

1 **Interview of Eleanor Carey on her service as a career U.S. Air Force nurse**

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4Ruth Stewart: Eleanor Carey is being interviewed as a member of the WOSL, San
5 Antonio, Texas, unit at San Antonio, Texas, on October 22nd, 2003.
6 Eleanor was born on March 21st, 1928 and is a resident of the Army
7 Residence Community in San Antonio. Ruth Stewart is interviewing,
8 assisted by Carol Habgood. [00:27] Eleanor, tell us about your joining the
9 service.

10

11Eleanor Carey: Well, I decided one day that, um, I was sort of bored with what I was
12 doing, which was nursing. And it was grand, but I really, I really was
13 bored with it, so I decided that I would just take two years off and go in
14 the air force and that would do, 'cause at that time that was the average
15 term.

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17Ruth Stewart: [00:50] Where were you at that time?

18

19Eleanor Carey: I was in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania and I was working in a VA hospital and
20 [inaudible 00:56] sorta thing and... It was just, oh yeah, c'mon I need to
21 get a change. And I informed my family that I was doing this. And uh,
22 they were a little unhappy about, you know, losing me and etcetera,
23 etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, but I decided I was doing it anyhow. And I
24 went to the, um – no, no, I, I wrote a letter to Washington to the air force
25 and asked them for a – to send me a, uh, uh, registration for – to apply for
26 a commission. So, I got the paperwork back and I filled the form out and I
27 got it notarized and everything and sent it back. So, I always say I got a
28 mail order commission really in the first place. [chuckle]

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30Ruth Stewart: [1:40] And this was air force?

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32Eleanor Carey: And this was air force.

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34Ruth Stewart: [1:42] And what year?

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36Eleanor Carey: In 1955. And so anyhow, we, uh, I, I just waited for them. And
37 somebody said, "Well where are you going to go?" And I said, "I don't
38 know. Whatever, where ever they tell me to go, I'll go", you know? And
39 then they notified me about joining up for, uh, orientation. I went to
40 Gunter Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, for three weeks. I met
41 another equally great group of people. And uh, then I was assigned to
42 Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. That was my first assignment. And
43 we had heard so much in orientation about the hospitals and that the air
44 force was getting modern hospital because they were – they had just

1 separated from the army not too long before. And so, we were going to
2 get these great hospitals.
3 So, I got there, to Dover Air Force Base, and it was a 50-bed hospital.
4 And, uh, they, they told us also that we would mostly be general duty
5 nurses. But, however, you know, if we had specialties, we could be
6 specialists. But um, you were, you know, they could decide to, to change
7 this. Well they changed it on me, 'cause they assigned me to the operating
8 room. [chuckle] And this little hospital has a [inaudible 2:53] growing up
9 between the floor boards and stuff like this. [chuckle] So... I thought,
10 "This is not really the new hospital that they promised me", but that was
11 okay. And I learned to, you know, I learned – adapted to whatever – if I
12 was in the operating room in the morning and back on the ward in the
13 afternoon and that kind of thing – on call for the OR once in a while. And
14 I, you know, I sort of got along with it. And we were weren't doing really
15 major, major surgery. We were doing appendectomies and so forth.

16
17 And um, so I decided I wanted overseas, you know, where ever they
18 wanted me. So, I got orders for Athens, Greece. I didn't even know they
19 had air force in Athens, Greece. And uh, so I packed my bags and, and
20 took off and went to Athens. It took me seven days to get there because
21 they kept moving me, you know. I had to wait in one place and uh, I spent
22 two days in the Azores. And if you've ever spent two days in the Azores,
23 you get pretty windblown. And uh, so then I went to some place in Africa
24 and I had to wait there about three days, you know, before I got on... But
25 I had a ball, you know, it was – I didn't know very many people in this
26 place, but everybody was very, very friendly. And I finally arrived in
27 Athens; and uh, [book 4:12] told me not to unpack because I was there
28 with a detachment – an air evac detachment.

29
30 In meantime, I had gone to flight school. And uh, so they told me not to
31 unpack because, uh, they were getting a message from, um, Germany – the
32 headquarters; and we might be losing our detachment there. So, we did
33 lose our detachment there. But I had another month in, um, Athens, which
34 was great because [chuckle] nobody knew what to do with me, right? So,
35 I was living on the economy and I lived in a great, um, place that was a,
36 uh, oh what we would call, um, what in the world would we call the, uh –
37 kind of a motel-type thing but it was a very nice motel. I mean it was kind
38 of a first-class motel.

39
40 And I would go into the base every morning and have some coffee with
41 everybody and do this, that and the other thing – read *Peanuts*, of course.
42 And, uh, everything was fine, you know. And then I'd get on the bus and
43 go back to the motel or go to a party if there was one – or go to the club.
44 And there were a lot of parties and I got invited to all of them 'cause they

1 were short on females [chuckle], so I was always at them. And uh, one
2 time the navy was having this big party and they were bringing their own,
3 their own chefs off the ship and... But they were having a party in the
4 hotel, so they, uh, sent me an invitation and I replied, "Yes". Well there
5 were two marines – navy, um – no two marine flyers that were living next
6 to me. And they wanted to go to that party. So, they called the – and told
7 them that, uh, the navy and said, "Well gee, we have, we have a woman to
8 bring with us", you know. "Oh well c'mon", you know [chuckle], so...
9 They didn't tell them that I had already been invited [chuckle]. So, we
10 went to stuff like that and it was really...

11
12 I did a lot of touring around the city and so forth. And uh, someone was
13 talking the other about Smokers Restaurant in Athens. I guess it wasn't
14 here, but anyhow that was one of our favorite meeting places. And after
15 almost a month they finally got me on a – they got my orders and got me a
16 new airfare to Saudi Arabia. And I arrived there at 2:00 in the morning.
17 And um, I got, uh, I went to the BOQ when they rest-... Back then, the
18 club was right across the street and the club was open 24-hours a day. So,
19 after I was, you know, got my bags in and stuff, I thought, "Well I better
20 go over and get some coffee", 'cause it was then becoming early morning.
21 And I forgot which way they said I should go when I got out of the BOQ;
22 and when I did, uh, I turned and I looked left and all I could see was sand
23 all to the horizon. I mean there was nothing. And then I turned to the
24 right and it was the club. So, but it was – the, the sand just blew my mind.
25 And I went over there and had some breakfast and so forth; or some
26 coffee, at least.

27
28Ruth Stewart: [laughter]

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30Eleanor Carey: And I got into the, uh, 50 bed hospital again here. [chuckle] I knew 50 bed
31 hospitals intimately. And, um, but I was supposed to, uh, when I was not
32 flying, I would be working in the hospital clinic. So, that worked out well.
33 And then the senior nurse came over – my chief nurse who was a captain
34 and I was a 1st lieutenant so, you know, we had a lot of rank in that outfit,
35 of course. And so, I did, uh... Probably one of the most exciting things I
36 had was being a flight nurse in the [inaudible 7:46]. We flew passengers,
37 patients and cargo all in the same aircraft. And um, it was all C-54's and
38 uh... It was an adventure. Every, every landing was a new adventure.
39 [chuckle] We were not sure where or when we were going to land and so
40 forth. And we usually, uh, RON, remained overnight, in Turkey. And uh,
41 that was an adventure in Turkey finding a hotel room, you know, so forth,
42 that had a bathroom in it. And that's what we did. Uh...that's what I did
43 for that whole year. And it was, you know, I got to see great places...
44

1Ruth Stewart: [8:25] That was in 1957?
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3Eleanor Carey: That would be '57, yeah. And uh, '57, '58 in that time, yeah. And uh, so
4 I had a wonderful time. I just took off every week or every other week.
5 The other nurse took one and I took the other. And so, I got into some
6 places and I was in, uh... I was in Beirut. I loved...absolutely loved
7 Beirut. We would go to Turkey and sometimes we would... What we did
8 in Turkey, we traded the patients, you know. We sent the patients that
9 were going on to Germany; and then they gave us the patients that were
10 coming back to the desert. And uh, so we would usually get into Beirut,
11 which was absolutely the most, I thought, the most beautiful city in the
12 world. And it is not the most beautiful now, of course, after the war, so...
13 But it was very sophisticated. And I'm a kid from a small town and I'm
14 carrying around about five different kinds of currency in my wallet – that
15 I'm dining in Beirut with a crew, you know, and stuff like that. So, it was
16 really a great adventure. I loved every bit of it, but I would do it all over
17 again at any time.
18

19 So, from there, I went to Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas. And I had
20 thought I would stay out of that place...or out of Texas anyhow. [chuckle]
21 And, uh, I worked in an intensive care unit there. It was a good duty. I
22 met a lot of people. And from there I went to the University of
23 Pennsylvania and got my bachelor's degree.
24

25Ruth Stewart: [9:56] What year was that?
26

27Eleanor Carey: Uh...I got my bachelor's in '62. So, I went there from '60 to '62. And
28 uh, that was, yeah, that was great. It was near – it was about 80 miles
29 away from my home. So, you know, I got to go home on weekends and
30 things like that. And at that time, it worked out really well 'cause my
31 mom was terminally ill [inaudible both talking 10:20].
32

33Ruth Stewart: [10:20] Now this is following termination from the air force?
34

35Eleanor Carey: No, I'm this is... No, I'm in the air force...
36

37Ruth Stewart: [10:23] Or this is...the air force sent you?
38

39Eleanor Carey: ...oh, the air force sent me, yeah. Then I came back. Let's see, where I
40 went after the, after there... Oh, I went to recruiting. And I spent three
41 years in New Haven, Connecticut. That was my, my, uh, office space in,
42 uh, New Haven. And I spent three years recruiting nurses and doing PR
43 work for the air force. And um, when I finished that, let's see, I went to
44 Vietnam. Did I go to Vietnam then? No, I went to Hawaii after that. And

1 uh, that was a plush assignment. Obviously, with the being at the beach
2 and all the good stuff that was around. We got a lot of VIPs. Of course,
3 they had to go see Hawaii, you know... [chuckle] ...making sure the
4 troops were doing the right thing there, of course, you know. And uh, so
5 after, and uh, after Viet-, or after Hawaii, I went to Vietnam. I was there
6 '66 to '67. And of course, that was a whole new ballgame for me. And
7 uh, we worked hard. And we were in tents most of the time. And then we
8 moved into – when we moved into hard cover like a Quonset hut, that was
9 luxury. [laughter] We thought that was wonderful. And uh...

10

11Ruth Stewart: [11:54] You were taking care of combatants at that point?

12

13Eleanor Carey: Yes, uh-huh. Oh yeah, mm-hm. And we were taking care of some, you
14 know, just ordinary appendectomies and whatever happened. And uh, it
15 was the 12th [Evac 12:06] Hospital. And uh... So, we, you know, got
16 accustomed to working in that kind of zone. It was, it wasn't as bad as
17 people thought it was or would be, you know? I...

18

19Ruth Stewart: [12:18] Do you have any special memories about the patients you took
20 care of that that point?

21

22Eleanor Carey: Yes, I was talking to somebody not long ago about that. I had a patient
23 who was, uh, Vietnamese; and he had been into badly something and he
24 had – no he wasn't injured – he had stomach ulcers and he got into our
25 place because he worked on the base. And we were having – he did the
26 surgery very well. But we couldn't get him to gain weight or, you know,
27 get him nutritious and stuff like that. And I said that I don't – "I don't
28 know what we're going to do with him", you know, because he really is a
29 sick – was a sick man. And so, we deci-, we tried the Vietnamese food
30 and that was interesting. [chuckle] You know, you never gave a patient
31 with ulcers that kind of food. We gave it to him. He recovered.
32 [laughter]. So, after that when we had a Korean patient in, 'cause the
33 Koreans did a lot of the, uh, contractor work, you know? And if they
34 didn't do American food very well, we'd send the Korean – RMK had a
35 Korean kitchen and we – they would send us... If you ever operated in the
36 ward with this awful stuff – Korean food in your refrigerator, you know,
37 you would stay away from it [laughter]. But, uh...it worked. And we did
38 a lot with a little...

39

40 Uh...one of the highlights of the tour was that, uh, the President, Lindon
41 Johnson, came to my ward. And uh, I was, I was irritated about something
42 because, uh, people passed up our ward all the time. And I said, "Yeah
43 they keep passing us up", you know. So, I went to lunch; and when I
44 came back, the med tech said to me, "The commander wants to see you."

1 And I said, "Oh, okay." So, I – we had a great commander and we had a
2 great chief nurse, so that was no problem. I went to the commander's
3 trailer and he said, ah, "We're getting VIPs, uh, maybe General
4 Westmoreland, maybe somebody higher." "Oh, okay." And, uh, you
5 know, I'm thinking... I didn't even really – I just went back and I said,
6 "Hey, we're getting VIPs." He said, "I want you to move all the air
7 force...". 'cause, you see, we didn't have air force casualties. Well, the
8 casualties we had were dead. That was it. So, we would have, you know,
9 army or we would have marine corps casualties. And we had a lot of
10 marine corps casualties. And uh, but the ones that were not casualties, we
11 moved to the back of the Quonset. And uh, they were bringing in some
12 army and some marines from other bases so that, you know, we wouldn't
13 be the only ones getting anything. So, we got these in...

14
15 And I, I, I, I, we didn't allow anybody on the ward except my own staff
16 period, because they knew how to work together. I had a great, great staff.
17 And we got ready and got these patients and put them in, you know. And
18 suddenly we realized none of'm had pajama tops on. [chuckle] We had to
19 get pajama tops on'm. "I don't need one ma'am. I don't need one."
20 "What is he going to pin a medal on?", you know. [laughter] And finally,
21 the, the right moment arrived and the door opens and who's to walk in but
22 Rufus, his bodyguard, and steps to the side and there's the President, you
23 know. And it was just fantastic. And the commander – we lined up and
24 the commander introduced everyone on the staff...the doctors, the nurses
25 and the med techs – my name to the President. It was done very, it was
26 done very well. Yeah, oh yeah, he just, you know – he didn't, he didn't –
27 that was his staff and he was very proud of it. And he wanted the
28 President to know how proud he was. Westmoreland – General
29 Westmoreland was there. Uh...he's the president's personal physician
30 that came through. And he talked to me about, uh, how we were doing
31 down there; and did we need anything special and stuff like that.

32
33 But everything went really well. We thought, you know, "We're the
34 greatest in the world", you know. "Look at us." [laughter] And it really
35 was good, yeah.

36
37Ruth Stewart: [16:25] Explain why you said that the, uh, if you got air force, they were
38 dead casualties.

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40Eleanor Carey: Uh...because they're the flyers. Those were the people...

41
42Ruth Stewart: [16:35] Crashes?

43

1 Eleanor Carey:

2 Yeah, their crashes, the flyers, yeah. We rarely got anybody that, you
3 know, had any, any problem flying in mine, but that was the typical... If
4 we had someone who was seriously ill, it was, you know, it was a medical
5 problem, not a casualty.

6 So anyhow, uh, we had, we had our great moment in the sun. And about
7 two days later – one or two days later there were some national media
8 chamber award. And I forget – I can't remember the man's name, but he
9 was one of the leading, uh, commentators. And uh, he said, uh, would –
10 he would like to interview some of the patients who had gotten their
11 medals from the President. And I said, "Okay, we have some", you know,
12 "There's two kids there that they were from the same [hometown [17:25]
13 and there's this, that and the other thing." And so, of course, he had, uh, a
14 recording man with him and a photographer; but he was just going in to
15 interview patients before they started. And just the day before, we had
16 just, we had just moved into that Quonset before the President arrived, uh,
17 because we were in the tents, we were having a lot of, uh, showers. And
18 uh, it was getting wet in there, so we moved in early; and we didn't have
19 air conditioners. And we finally got some air conditioners; and uh, so it
20 was ready for VIPs. We didn't plan it that way, but it happened.

21
22 But anyhow, the, uh, the two guys were talking to the med techs. And the
23 day before, we had gotten – the BX was open the day before. And one of
24 the kids had a sergeant that he knew that was working at the BX and he
25 got us a coffee pot, you know. We were so proud of our coffee pot. That
26 was the first one we had. We had to go to some other ward to get coffee.
27 And uh, so the med tech said to the two gentlemen who were waiting,
28 "Would you gentlemen like a cup of coffee", oh they said, "Yes". Well
29 the only coffee cups we had, you know, those feces specimen cups with a
30 lid on them, you know? That was what we were using and we – you
31 know, we were so used to it. They were clean, honestly, you know.
32 [laughter] And of course, the kids handed these to them, you know. And I
33 knew that one of them knew what it was, but I didn't lead on. I was... So,
34 they finished their coffee and then they went ahead and did their, their
35 filming and stuff. And they were thanking me on the way out for my
36 hospitality. And I said, "Well the next time you come, we'll have the
37 [inaudible 19:04] china ready". [laughter] And you know, they said... So,
38 it was a good experience. It was a great experience.

39
40 Ruth Stewart:

[19:12] And how long were you in Vietnam?

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42 Eleanor Carey:

43 A year. And I came back from Vietnam and went to – I was assigned to a
44 base in Florida. And uh, from Florida, let's see where I went to Ohio...
Trying to remember all these assignments I had. From Ohio...let's see,

1 uh... Then I went to Wilford Hall – never expected to go there. Did not
2 really want to go there. Uh...

3
4Ruth Stewart: [19:54] Well tell us about it. Why, why did you...

5
6Eleanor Carey: I just didn't like the idea of that big hospital and, uh... When I saw it, of
7 course, it was a long time – it was before the new hospital was built, you
8 know. It looked a little shabby and stuff like that. And uh, was it... Oh
9 prior to that, I was a, uh, I was at, um, the air force base. Now I'm
10 forgetting the name of it. Uh...where we had... I will remember this
11 name, uh, the air evac – the air evac was out of there. Sky Air Force Base
12 in [inaudible 20:36]. And uh... I spent a tour there. I was the chief nurse
13 at the squadron; and then, from the chief nurse of the squadron, I was chief
14 nurse at the ward. And then I got re-assigned. And so, I went to the base.
15 They said, "You're going to Wilford Hall. And I am at this point a chief –
16 a lieutenant colonial with some seniority. And um, "Why was I going to
17 Wilford Hall", you know? I didn't think that was, uh... So, I called the
18 assignments person and I said, "Well what am I going to do at Wilford
19 Hall?" And she said, "Well, what the chief nurses assign you to do?"
20 And I thought I would – you're lucky I – she was lucky, uh, that she
21 wasn't in my presence, because I would have bopped her. I mean, that
22 was not – I didn't feel [inaudible 21:19], so my morale was poor when I
23 went there.

24
25 And, uh, actually it turned out to be a fairly decent assignment and so
26 forth. And I did the job I was there to do and all of that, so...

27
28Ruth Stewart: [21:30] Which was...?

29
30Eleanor Carey: Which was – I was the, uh, the clinical coordinator for the pediatric and
31 orthopedic services. And then, uh, the chief – we had a new chief nurse
32 and she was gonna rearrange some staffing; and she said, uh, she wanted
33 to put me – she told me she had talked to Washington about some of this
34 and they said – she said she was going to put me in, in the surgical
35 services, uh, coordinator. And they said, "Oh don't because, uh, we're
36 going to send her out on another assignment. She's probably going to be
37 at a regional hospital". "Oh, okay." So, I thought, "Okay whatever they
38 want", you know. And um, regional hospital was an upgrade.

39
40 And uh, so then I suddenly got orders for Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada.
41 And I thought, "That is not a regional hospital. It was another 50-bed
42 hospital". And I thought, "Oh dear". And so, I went. And I was – they
43 were asking me about my personal... You had to fill out a form on what
44 was your personal objective, you know. And I said, "Retirement in 20."

1 Just like that. These gals are really sick up in that office they're scared
2 they'll get...dumping on me. And I felt paranoid about the whole thing. I
3 thought, "There's something wrong". And then I found out much later
4 that there was something – some problem with, uh, somebody wanted to
5 move me out of the job so that they could get somebody of their own
6 wishes in that job.

7
8 I think that's a very – it's okay to do it but I think you should tell the
9 person that you're doing this, you know. Be honest about the whole thing
10 and not, you know, going around... Anyhow I did that, I did Nellis and
11 thought, "Well, I guess it's gonna be the greatest place they'd ever seen".
12 And it was a hospital. I hope nobody listens to this that was involved in
13 there, but it was a place where just coming to work in the morning and
14 organizing something was a step up for you. And then I found out later
15 that it had been a problem hospital for a long time. And the previous chief
16 nurse had just retired after a DWI. And um, you know.

17
18 Well, like I – I got the staff together and I got things working. I had to
19 move some people around and, you know, I did some ordinary
20 management kinds of things that you do. And uh, the one commander
21 made a big fuss over me when I got the bronze star after Wilford Hall.
22 And uh, he said, "You have a very, you have a very significant job", or
23 something. And I thought, "Oh yeah, they always say this", you know –
24 even when you're a 2nd lieutenant. And uh, so I found out later that, uh,
25 his predecessor was red lined off the general's list over the hospital. So,
26 they put me in and they took the command...the chief, uh, flight surgeon
27 and put him as commander.

28
29 And so, we really eventually got things sort of straightened out and
30 everything went well. And we made our IG teams and we made our, you
31 know, everything. And so, the one commander called me and told me I
32 was promoted. And I was kind of surprised and he said, "I'm not." He
33 said, I would... "In fact if you had not been, I would have, uh, very
34 concerned about that". So, I got my, uh, [inaudible 24:58] there.

35
36 Ruth Stewart: [25:02] Besides the bronze star, what other citations or medals did you
37 get?

38
39 Eleanor Carey: See, I have a whole list of them here.

40
41 Ruth Stewart: You have them listed? Okay. [25:16] So then did you get out at 20 years
42 or did you stay on longer?

43

1Eleanor Carey: No, no. I stayed in and I went to the, um, medical IG team at, uh, Norton
2 Air Force Base.
3

4Ruth Stewart: [25:27] And what was your role there?
5

6Eleanor Carey: I was nurse inspector and so... We had three teams of inspectors; and I
7 was on one of the teams. And the team consisted of eight or nine of us
8 who were in various medical specialties, uh, doctors, MSC officers,
9 nurses. And we did the inspection for – world-wide inspections. So, I got
10 a lot of traveling in there.
11

12Ruth Stewart: [25:52] Your entire career involved a lot of travel, didn't it?
13

14Eleanor Carey: [Laughter] Yeah, it did, yeah. But I, I really liked it, you know. I, I liked
15 the jo-, I guess there's something of a wanderlust in me that I liked the job
16 and I didn't mind the travel and, and so forth. Uh...but it was a job that
17 you – contrary to what some people felt, it was a job that was probably a
18 16 hour a day job because you did a lot of writing and organizing. And
19 then used to into the hospitals – oh maybe a little walk at night to see how
20 the emergency room is operating, you know. I talked to people I couldn't
21 talk to during the day and so forth. And so, I...I tried to be very creative
22 in that, you know, seeing what was happening and why it was happening;
23 and making recommendations for improvement; and making
24 recommendations to the air force, which we did. You know, "You need to
25 do this, this and this." Now some people didn't listen to us, of course.
26 [chuckle] That was their problem, right?
27

28Ruth Stewart: [26:47] During all this moving around to different places in the world and
29 this country, how did you keep in touch with your family and friends?
30

31Eleanor Carey: My family, uh, most of all was letters and, and phone calls. And um, my
32 friends back home, uh, I really didn't keep in touch and they didn't keep in
33 touch with me. It was interesting. Uh...when I was in – when I came
34 back from Vietnam, um, I met a friend of mine and she said, "Oh where
35 have you been?" Then I said, "Well I was in Vietnam". And she said,
36 "Oh my cousin's in Germany." And they sort of look past you 'cause it
37 was something they didn't, obviously did not want to deal with or would
38 think about, you know. So... And that didn't really bother me. I mean it
39 was, you, know. You evolve friendships over the years and....
40

41Ruth Stewart: [27:35] Are there any of those in the military that you still maintain close
42 relationships with?
43

44Eleanor Carey: The ones that were in?

1
2Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
3
4Eleanor Carey: Oh yeah. Oh yes. [Ann Hinds 27:43] was in Vietnam. Uh...and she's
5 now in assisted living here and I'm her... But I – we kidded about that
6 when my family found out Ann was a [nobody 28:02] and they found out
7 she was coming to Vietnam to share the [righteousness 28:06] with me,
8 right? [Laughter] I said, yeah, the first thing that happened is I, I was in a
9 trailer and I had a nice vacuum, you know, and so forth and so on. And
10 uh, they sent me to what we call, "Menopause Manor" at the time.
11 [chuckle] And Ann took my bed, you know. And I said, "My friend
12 comes and she takes my bed." You know, that's the first thing...
13 [chuckle] So we had a lot of laughs over that. At her 80th birthday party
14 we talked about that.
15
16Ruth Stewart: [28:37] What other kind of humorous events do you remember over your
17 entire career that – special memories that come up of things that happened
18 that were funny or unusual or poignant.
19
20Eleanor Carey: Mm-hm. Trying to think... Well, we had, we had a women's baseball
21 team. That was in '67. Softball... And it was, uh, we won all the games.
22 We didn't know how to play but we won all the games, 'cause they – the
23 guys would not dare say that we didn't win the games. And uh, the
24 funny...
25
26 Let's see, I transferred a patient one time, air evac, uh, out of this country
27 over to Korea. And uh, he had gotten into some trouble in this country
28 and we were, we were concerned that they were going to probably shoot
29 him in Korea, 'cause the Korean military did not, did not have any
30 compunction about shooting somebody if they did the wrong thing. I
31 mean, it was, you know. And that, that was hard. That was very hard,
32 because, you know, our regard for life is so much different than theirs.
33 And let's see...I don't know. I had some – plenty of talks on... I, I liked
34 air evac. I enjoyed doing that. And uh, we had, uh, times when we were,
35 you know, absolutely filled up.
36
37 And I remember one Christmas eve, I took the duty on Christmas eve,
38 which was fine. And uh, there was a group of people in Denver that were
39 just wonderful. They had started during the Vietnam war, they started, uh,
40 bringing hot-, they found out that the guys wanted hot dogs or pizza or
41 something like that. And they were – every time an aircraft landed there,
42 there were these people that were out there with food for these guys and
43 this, that and the other thing. And so, I said – and they continued that after
44 the war for the air evac. And uh, I was on that night and I said to the other

1 nurse, "Well I'm sure that they won't be here because it's Christmas eve."
2 You know, it's 8:00 Christmas eve and people are home. We landed; and
3 they were there. And they had, they had food, they had candy, they had
4 gifts for everybody, including the crew, you know. And I thought, that
5 really, you know, we think we serve, but some of those people served so
6 readily and so outstandingly. I, I couldn't believe it, you know, they were
7 good. And so, we, we were looking around for some kind of a civilian
8 award to give them, but we never got – at least while I was still there, we
9 didn't give any.

10
11 And let's see, um, I guess I had a lot of experiences, but I guess I can't
12 sort them out in, uh, at this time. You know, Beirut was, Beirut and the
13 Middle East for me was an experience. Uh... 'cause I saw a whole
14 different culture and learned to appreciate, I think, the differences in
15 culture. And that's, I guess what sort of bothers me about the war that we
16 are in right now, is that we're dealing with different religions in a different
17 culture and I'm not sure that we're really up with that all the time, because
18 they... You know, there are certain things that they insist on. And, and
19 um, the Arabic, uh, people – I just, I just liked them, you know. They
20 were, they were comfortable; they do what they want and all. And you
21 know, we had several – of course, we were over there we could not, we
22 couldn't drink, because we couldn't drink in Saudi Arabia. So, people
23 used to make their own. The military, we'd kind of stayed away from
24 that, 'cause that was a punishment. And there was an oil company,
25 Aramco Oil Company there; and so, we had friendships up there. And
26 some of them would make the stuff. Of course, it would blow up and then
27 they'd have to go home, so it was... And, uh, I enjoyed that part too. I
28 enjoyed being in Beirut a lot.

29
30 I can't think of anything that, um, too particular during this, you know...
31 I, I, don't know, um, yeah, I... One night... Did I tell ya about the
32 psychiatric patient that I had? We had this – the army brought this patient
33 over and uh, they – he was medicated when he got there. And they, they,
34 left, fortunately, one restraint on him, but they hadn't restrained the rest of
35 him when they took off. And uh, he woke up after I got on duty and he – I
36 was in the next – we had three tents – in the next tent. And he's screaming
37 at me, "You get out of that tent you hussy – or you honkey", you know,
38 with all these men and so forth. So, I thought finally, well I'll just, I'll just
39 sit on the – where the boardwalk – around in front of the tents – I'll sit on
40 the boardwalk with my back to him and maybe he won't be so agitated.

41
42 And, uh, I'm sitting on the boardwalk and I'm, uh, all of a sudden, I
43 realize there's two – we had some ambulatory patients that we, you
44 know... Two of them were sitting on one side of me; two of them were

1 sitting on the other side of me; and three of them were standing behind
2 me. And they said, “Don’t worry, he’s not going to get to you”. You
3 know [laughter] what I mean? “Cool it guys, cool it”, you know. “Oh no,
4 no, he’s not gonna get to you”. And uh, he carried on.

5
6 And so, pretty soon, uh, the enlisted men – their quarters were in back of
7 the hospital; and they were all most in tents. And a couple of the NCOs’
8 came over from the tents. They had heard this – they were in the showers
9 and they had heard this, so they came over. So, they started to talk to him.
10 I said, “Try to get some Thorazine in him”. They started talking to him.
11 Well he’s, he, I was his, I was his focus of concern. Uh...and he said, uh,
12 “That honkey, that honkey...” [inaudible 35:16]. But before that he
13 said... And they said to him, “Listen. She doesn’t even have to be here.
14 She volunteered. You’re trying to get outta here. You’re the coward”,
15 you know. “Don’t talk about her; you’re the cow-...”, and they were, they
16 were really after him, you know.

17
18Ruth Stewart: Right.

19
20Eleanor Carey: And uh, they finally got some more Thorazine into him and he quieted
21 down eventually. I was afraid, ’cause I called the, I called the, um,
22 psychiatrist. And of course, he didn’t want to come over because, you
23 know, he didn’t want to deal with that situation. He said, “Well get some
24 Thorazine in him.” “Well, sure, yeah, how...?” So, they finally got some
25 Thorazine into him, and um.... When I reported to the chief nurse the next
26 morning, I said, “Well he could be heard all over the place”, you know.
27 And uh, I told the chief nurse the next morning about it and she told the
28 commander and he called the army and said, “Get this guy outta here.
29 [chuckle] You’re not going to have him here.” Uh...I don’t know what...
30 they would have to send him someplace, so they [inaudible 36:17]. And
31 uh...so, that was kind of a, a hairy kind of situation with him.

32
33 And I think that concludes my, uh, part of my...

34
35Ruth Stewart: [36.32] What happened then when you got out of the service. When and
36 where was that?

37
38Eleanor Carey: Yeah, I was in New York. And uh, I was having a tough time finding
39 housing that I could afford in Manhattan; and so, I decided to come to San
40 Antonio. And I did a little bit of nursing, but not very much. I didn’t –
41 and civilian nursing didn’t seem to cut it with me, you know. And um, I
42 worked at the State Hospital Behavior Modification Unit for a while. I
43 think I did six months there, at least. And uh, that was good. I learned a
44 lot from that. But I decided to go back to school and I went back and got

1 my, uh, an associate's degree in legal assisting. And I worked at [Tyler
2 Blake 37:18] for, uh, maybe 10 years. Yeah. Loved every minute of it.
3
4Ruth Stewart: [37:31] And that was what period of time?
5
6Eleanor Carey: Hm, let's see. It would be '70 – it was in the '80's...about, uh, '83 maybe
7 – '82, sometime around there. And uh, I really, I really loved the job. It
8 was great because, you know, before I went there, I knew the statistics in
9 San Antonio of poverty and so forth; uh, and I knew the sta-, I saw
10 poverty overseas. But I got the first-hand look at poverty in San Antonio.
11 It's all different than people think it is. You know, when you have a client
12 you call and say, uh, "Listen, can you come in to sign some paperwork?"
13 Uh...when I – she didn't have the bus fare. And I had never dealt with
14 those kinds of situations before; and so, that's why I say I'm a bit of a
15 social activist because I, I now know what poverty – what the face of
16 poverty, you know.
17
18Ruth Stewart: [38:35] You have continued as a social activist.
19
20Eleanor Carey: I sure have, yes. What would I do otherwise, you know? I mean, that's...
21
22Ruth Stewart: Uh...[pause] [38:52] Did your experience during the war – during the
23 different wars – during your service days, uh, influence your thinking
24 about war or the military?
25
26Eleanor Carey: Uh...absolutely. Especially about war, yeah. Uh...
27
28Ruth Stewart: [39:10] Tell me about it.
29
30Eleanor Carey: Yeah. I think until you've been there and you put that face on where it's
31 no longer statistics or somebody else or anything like that... And war has
32 such consequences. I've been going Vietnam Veterans Against War. And
33 these are the people that know the consequences of, of war. And this
34 particular war bothers me terribly much. I, I, I was one of the [sad face
35 39:42] that stood downtown with my, with my, uh, sign saying, "No war".
36 And uh, I will always do that because we were not directly, directly
37 attacked. We were not... Yeah, there are plenty of other ways to do this.
38 And it's not only the military that pays a high price. It's the civilian
39 population in the land you're going into. And that's unfair. I mean, and
40 again, the poor people are usually the ones, you know, who get the most
41 grief from this thing. And I, I just – and that's why I won't – I think I'm
42 this peace business is okay for me because I think we need to learn how to
43 do some, uh, do some, uh, oh, talking to people and, and getting some
44 things going. It's been successful in the past, you know. Diplomacy has

1 worked in the past and it will work, uh... It may not work as perfectly as
2 we want it to, but it will work.
3
4Ruth Stewart: [40:43] You mentioned the one organization you belong to, the Vietnam
5 veterans against the war. Are there other veteran's associations you
6 belong to?
7
8Eleanor Carey: No, uh-uh. That's the only one. And I support that one, you know. I, I
9 don't think we have a right more than anybody else, but I think we've
10 earned a right to have our say – and our leaders have their say. And I
11 think it's important.
12
13Ruth Stewart: [41:12] Before we conclude, is there anything else you'd like to add or any
14 memories that this has dragged up you'd like to...?
15
16Eleanor Carey: Well I can't read my write-, I think, uh, my tenures have been
17 unbelievably great. I loved them. And the only reason I left was I, you
18 know, I gotta new boss and she was not like... She and I did not really,
19 really do very well together. So, I decided I had to leave. I did not need a
20 job. I mean, it was not a problem. So, why not, uh, leave and do
21 volunteer work and do the things you wanted to.
22
23Ruth Stewart: Well thank you very much. We appreciate you being, uh, providing this
24 history.
25
26Eleanor Carey: Oh, thank you.
27
28/all