mutual friend. But neverth-, uh, she's one of my
31 dearest friends now. She lives in Monterey. And, um, I called another –
32 when I was in Los Angeles during this little trip that I had, I phoned a, eh,
33 friend that been one of my best friends in, in the whole, whole experience.
34 She was with me in New Guinea, and then we were sent up to Manila, and the
35 war ended, and we were stationed there together. And I haven't seen her for
36 about 3 years, oh 3 years, um, 15 years...
37
38 Interviewer: Hm.
39
40 Betty Van Kirk: ...I guess, 15 years, and, uh, I haven't tal-, I've, I've had word indirectly, but I
41 haven't seen her. But I called her, and she, uh, we, we didn't get a – have a
42 very satisfactory telephone conversation because it was at the airport, and I
43 waiting for the limousine. And so she called me the next Sunday after I got

1 home, and we talked for half an hour. But, uh, uh, it's, it's strange how many
2 of my friends, uh, are, are really very, very dear friends now.
3
4Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5
6Betty Van Kirk: This, I think this is true of, of all services.
7
8Interviewer: Mm-hm.
9
10Betty Van Kirk: I know it's true of all services.
11
12Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. You mentioned some of the restrictions, uh, that you
13 experienced overseas. [2:58] Can you tell me a little bit more about that? Was
14 there regimentation and were you allowed to date and [inaudible 3:04]?
15
16Betty Van Kirk: Oh, yes.
17
18Interviewer: Mm-hm.
19
20Betty Van Kirk: Well, as I say, eh, in my experience, a-, as long as I was at the hospital in New
21 Guinea, uh, I was treated just like the nurses.
22
23Interviewer: Mm-hm.
24
25Betty Van Kirk: And we were allowed to – I don't think there any – there were no limits. Uh,
26 we h-, I guess we had to be home by midnight.
27
28Interviewer: Mm-hm.
29
30Betty Van Kirk: But we could go out every night as far as that was concerned [of 3:26] people,
31 and any girl could've. Eh, I mean there were [chuckle] a shortage of females,
32 so – but, uh, in, eh, in time, the women got tired of it, and they mostly settled
33 down to one escort...
34
35Interviewer: Mm-hm.
36
37Betty Van Kirk: ...that they could depend on.
38
39Interviewer: Mm-hm.
40
41Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, if it, uh, if he was moved out, they were plenty of them that didn't
42 care to date at all. They just got weary of the whole bit.
43
44Interviewer: Mm-hm.

1
2Betty Van Kirk: Of course, they were physically weary because of the innervating climate...
3
4Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5
6Betty Van Kirk: ...in New Guinea...
7
8Interviewer: Mm-hm.
9
10Betty Van Kirk: ...and the same thing in the Philippines. But, um, uh, it was, it was an
11 amazing experience for m-, most of us that hadn't had all that attention...
12
13Interviewer: Mm-hm.
14
15Betty Van Kirk: ...in growing up.
16
17Interviewer: Mm-hm.
18
19Betty Van Kirk: And so that was fun too.
20
21Interviewer: [laughter]
22
23Betty Van Kirk: But, uh, most of those and contrary to the, the experiences with women, uh,
24 the experiences with men, very little. They, they almost invariably fell apart.
25 Almo-, unless they actually married. Uh, eh, maybe even over there or...
26
27Interviewer: [4:35] You mean if they met someone...
28
29Betty Van Kirk: Yes.
30
31Interviewer: ...who they dated?
32
33Betty Van Kirk: They dated them and they, they – when they came back to the United States, it
34 was as though it had – it was just a dream.
35
36Interviewer: [4:44] Oh, really? [Inaudible 4:45]?
37
38Betty Van Kirk: Oh, eh, eh, that's almost always the case. It's, it's a dream that people, eh,
39 think about, but eh, eh, it almost never materialized into anything further.
40
41Interviewer: Mm-hm.
42
43Betty Van Kirk: Once in a blue moon, they, they'll see one of these people, but mostly not.
44 It's, it – and I think this is – I think the men would say the same thing. The

1 men h-, their, their close relationships are with the men that they knew over
2 there. I mean I, I'm quite sure that – I never thought about it before, but I
3 think that was really quite universal.
4

5Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [5:20] So men pretty much...
6

7Betty Van Kirk: Went back to, eh, eh, they went – they, eh, everybody went back to their, their
8 social, uh, life that they'd had before.
9

10Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
11

12Betty Van Kirk: With a new angle on it I guess, but it, um, the, the men went back and married
13 the girls or went back to their wives. M-, of course many of them were
14 married when we knew them over there.
15

16Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
17

18Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, but this, um, over there, it was, it was – everybo-, it was an entirely
19 different setup. They – people talked about their home lives. They – you
20 knew about their wives and their children and, and all the rest of it. Some of
21 the men, of course, were very faithful to their wives. Some were less so.
22

23Interviewer: Mm-hm.
24

25Betty Van Kirk: But, uh, they, they almost all talked about them.
26

27Interviewer: Mm-hm.
28

29Betty Van Kirk: And that was very important and, um, the girls became very good listeners.
30

31Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [6:16] Did you find that to be a norm, that the
32 women went out with the men to listen to them or?
33

34Betty Van Kirk: Well, yes.
35

36Interviewer: Mm-hm.
37

38Betty Van Kirk: I – I think so.
39

40Interviewer: Mm-hm.
41

42Betty Van Kirk: I mean, uh, of course, they expressed themselves too. I mean it wasn't that
43 they were – but, but, um, eh, eh, we all knew pretty much what the, the lives

1 of these men were. And, and, uh, some of them changed rather drastically,
2 but mostly they didn't.
3
4Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5
6Betty Van Kirk: And I think most of them just went right back as though nothing had really
7 happened.
8
9Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
10
11Betty Van Kirk: By and large. At least of my age group. I was, I was, uh, what 34 when I
12 went over, which was within, a, a year. I think they didn't take any Red Cross
13 theoretically that were over 35.
14
15Interviewer: Mm-hm.
16
17Betty Van Kirk: They took them, but f-, age 25 to 35.
18
19Interviewer: Mm-hm.
20
21Betty Van Kirk: There were exceptions, but, um, uh, I, I've always thought that the, the older
22 ones adjusted better when they came home. This I think this has been true of,
23 of all the wars.
24
25Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
26
27Betty Van Kirk: The older ones are more confirmed. They, they h-, they know more who they
28 are when they go into the service, and they know who they are when they
29 come home...
30
31Interviewer: Mm-hm.
32
33Betty Van Kirk: ...whereas the young ones are just sort of torn...
34
35Interviewer: Mm-hm.
36
37Betty Van Kirk: ...different directions.
38
39Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. That's true. [7:39] So can you describe an average day
40 for you while you were in the hospital?
41
42Betty Van Kirk: Well the hospitals, uh, they, they were interesting. But the time I got there, it,
43 eh, everything was all set up. I actually landed Easter Monday in New
44 Guinea, and they were already shipping people up to the Philippines you see.

1 Leyte had been captured, and so New Guinea was, was, uh, being
2 dismembered. Hollandia was being dismembered really by the time I got
3 there. But I was replacing a, a Red Cross girl from – we were, eh, uh, as I say,
4 we were casuals is the expression. When you don't go as a hospital, you go
5 just as a single person to be assigned to replace somebody.
6

7Interviewer: Mm-hm.
8

9Betty Van Kirk: And I was replacing a Red Cross girl from Omaha, who had such bad prickly
10 heat that they, they had to send her back, and she ended up in Paris and was
11 thrilled to pieces. But she, [chuckle] she loved it in New Guinea, but they
12 simply couldn't control her, her prickly heat.
13

14Interviewer: Mm-hm.
15

16Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, so I, I took her place, and, uh, uh, the hospital was established. The,
17 the buildings were long barracks buildings. The, the – where the nurses were,
18 there were sides up be-, up to the top of the beds, and then, uh, eh, eh, some
19 kind of beaver board. I don't know, pl-, uh, whatever it was. And then, uh, it
20 was a screening from there up to the top and then tin roofs.
21

22Interviewer: Mm-hm.
23

24Betty Van Kirk: And then we slept, of course, under – we had beds, which was great. Really
25 the beds were perfectly alright, and they were hospital beds that they were
26 using at that time, and this was a general hospital. It was one of the big
27 hospitals. It was the University of, of Pittsburgh Unit. I d-, I always thought
28 that was one reason they sent me because I had gone in leaving my families
29 address as Pennsylvania, you see...
30

31Interviewer: Hm.
32

33Betty Van Kirk: ...and Swarthmore, so I think they picked me out of the hat and sent me to
34 the, eh, to the University of Pittsburgh Unit.
35

36Interviewer: Hm.
37

38Betty Van Kirk: The doctors and most of the original nurses were from the University of
39 Pittsburgh...
40

41Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
42

43Betty Van Kirk: ...Hospital.
44

1Interviewer: [9:53] So they thought you'd be at home, huh?
2

3Betty Van Kirk: Yes. [laughter] I guess so. I, I don't know. I mean they w-, why, why give 1
4 person rather than another person? They didn't have time to give it any deep
5 thought. But, um, [tsk] uh, eh, we, we, uh, we had nets. Of course, we slept
6 under mosquito nets. And of course, we were terrified of the Anopheles
7 mosquito because of the, of, uh, get, eh, Dengue fever or Dengue came from
8 another mosquito. Malaria was what...
9

10Interviewer: Mm-hm.
11

12Betty Van Kirk: ...came from the Anopheles. And, eh, I think the Dengue fever was, was, eh,
13 mostly up in the Philippines when we got up there. But we were given, um,
14 we took Atabrine. We turned as yellow as could be, [laughter] and that
15 yellow took quite a while for that to, to come out of our skins. But, uh, it was
16 on the table. Atabrine and, uh, vitamins were on the, on the mess table, and...
17

18Interviewer: Mm-hm.
19

20Betty Van Kirk: ...people just took them regularly as could be. Uh, we, we had, eh, uh, our
21 toilets and, and wash, eh, rooms and so forth were separate buildings. There
22 was just one for the, for the nurses.
23

24Interviewer: Mm-hm.
25

26Betty Van Kirk: And I guess there were about, uh, 2 – maybe there 2 of these long barracks
27 buildings or maybe there were 4. I'm, I'm, I'm not sure about that. The, the,
28 the roof was the same, the tin roof and the, the cement floor was just the same
29 as the wards, but the wards didn't have the sides. The sides were because we
30 were women. We were being protected a bit more. The, the wards just
31 simply were all screened in all the way down to the concrete floor..
32

33Interviewer: Mm-hm.
34

35Betty Van Kirk: ...without these, these...
36

37Interviewer: Mm-hm.
38

39Betty Van Kirk: ...sides that we had.
40

41Interviewer: You mentioned about the fear of getting malaria or some other dreaded
42 disease. [11:43] What were the other fears or, um, trepidations that you might
43 have had going over as you were? Did you fly...
44

1 Betty Van Kirk: [Well 11:51]...
2
3 Interviewer: ...or did you take a boat over?
4
5 Betty Van Kirk: No, we w-, we went over on a Liberty ship.
6
7 Interviewer: Hm. Mm-hm.
8
9 Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, uh, we were terribly crowded. We w-, eh, it happened that with our
10 – there were Red Cross. There were, there were 2 women going back, uh,
11 who had, had been back in the United States on emergency leave. One of
12 them was a Red Cross and one was a nurse. And those 2 women, eh, had
13 nothing to do with each other, excepting at meal time, and it happened that
14 they were – we sat at the same table, and th-, there they would – they just, eh,
15 enjoyed saying to each other and loudly enough so everybody was in on it,
16 and of course, we were all gaga about the fact that they'd been there, you
17 know, because it was a totally unknown world to the rest of us. They were
18 enlightening us, and they were enlightening us, eh, as, as cruelly as they
19 could. I, I, I don't know. They, they – both of those women were just sort of
20 nuts, I, I really do think. Uh, they – the, the worse they, they could, the worse
21 they could make the picture, eh, the more they s-, obviously enjoyed doing it
22 for us. No matter what it was. And...
23
24 Interviewer: [13:06] What – can you give an example of what they said to you?
25
26 Betty Van Kirk: Well, I, uh, no. The funny part is I just remember that it was so, it was so
27 awful. And they, they were not close friends. They, as I say, they never saw
28 each other excepting, uh, uh, when – at meals, and then they would just, eh,
29 they would sort of egg each other on trying to outdo each other about how,
30 how terrible everything was over there. I r-, I really can't remember anything
31 specific at this point.
32
33 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
34
35 Betty Van Kirk: But, um, it really was very funny. And, eh, eh, then finally, of course it took
36 us how long, almost 3 weeks I guess to get to, to Hollandia. We went down –
37 we went past – one morning at 6:00 we were all out on deck to, to see
38 Guadalcanal.
39
40 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
41
42 Betty Van Kirk: It was just a, a streak on the horizon. We weren't close to the Solomon
43 Islands, but we, we at least, uh, and the [Ellis 14:03] Islands. We saw [Ellis
44 14:04] Islands too. And went on down to Finschhafen where we stayed out in

1 the – you see there were no piers or anything and the – so the ships had to be
2 out in the harbor and then small boats would come out. And, um, one, uh,
3 high-ranking nurse was taken off there. I don't, uh, very few people were
4 taken off, and – but we were there. That looked beautiful, all these beautiful
5 palm trees and everything. That was the first thing that we were close to.
6 And then we went from there on up to Hollandia.
7
8Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
9
10Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, [tsk] again, s-, uh, some people were taken off, and some were kept
11 on. I don't know where the ship went from there...
12
13Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
14
15Betty Van Kirk: ...but, uh, we were being dropped off various places.
16
17Interviewer: Mm-hm.
18
19Betty Van Kirk: Um, one thing that was interesting for me was that, that I – at, uh, at the, the,
20 uh, Sunday service, Protestant service, uh, that was the only time on the ship
21 that, that we had any chance to talk to any of the GIs because we were all
22 considered, um, officers.
23
24Interviewer: Mm-hm.
25
26Betty Van Kirk: We had that status.
27
28Interviewer: [15:19] [Inaudible 15:19]? Mm-hm.
29
30Betty Van Kirk: Yes.
31
32Interviewer: Mm-hm.
33
34Betty Van Kirk: And the, uh, there weren't any WACs as I remember and the w-, there were,
35 uh, there were, uh, there was a USO Oklahoma Troop, the whole troop. That
36 was the biggest [inaudible 15:34] that had ever been sent...
37
38Interviewer: Mm-hm.
39
40Betty Van Kirk: ...overseas...
41
42Interviewer: Mm-hm.
43

1 Betty Van Kirk: ...and that was on the ship with us. So there were all those USO girls, and
2 there were nurses, and there were Red Cross.
3

4 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5

6 Betty Van Kirk: And, um, [tsk] we had to stay in the officer's area, and, eh, down below decks,
7 they, eh, eh, uh, actually they weren't kept below decks. I mean they slept
8 below decks, but they had a, an area where they could be outdoors. But there
9 were the, the GIs, and, uh, a lot of those had been home on leave. They'd
10 been over for 3 years at that point, and were b-, had, had what was it 60 days I
11 think at home...
12

13 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
14

15 Betty Van Kirk: ...30 days or 60 days, and they were being shipped back, so of course, they
16 were, they were just, eh, very low in their minds. This was terribly hard on
17 those, those men to back. But I remember this one sergeant who turned out to
18 be from Pennsylvania. In fact, he had gone to the – to, uh, [tsk] uh, Penn
19 State, and w-, I met him, and we talked at the, at the, uh, after the, the, uh, the,
20 the, uh, Sunday service, and he was able to tell me what my APO was. You
21 see, we, we knew our orders. We had orders, but it was just APO whatever
22 the, the number was. And that meant nothing to, to me.
23

24 Interviewer: [17:01] And APO is what? Your...?
25

26 Betty Van Kirk: W-, uh, that's your post office box.
27

28 Interviewer: Oh, oh. Uh-huh.
29

30 Betty Van Kirk: You see, I was being sent APO, say APO 360...
31

32 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
33

34 Betty Van Kirk: ...whatever, and – but I didn't know where APO 360 was excepting I knew I
35 was going to the Pacific. Eh, that was obvious. But, eh, he said oh, well
36 that's Hollandia you know. He knew all this. He was, he – and he was very
37 kind, I mean.
38

39 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
40

41 Betty Van Kirk: And I would say well, now tell me about it. Tell me. And I told him about
42 these 2 women who just couldn't think of enough awful things to tell us, and,
43 uh, so he – I said just tell me nice things. And he would say well, the sunsets

1 are the most beautiful in the world, and it's very beautiful, and, uh, you, you,
2 you know...
3
4Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5
6Betty Van Kirk: ...there are lots of lovely things about it.
7
8Interviewer: Mm-hm.
9
10Betty Van Kirk: And so he would tell me these nice things when I'd see him only occasionally,
11 you see.
12
13Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
14
15Betty Van Kirk: But, um, uh, the most – the officers that were going over were just as green as
16 we were.
17
18Interviewer: Mm-hm.
19
20Betty Van Kirk: They, they were, they were the ones that we were thrown with, the men as
21 well as the women officers, but, but, the – I think there was 1 major, the, the
22 nurse that, that got off at, uh, Finschhafen was a major I believe. But anyway,
23 uh, we didn't know what to expect.
24
25Interviewer: Mm-hm. [18:21] Were you frightened at all of...?
26
27Betty Van Kirk: No.
28
29Interviewer: [18:24] What was going on in your mind as you were on that ship going over?
30
31Betty Van Kirk: Not, not really.
32
33Interviewer: Mm-hm.
34
35Betty Van Kirk: I mean, o-, of course, the, uh, Tokyo Rose and all this business.
36
37Interviewer: Mm-hm.
38
39Betty Van Kirk: There was a certain amount of scuttlebutt about that, but, um, we weren't in a
40 convoy. We were set alone. Those Liberty ships at that point were just, eh,
41 they – that was not a dangerous area that we were going to.
42
43Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
44

1 Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, no, I, I, I can't remember being very fearful.
2

3 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
4

5 Betty Van Kirk: O-, of course, I've always traveled, and this was not traveling under the best of
6 circumstances.
7

8 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
9

10 Betty Van Kirk: I d-...
11

12 Interviewer: [19:02] So you had had quite a bit of an experience before you went over?
13 You said you were 34? Is that correct?
14

15 Betty Van Kirk: Yes. Yes.
16

17 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
18

19 Betty Van Kirk: And I'd gone to school in France...
20

21 Interviewer: Hm. Mm-hm.
22

23 Betty Van Kirk: ...when I was a – when I was in high school. My mother had taken my br-,
24 brother and myself over, and, uh, then of course, after I moved to California, I
25 had gone back and forth across the country. I really covered a great deal of
26 the United States. I hadn't been, I hadn't been out of the country, uh,
27 excepting that year in Europe...
28

29 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
30

31 Betty Van Kirk: ...at that time, but I had traveled a lot around the United States.
32

33 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [19:38] Well it must take a lot of courage? Do you see
34 yourself that way?
35

36 Betty Van Kirk: No, not really.
37

38 Interviewer: [19:42] As a courageous person? No?
39

40 Betty Van Kirk: No, uh, no. I really don't. Um, I, as I say, I think that the – all the women
41 that went into the Red Cross because they had to make a decision. We made
42 the decision ourselves that we wanted to go overseas. Now this was not true
43 of the nurses nor the WACs. They were sent overseas.
44

1Interviewer: Mm-hm.
2

3Betty Van Kirk: They s-, they made the decision to sign up, but they, they really had no
4 control. I've talked to many of them who wanted to go overseas but didn't
5 wangle it, you know. But then others, I'm sure didn't want to go overseas and
6 were just simply shipped out. Once they went into the service, they, they did
7 what they were told to do.
8

9Interviewer: Mm-hm.
10

11Betty Van Kirk: Whereas from the very beginning, the Red Cross, you see, we were a
12 different, we were a different group in that we, we made our decisions
13 because when we signed up, in fact, I would have gone in a month or two
14 earlier if I hadn't held out for going overseas. But when I signed up for the
15 Red Cross, they – it was for overseas. They couldn't use me here in the
16 United States.
17

18Interviewer: Mm-hm.
19

20Betty Van Kirk: I wouldn't accept assignment because I knew if I once accepted it for, for the
21 United States that it would be very difficult to get overseas, and I had already
22 made up my mind. So many of my friends m-, male friends had gone out
23 through San Francisco to the East, eh, eh, to, you know, New Guinea and
24 whatnot, and I – that's where I wanted to go. So I was delighted...
25

26Interviewer: Mm-hm.
27

28Betty Van Kirk: ...that I was going that way.
29

30Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
31

32Betty Van Kirk: Because that's where they'd, they'd gone, and I, I wanted to have the same
33 type of experience that they were having. And, uh, I was not going – I said
34 well, any, any girls can be Red Cross in the United States. They don't, eh,
35 they, they don't, they can have families or anything else and, uh, and there's
36 no reason to keep them from doing it. But I'm – I have no dependents, and I'm
37 the sort that should go overseas.
38

39Interviewer: Mm-hm.
40

41Betty Van Kirk: So I'd made that decision.
42

43Interviewer: Mm-hm.
44

1 Betty Van Kirk: And all the other girls – the Red Cross girls had likewise made the same
2 decision.
3
4 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5
6 Betty Van Kirk: So we were, we were always sort of, uh, maybe a little bolder...
7
8 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
9
10 Betty Van Kirk: ...than, than the nurses and the, and the WACs.
11
12 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
13
14 Betty Van Kirk: We were just a different type.
15
16 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
17
18 Betty Van Kirk: A little more independent.
19
20 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
21
22 Betty Van Kirk: And we stayed independent. [chuckle]
23
24 Interviewer: Mm-hm. [22:08] Were you ever married?
25
26 Betty Van Kirk: Yes, I had been married before that, and I was divorced at the, at the time.
27
28 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
29
30 Betty Van Kirk: So that was the reason that, that, uh – and I – I've never had any children, so
31 there...
32
33 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
34
35 Betty Van Kirk: ...there was no reason. And my, my brother, there wasn't any question about
36 my brother being around to take care of my mother...
37
38 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
39
40 Betty Van Kirk: ...if it were necessary.
41
42 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [22:31] So you never remarried? Um.
43
44 Betty Van Kirk: Yes.

1
2Interviewer: [Inaudible 22:34].
3
4Betty Van Kirk: I, I did remarry.
5
6Interviewer: Mm-hm.
7
8Betty Van Kirk: I remarried my husband [chuckle] [inaudible 22:37], but that – it didn't work
9 the second time.
10
11Interviewer: Mm-hm.
12
13Betty Van Kirk: It rarely does.
14
15Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
16
17Betty Van Kirk: But that was after the war was all over.
18
19Interviewer: Mm-hm. [22:44] So do you attribute any of that to the war or...
20
21Betty Van Kirk: No.
22
23Interviewer: ...is that very separate?
24
25Betty Van Kirk: No.
26
27Interviewer: Mm-hm.
28
29Betty Van Kirk: That's entirely separate.
30
31Interviewer: Mm-hm.
32
33Betty Van Kirk: It, it had nothing...
34
35Interviewer: Mm-hm.
36
37Betty Van Kirk: ...to do with the war.
38
39Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [22:53] So what, what do you classify as your biggest
40 challenge while you were overseas? [Inaudible 22:59].
41
42Betty Van Kirk: [laughter] Trying to remember the – what the G-, the GIs faces if not their
43 names. That – I had a funny experience.
44

1Interviewer: [laughter]
2
3Betty Van Kirk: Well, you see there were so few of us that they could spot us...
4
5Interviewer: Mm-hm.
6
7Betty Van Kirk: ...you know?
8
9Interviewer: Mm-hm.
10
11Betty Van Kirk: I was Betty...
12
13Interviewer: [laughter]
14
15Betty Van Kirk: ...and, and hundreds of them knew me.
16
17Interviewer: Mm-hm.
18
19Betty Van Kirk: And they all were dressed alike, and honestly they, they really didn't look that
20 different. So that was sort of w-, m-, my nightmare, that, that, uh, one of them
21 would come up and speak to me and that I wouldn't know who – wouldn't
22 place him.
23
24Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
25
26Betty Van Kirk: N-, n-, as I say, not particularly remember their names. They didn't really
27 expect that unless we knew them very well. But, uh, to at least remember
28 where I'd seen him and all the rest of it. And finally a very funny thing did
29 happen on that vein, and this was after the, after the war had ended. It was a
30 [inaudible 23:52] at our camp outside of Manila when were keeping the
31 canteen going. And we would serve coffee and donuts, oh starting around
32 2:00 in the afternoon, [tsk] and, uh, 'til about I think 7:00 or so in the evening.
33 And, uh, uh, this par-, but we'd come, the, uh, this Doris and I would come in
34 the mor-, morning and sort of, you know, get the – everything in order and
35 whatnot, and the, the, the tables – there were tables, uh, there were – that were
36 originally for the coffee drinkers, but, um, the, uh, the, the boys would come
37 and play cards or whatnot, just to – they had nothing to do. It was just a place
38 to sit to get out their, out of their, uh, tents.
39
40 And, uh, [tsk] this particular time in the morning, this, this, uh, GI in fatigues
41 and with a 2 days' growth of beard, uh, sort of called over to me and said, uh,
42 Red Cross, do you cook your donuts in Crisco? Well that didn't seem like a
43 very strange question to anybody excepting somebody that had worked for
44 many years for Proctor & Gamble, and who was working for Proctor &

1 Gamble at the time that she went into the Red Cross, and of course, Crisco is
2 one of their products.
3
4 Interviewer: Hm.
5
6 Betty Van Kirk: In fact, it was the product that originally started me with Proctor & Gamble.
7 And, uh, so I, I thought oh, my stars, you know that's a very leading question,
8 and I looked at that guy, and nothing came, nothing came, and I thought this is
9 it, this is the great – this is what I've always dreaded because it was obviously
10 somebody that knew me...
11
12 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
13
14 Betty Van Kirk: ...you see.
15
16 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
17
18 Betty Van Kirk: And I, I, I – now I don't remember whether he finally relented or, or whether
19 it finally came to me, but I, I think maybe he had to tell me that he, of course,
20 was a Proctor & Gamble salesman from...
21
22 Interviewer: Hm.
23
24 Betty Van Kirk: ...from Stockton.
25
26 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
27
28 Betty Van Kirk: Eh, Jack Noon. And the thing was I felt better later, uh, because he had
29 cornered the other Red Cross girl and said what's that, what's that Red Cross
30 girl's name. He w-, he didn't believe his eyes. He didn't really think that,
31 that I was Betty Van Kirk.
32
33 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
34
35 Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, the whole point was that he had been one of Patton's men. He'd
36 been a sergeant in Europe.
37
38 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
39
40 Betty Van Kirk: And, of course, had been gone for a long time, oh, which I knew very well,
41 and I didn't – but then I left the United States. He didn't know I'd gone into
42 the Red Cross. He hadn't gotten any communiques of – to indicate that I'd
43 gone into the Red Cross, and I didn't know that he had been shipped with all

1 these other high-point men through the canal. They didn't even bring them to
2 the United States. They just took them from Europe to Manila.
3
4 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
5
6 Betty Van Kirk: And when they got them there, of course by that time, uh, the war was – has –
7 had ended really.
8
9 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
10
11 Betty Van Kirk: So they were, they were – first they were based, uh, at, um, on Bataan,
12 temporarily on Bataan, and then the ones that had very high points, as he did
13 because he'd been in so many battles and whatnot with Patton, were brought
14 to our camp because we were – we had the highest point men that were
15 waiting for transportation back to the United States, so...
16
17 Interviewer: [27:20] So that meant that they were the next to be shipped out?
18
19 Betty Van Kirk: Theoretically. Yes, that's right.
20
21 Interviewer: [27:24] [Inaudible 27:24] high points.
22
23 Betty Van Kirk: Yes.
24
25 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
26
27 Betty Van Kirk: Yes.
28
29 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
30
31 Betty Van Kirk: That's right.
32
33 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
34
35 Betty Van Kirk: They w-, they were shipped out depending on their points.
36
37 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
38
39 Betty Van Kirk: And so when they got to our camp, they were just sitting there waiting for the
40 n-, for the ships to take them back, and so that's how he happened to be there.
41 But, uh, we, we really had some very nice times after that. Of course, he
42 shaved after that. [laughter] And then he, he had some other clothes that
43 didn't look quite that, you know...
44

1Interviewer: Mm-hm.
2
3Betty Van Kirk: ...not the old fatigues. So he sort of spruced up. And we went into Manila,
4 eh, 2 or 3 times...
5
6Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
7
8Betty Van Kirk: ...uh, together and went to the Red Cross Club. Of course, I, uh, there were
9 only certain places we were allowed to go and it was only because we were
10 very old friends that I was allowed to go with him because, uh, I was only
11 supposed to date officers because I was theoretically an officer. They were
12 very rigid.
13
14Interviewer: Mm-hm.
15
16Betty Van Kirk: MacArthur was very fussy about that...
17
18Interviewer: Mm-hm.
19
20Betty Van Kirk: ...that officers...
21
22Interviewer: Mm-hm.
23
24Betty Van Kirk: ...the nurses could only date officers...
25
26Interviewer: Mm-hm.
27
28Betty Van Kirk: ...theoretically. I mean there were, there were times when – but if, if it was a
29 relative or a very old friend...
30
31Interviewer: Mm-hm.
32
33Betty Van Kirk: ...why of course that was a different thing.
34
35Interviewer: Mm-hm.
36
37Betty Van Kirk: So Jack and I had some, some fun times together, but that was my nightmare
38 come true [laughter] as far as recognizing him.
39
40Interviewer: That's true. I can imagine. [28:42] Do you have any other stories? Any funny
41 stories? Anything that's happened to you – that happened to you when you
42 were there?
43

1 Betty Van Kirk: Well, um, I was telling – I told twice recently, and I think this is sort of a
2 funny story because nobody else is gonna tell this to you. But it happened that
3 I took one of these tiny little turtles to New Guinea. They used to sell them
4 down at Fisherman's Wharf...
5

6 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
7

8 Betty Van Kirk: ...and some of them were painted...
9

10 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
11

12 Betty Van Kirk: ...and some weren't. Well we always knew that the painted ones couldn't live
13 very long because the paint would, would kill them. But I was given by one
14 of these s-, men that was shipping out or something, and I didn't buy it
15 myself, I know, but somebody had this brainstorm. Oh, Betty should have a
16 little turtle. She should have a pet. So I was given one of these little turtles,
17 and I'd had it here for about a year, here in this apartment, and, uh, when,
18 when I decided to go overseas, I rented my apartment furnished to a very nice
19 older couple, and Mrs. [Greer 29:43] said oh, yes, she would keep Bob the
20 Turtle. She'd be glad to. Well then I – when we came back and were at
21 Stoneman, I came to see her, of course, and, and to see everything was going
22 well, and she informed me that Bob the Turtle had been, uh, had gotten out of
23 his, of his, uh, I had s-, a sort of a [tsk] eh, well, eh, it was, um, a glass bowl...
24

25 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
26

27 Betty Van Kirk: ...that he was in. And he'd gotten out of it a couple of times. Well I was
28 horrified because he – in the time I'd had him before, he'd never gotten out,
29 and I knew that if he got out, then th-, w-, it was anybody's guess how soon
30 he'd be stepped on or, you know, get under the radiator or something. So I
31 felt very badly about it, and I told my roommate back at Stoneman about this.
32 I said, you know, he'd never gotten out before. I don't know what she's doing
33 differently from the way I did it, but I, I know his days are numbered. And
34 she s-, she thought a little while, and then she said, Betty, why don't you take
35 him with us? And, uh, I thought about it, and I thought well, you know, maybe
36 that's what I should do. And of course, there was no big thing about it. I had
37 the little paper box that he had – I'd brought him home from Fisherman's
38 Wharf in and which they shipped them all over the United States in at that
39 point.
40

41 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
42

43 Betty Van Kirk: Now it's illegal.
44

1Interviewer: Mm-hm.
2
3Betty Van Kirk: I'm sure they...
4
5Interviewer: Mm-hm.
6
7Betty Van Kirk: ...they're, they're long since gone because, of course, they do die. It's, it's a,
8 it's dreadful. But anyway, of course, mine had eaten. That was the whole
9 point. He would eat. A lot of them wouldn't eat in captivity. But mine would
10 eat meat.
11
12Interviewer: Mm-hm.
13
14Betty Van Kirk: And so he was doing very well. So I thought about it, and I thought well, why
15 not. So I c-, the next time I came over, I picked up Bob the Turtle, and I just
16 said well, we've just got to keep this as a secret, eh, this to my roommate.
17 Well, that's fine, you know, we'd keep it as a secret. And I, uh, I felt that on
18 the ship it was very important because I was rooming with all these girls that
19 didn't know at all r-, the USO and whatnot girls. There were – oh, I think
20 there were 18 of us in our cabin, and we were, we were 3 decks. The b-,
21 bunks were 3 decks. And I happened to be on the, the bottom, and, eh,
22 everything was dark, and I was in a very dark corner, and I just simply put
23 Bob the Turtle in the – my helmet, in my metal helmet and hooked it over the
24 head of the bed against the wall. [tsk] He couldn't get out because of the
25 curve of the helmet. And I put a little bit of water in the bottom of it. And,
26 uh, eh, nobody would pay any attention to the fact my helmet was hooked
27 over the head of my bed in, in the dark corner.
28
29 And so that – there he was and th-, and I watched him, and I, you know,
30 sneaked a little bit of meat from the – our t-, dinner table and, and brought it
31 down to him and took care of him perfectly well. And then finally, I did,
32 when, uh, we were in the, in the – getting in the South Pacific and it was so
33 warm, I towards the end, I smuggled him upstairs. I'd bring him up in my
34 pocket, and then there were just a very few people that were allowed to know
35 that I had Bob the Turtle. I'd, I'd have him out, you know, and we'd make a
36 little cluster of people, and nobody would see that this little thing was out in
37 the sunshine in the light. You know, I was concerned about him being in the
38 dark all the time. So the, uh, and finally in the end, the only person that got
39 upset about it was one of the girls that didn't know about it until the last few
40 days, and she was just insulted that I hadn't let her in on it.
41
42Interviewer: [laughter]
43

1 Betty Van Kirk: But the whole idea was that there would be people that might look upon it as a
2 reptile and, you know, it would get loose, and they'd get nightmares and all
3 the rest. That was the reason I kept it a secret.
4

5 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
6

7 Betty Van Kirk: But it was never a secret once I got to, to New Guinea.
8

9 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
10

11 Betty Van Kirk: And I would take him, uh, uh, people a-, they had their own pets at the
12 hospital. They had, uh, monkeys and dogs mostly.
13

14 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
15

16 Betty Van Kirk: And the nurses had them.
17

18 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
19

20 Betty Van Kirk: And my little, my little turtle was almost nothing compared to that. But the
21 boys used to like to have me bring him on, on the wards because then I'd leave
22 him and then they'd know I'd come back later in the day to pick him up. I
23 never left him any place overnight. I always took him back. And mostly
24 people were afraid he'd be stolen, but of course...
25

26 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
27

28 Betty Van Kirk: ...and he was safe in my quarters. But anyway that was Bob the Turtle, and
29 he – I brought him back to the United States, and he finally traveled with me
30 again and he died in Springfield, Missouri. I had him for about 4 years.
31 [laughter]
32

33 Interviewer: [34:21] That long?
34

35 Betty Van Kirk: Mm-hm.
36

37 Interviewer: [34:22] Really? [laughter]
38

39 Betty Van Kirk: Yeah.
40

41 Interviewer: [34:23] I used to have those little turtles when I was younger.
42

43 Betty Van Kirk: Yeah.
44

1Interviewer: They didn't last more than a week. [laughter]
2
3Betty Van Kirk: Oh, well. This one would eat.
4
5Interviewer: Mm-hm.
6
7Betty Van Kirk: And he got jungle rot. That was the only thing that – we were all afraid of
8 jungle rot.
9
10Interviewer: [34:34] W-, what was that, like what...?
11
12Betty Van Kirk: Well that was just a, eh, eh, with us it was a, a skin, you know, eh, eh, it was
13 sort of a, eh, eh, a skin disease. And we were – we – you'd get it between
14 your toes or anything. It was, it was sort of like athletes foot or whatnot.
15
16Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
17
18Betty Van Kirk: But w-, I called it jungle rot. Actually, a l-, all along hi neck, he, he got a –
19 sort of a white mold.
20
21Interviewer: Mm-hm.
22
23Betty Van Kirk: And – in New Guinea. And I would wipe it off with, with a Kleenex.
24
25Interviewer: Mm-hm.
26
27Betty Van Kirk: And – but if I could get raw meat for him instead of the cooked meat, it would
28 go away. It w-, it was [chuckle] sort of like scurvy or something.
29
30Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
31
32Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, so I would try. I'd go to no end of trouble to try to get raw meat. It
33 wasn't easy to do because most of our meat came, uh, canned, you see...
34
35Interviewer: Mm-hm.
36
37Betty Van Kirk: ...from, from Australia. But once in a while, we'd get raw meat, and I'd get it
38 for him. But, uh, it was because he ate so well I'm sure that he lived as long
39 as he did, and when he finally died, he died from lying on his back and not
40 being able to turn himself over. Th-, turtles die when, eh, they can't stand
41 lying on their backs.
42
43Interviewer: Mm-hm.
44

1 Betty Van Kirk: Their hearts stop. And, uh, he'd turned himself over many, many, many
2 times, but I think he'd gotten sort of, uh, [tsk] well, it wasn't exactly old age
3 because turtles can live to be very old, but it, it – he, he was just w-, got in a
4 weakened condition and obviously that time he couldn't turn himself over.
5

6 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
7

8 Betty Van Kirk: So that, that's how poor Bob the Turtle died.
9

10 Interviewer: [laughter]
11

12 Betty Van Kirk: But he was a well-traveled turtle.
13

14 Interviewer: [laughter] I see. Um, I'm concerned pretty much about what you did, uh,
15 about your responsibilities. You've mentioned that before. [36:20] Um, what
16 did you enjoy most about your travels or most about the work that you did
17 overseas?
18

19 Betty Van Kirk: [sigh] Well I don't really know. I, uh, uh, the, the GIs of course...
20

21 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
22

23 Betty Van Kirk: ... and, and the, the women that I was, was with. Uh, that I thought the
24 women were a very fine group. I enjoyed the nurses. Uh, I never – didn't feel
25 that I was doing anything that anybody couldn't do. I mean it was, it was
26 nothing really.
27

28 Interviewer: [36:56] What did you do specifically in the hospital?
29

30 Betty Van Kirk: Well we'd go on the wards.
31

32 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
33

34 Betty Van Kirk: And, uh, eh, of course we would take, uh, any anything, you know toothpaste,
35 cigarettes, uh, anything that the, that the boys needed, we'd take baskets
36 around...
37

38 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
39

40 Betty Van Kirk: ...and provide them with that. Uh, of course most of the, most of the boys
41 had money and could buy the things they wanted, but if they didn't for any
42 reason, why we would pro-...
43
44 ...by plane...

1
2Interviewer: Mm-hm.
3
4Betty Van Kirk: ...from, uh, Japan.
5
6Interviewer: Mm-hm.
7
8Betty Van Kirk: And uh, I, I don't know whether some were, eh, I'm, I, I guess they were all
9 from Japan. The ones I knew the most about were anyway. And this was
10 very interesting. W-, what my duty, of course the nurses were, they were
11 putting them through their first elementary, uh, physicals and whatnot, and
12 they were busy with the doctors doing that, but the Red Cross, they, eh, they
13 used to handle – I handled the next-of-kin messages. And this was a matter of
14 putting the 2 together, getting the messages and the, and the, the men together.
15
16Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
17
18Betty Van Kirk: [tsk] And, uh, I, uh, there's a picture of me with, with all this file and business,
19 but then meeting those men that had been prisoners of war was really a-, all
20 the Red Cross around Manila were just dying to meet those men, so that, that
21 was a, a break that I got in on that...
22
23Interviewer: Mm-hm.
24
25Betty Van Kirk: ...particular experience. And, uh, one man that I, that I got to know quite
26 well, uh, had been, um, he was a major, and he had been taken on, um, uh,
27 he'd been taking on Corregidor...
28
29Interviewer: Mm-hm.
30
31Betty Van Kirk: ...and he, he told various stories about Corregidor that were very interesting,
32 and he said how fortunate he'd been not to have been on Bataan because the
33 men on Bataan, oh so many of them died, you know, in that death march and
34 so forth. But he, he was, uh, um, eh, the, uh, Corregidor was taken, and they
35 were just taken off. They didn't have to go through that awful marching
36 business that the other men did. But th-, they were, um, they w-, those men –
37 it was very interesting to, to see them and then later to see – unfortunately,
38 things didn't work out with that man.
39
40 He, um, he of course was so thrilled about – they all were so thrilled that they
41 were on their way home and all the rest of it, and, and they, they told lots of
42 funny stories and whatnot, and of course, they looked thin and pale and
43 whatnot, but even in the – they, they got home in a hurry. The, the high point
44 men sat around, but the, the prisoners of war were brought home in short

1 order. So he was only there at the camp for about a week I guess. And this
2 particular man, uh, but he had told me about his family and anything he could
3 do for me anytime, I really hadn't done anything for him, you know, [laughter]
4 there, but he felt that I had, and, uh, I – anything I could – that he could do for
5 me. Well he did. It was funny because, uh, when we came back, I came back
6 on a troop ship a-, and it was that Christmas when everybody was g-, coming
7 home, and they – when we got several days out of San Francisco, they
8 announced we would not go to San Francisco, the harbor was full of ships,
9 they were taking us down to San Pedro...
10
11Interviewer: Mm-hm.
12
13Betty Van Kirk: ...in Los Angeles...
14
15Interviewer: Hm.
16
17Betty Van Kirk: ...and that's where we were going to, we were going to land. Well of course,
18 that floored me because I just saw myself getting right off my ship and, and
19 going right home, and here I was going to have to somehow or other get from
20 Los Angeles to San Francisco. And this was interesting how, how – what had
21 happened to me even as – even though I've considered myself quite
22 independent and even though I hadn't been in so long. I was in a little bit less
23 than a year...
24
25Interviewer: Mm-hm.
26
27Betty Van Kirk: ...because I, I actually didn't go in until after Christmas and I guess '45, that
28 has to be, and th-, w-, it was for '45 wasn't it?
29
30Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
31
32Betty Van Kirk: And then, uh, this was December of '45. So from January...
33
34Interviewer: Mm-hm.
35
36Betty Van Kirk: ...'til December, it w-, it was closer to 11 months...
37
38Interviewer: Mm-hm.
39
40Betty Van Kirk: ...that I was in. And, uh, we, um, we, we landed in, eh, down there in
41 Southern California, and then they, they came, the Red Cross came and said
42 well, I've – we've got your birth, you know, your – you'll go right on up on
43 the, on the, uh, uh, Starlight to San Francisco, and I said oh, well I can't go.
44 I'm not gonna go anyplace without my footlocker. See I had my hand luggage

1 and that was all. And this was something that had – that was a very important
2 thing. It wasn't that, that I had such valuable things in that footlocker, but
3 then what I did have was in there, and everybody had their horror stories
4 about being separated from their footlockers and...
5
6Interviewer: Mm-hm.
7
8Betty Van Kirk: ...never seeing their footlockers again, so I just said I, I'm not going until I get
9 my footlocker. Well the footlocker was not gonna be unloaded until later on
10 in the day, and this was very disconcerting...
11
12Interviewer: Mm-hm.
13
14Betty Van Kirk: ...to the Red Cross.
15
16Interviewer: Mm-hm.
17
18Betty Van Kirk: And – but they, they were nice enough not to really force me, and so th-, I
19 called my major – I don't remember his last name now – who lived down in
20 [inaudible 42:45] one of those towns.
21
22Interviewer: Mm-hm.
23
24Betty Van Kirk: It wasn't Long Beach, but it wasn't that far from, from, eh, it might have been
25 Santa Ana. I don't know where it was. And anyway, I g-, I got a hold of him,
26 and, uh, he and his wife came over the next morning and picked me up, and
27 we went out and got my footlocker, and then they took me to their home so
28 that I'd see their house, and we had, uh, luncheon or dinner, whatever, and
29 then they took me to the train that night. So it was a 24 – I went up 24 hours
30 later than I would've otherwise. But to make the effort to hold out and say no,
31 I'm not going with the crowd...
32
33Interviewer: Mm-hm.
34
35Betty Van Kirk: ...after just 11 months of being in the service, it, it w-, I was floored at how
36 much effort it took out of me to, to do something that I would have done so
37 easily a year before because I was completely used to negotiating things
38 myself...
39
40Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
41
42Betty Van Kirk: But it, it took a great deal, which shows what regimentation does for you...
43
44Interviewer: Mm-hm.

1
2Betty Van Kirk: ...in a short order.
3
4Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5
6Betty Van Kirk: And I had not been regimented like most these people.
7
8Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
9
10Betty Van Kirk: The, the change in, in myself w-, it just – I could hardly believe it. But later,
11 the sad part was when I s-, well when I saw that major and, of course, his, his
12 very attractive wife and so forth, and oh, they had a beautiful car, which of
13 course she'd, uh, been driving very little because gas was hard to get. So it
14 was just a beautiful car. And he had on his, his Eisenhower jacket. He looked
15 so nice, and, of course, they – he'd put on weight. He just looked like an
16 entirely different man...
17
18Interviewer: Mm-hm.
19
20Betty Van Kirk: ...uh, from the way he looked a-, a-, at the camp outside of Manila when he
21 had on fatigues and was thin and pale and all the rest of it. [tsk] And, uh, I, e-,
22 everything – his – both of his sons had lived. They were both in the, in the
23 navy. They'd all 3 survived, which was really quite remarkable.
24
25Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
26
27Betty Van Kirk: And everything just seemed so great. And do you know he showed up 2 or 3
28 times after that here in San Francisco what with coming up to the Presidio and
29 whatnot. I think he went back into the service. He had not been in the service
30 before. He'd been a, he'd been a – as most of those men – had been, uh,
31 reserve officers.
32
33Interviewer: Mm-hm.
34
35Betty Van Kirk: But he, he didn't go back to his job. He'd been an engineer for the City of
36 Los Angeles I believe.
37
38Interviewer: Mm-hm.
39
40Betty Van Kirk: Uh, he didn't go back to that. He, he went back into the army for a while.
41
42Interviewer: Mm-hm.
43
44Betty Van Kirk: And he absolutely went to pot.

1
2Interviewer: [45:23] Oh, really?
3
4Betty Van Kirk: He became a total alcohol.
5
6Interviewer: Mm-hm.
7
8Betty Van Kirk: And, and, uh, his wife finally had to divorce him. It was just terribly sad.
9
10Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
11
12Betty Van Kirk: But, eh...
13
14Interviewer: [45:33] But that's pretty characteristic, though, isn't it?
15
16Betty Van Kirk: It, it's very characteristic.
17
18Interviewer: Yeah.
19
20Betty Van Kirk: Yeah.
21
22Interviewer: Yeah.
23
24Betty Van Kirk: Vietnam and all the rest of it.
25
26Interviewer: Yeah, exactly.
27
28Betty Van Kirk: And yet he was an older man. This goes against my previous statement that
29 mostly the older men could take it better than the younger ones...
30
31Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
32
33Betty Van Kirk: ...because, uh, they had these grown sons.
34
35Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
36
37Betty Van Kirk: But I felt badly about that.
38
39Interviewer: Well you mentioned the regimentation and the change, uh, that you saw after
40 11 months. [45:56] Did you recognize any other changes, um, in yourself
41 after the 11 months overseas?
42

1 Betty Van Kirk: I don't – [sigh] well I was very yellow from the Atabrine. My mother was
2 shocked when she finally saw me, [chuckle] but that, that, uh, th-, that isn't
3 what you mean at all. Uh, I don't know.
4

5 Interviewer: [45:23] You don't know?
6

7 Betty Van Kirk: I didn't think s-, uh, as I say, I was mature...
8

9 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
10

11 Betty Van Kirk: ...at that point.
12

13 Interviewer: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
14

15 Betty Van Kirk: A-, and I don't th-, I don't know whether it made any changes. I'll have to ask
16 some of my other friends.
17

18 Interviewer: Re-, w-, well, yeah.
19

20 Betty Van Kirk: What – how they [inaudible 45:35].
21

22 Interviewer: [45:35] Did you, did you see any change in relationships with, with your
23 women friends or male friends? Did you view, uh, civilian women differently
24 than those who went overseas or?
25

26 Betty Van Kirk: I don't think so.
27

28 Interviewer: [46:49] You don't think so?
29

30 Betty Van Kirk: No.
31

32 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
33

34 Betty Van Kirk: I had never had any, [throat clearing] any [throat clearing] – excuse me –
35 [coughing] any experience with the military before...
36

37 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
38

39 Betty Van Kirk: ...having been raised as a Quaker and in a college town and so forth, and so
40 that, eh, that w-, that has been a change to me.
41

42 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
43

1 Betty Van Kirk: And it's still – I still am amazed as when I go over to Letterman or over to the
2 Presidio or whatnot. Uh, eh, we go have luncheons and whatnot. I – when I
3 joined the Women's Overseas Service League and I was one of – I was
4 actually the first World War II, uh, member of the San Francisco Unit of the,
5 of the Women's Overseas Service League.
6

7 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
8

9 Betty Van Kirk: There were a couple of other women that joined in very short order. I mean,
10 uh, we were processed, eh, more or less the same time, but I, uh, one – and
11 one of those was a WAC and the other one was a nurse. But I, I really was the
12 very first one to join because I was so charmed by the World War I member,
13 [Elizabeth Sperry 47:50], who, who got in touch with me and invited me to
14 the meeting and so forth. And I said, uh, well, I'll join f-...
15
16
17/lo