MARGARET E. OAKS

Denver, Colorado Unit

Transcript of an Oral History Interview

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Margaret E. Oaks

PREFACE

This transcript is the product of an interview conducted in April, 1986, for the Women's Overseas Service League, by Marjorie Brown.

Signed, dated agreements of release and biographical information accompany the original cassette.

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers

Lansing, Michigan 15 June, 1989

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Oral History Project

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Margaret E. Oaks

8 Denver, Colorado Unit

NOTE: Special thanks to the interviewer,

10 Marjorie Brown, of the Denver Unit.

MB: What is your name?

12 MO: My name is Margaret E. Oaks.

MB: Do you know approximately what time you joined the

14 Denver Unit of WOSL?

MO: I'm not real certain, but I think it was around

16 somewhere around 1978. MB: Were you in the Service?

18 MO: Oh, yes, I was in the Army Nurse Corps, and I retired as a lieutenant colonel with 21 years service, in

20 **1970.**

MB: What made you decide to come into the Army Nurse

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| 22 | **MO:** | **Corps?****I came in the 3rd of July, 1944. It was during** | **the** |
| **24** |  | **War, and it seemed like the right thing to do;****also, that type of life appealed to me. I liked** | **but****the** |
| **26** |  | **challenge and the travel and all that goes with** | **the** |
|  |  | **Army.** |  |

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28 MB: Before you came into the Army Nurse Corps, what did you do?

30 MO: I was about 6 months out of nurses' training. I graduated from nurses' training in January, 1944, and

32 came into the Army in July.

m b : What were your jobs when you were in the Army Nurse

34 Corps?

MO: Overseas, we acted as an air evac hospital and

36 received everybody in direct from the front. I worked on almost everything except, probably,

38 psychiatry. Certainly OB, general surgery, TB, medicine, supervision. I guess that covers almost

40 everything except psychiatry.

MB: How long did you say you were in the Service?

42 MO: For 21 years.

MB: Where did your travels take you?

44 MO: I was stationed first for my basic training at Camp White in Medford, Oregon. Then I went to Madigan

46 Army Hospital in Fort Lewis, and from there I went overseas, to Europe.

48 We landed in Scotland; went down through Scotland, England, France, and served there, in

50 Mourmelon-Le-Grand: Then came back to the States and went to Fletcher General Hospital in Cambridge, Ohio,

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and when that closed, I went to Crile General Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio.

When that closed, I went to Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island, New York. We closed that, and I went to Madigan Army Hospital at Fort Lewis, Washington, for five years; went back to Europe and was at Fontainebleau, France, and in Stuttgart, Germany: Came back to the States to the seven month administrative course at Fort Sam Houston (Texas). Then five years at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital, one year at Tooele Ordinance Depot (Utah) after I was married. Then I got out of the Service there because of pregnancy.

I went back in when Beth, my daughter, was four years old and went to Frankfurt, Germany. I came back to Fitzsimmons Army Hospital for another year and a half, where I retired in 1970.

Tell me about the kind of housing you had when you were in the Service.

It depended on where you were. During the War, you were in monasteries, old caserns; just about anything the Army could take over and make livable. As far as at the main hospitals, we were in usually one room with bathroom facilities down the hall. No cooking

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facilities, as such. We ate in the mess hall or out at restaurants when we wanted to.

The last time I was overseas, my husband and daughter were with me, and we had some housing at the HICOG Apartments in Frankfurt, which were very nice. Before that, on our last tour there we rented a home out in Massenheim, near Frankfurt. Other than that, just barracks style; sometimes just open-bay, depending on where you were overseas.

What was the nature of the medical care that you had? For me? I have no complaints about medical care in the Service.

Tell me about the uniforms that you wore?

When I went in, in 1944, there were still a few of the two-tone blue ones that were being issued. They were recalled very shortly, and we were given green class A's, and then we bought the pink skirts and green blouses, which were our class A uniforms (dress uniforms). We had the brown and white seersucker duty uniforms, which we used for some years -- I can't remember how many. Then we went to whites. Our class A uniforms changed to the taupe uniforms (I don't remember the years), but we wore them for some years. Then we changed back to green class A's, and then into our dress blues.

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Can you tell me a couple of experiences that were particularly touching, or funny, or important, in your career?

I think the first thing that ever really hit me that I always remembered was when we got off the boat coming across the channel. We came across at night, during the War; got off at Le Harve, in France, and marched in formation to the train station.

As we got off the boat, and looked, the city was just a mass of rubble. As we marched down through the town, there was nothing but concrete foundations and columns and just rubble, every place. It occurred to me immediately that we in the United States don't even know what war is. We lose people from our families and our friends, but we never have had to suffer the destruction of everything else that we own. These people over there -- everything was just utterly demolished, including their families.

What required the greatest adjustment for you when you came into the Service?

I didn't have to adjust at all. I came directly after six months out of training and it was pretty much the same: Rules, regulations, hours to be in. I did pretty much as I was told, the same as I had been. To me, it was nothing detrimental or unusual.

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| **138** |  | **When it became evident that people could stay after****the War, that was fine with me.** |
| **140** | **MB:****MO:** | **After you left the Service, what did you do?****My husband and daughter and I settled here in Aurora,** |
| **142** |  | **and my husband died in April of 1980. I still live****here. My daughter is now almost 25, and she's an RN,** |
| **144** |  | **with her bachelor of science. I do volunteer work at****Fitzsimmons, I drive for Meals on Wheels, I do a lot** |
|  |  | of **church** work, work **with the Channel** 9 **Health Fair.** |

MB: When you first came into the Army Nurse Corps, did you plan on making it a career?

MO: I don't think anyone thought about careers during World War II. We were just there because we were needed. Then it became evident that we were going to have occupation forces, and we were going to have a lot of casualties left that would be needing care. It just seemed to me the thing to do to stay in -- the benefits and the travel, which to me was the greatest, and the challenges and the new people to meet constantly, to me were a great way to live.

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I guess that's the main things.

MB: What does being a member of WOSL mean to you?

MO: I think it's satisfying to me to know that we pinpoint certain patriotic things that we support. Also, I've enjoyed knowing several families that we

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have more-or-less adopted in the past and helped out.

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156 MB:

They were veterans' families, and there was great illness or whatever; and we helped these families with as many things financially and morally as we could, and I like that kind of thing.

Thank you very much.

158 End of Interview

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Lansing, Michigan

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