

1 **Interview of Betty Vogel on her service in the U.S. Army Nursing Corps during WWII**

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4Ruth Stewart: [00:02] ...Vogel is being interviewed as a member of the Women's
5 Overseas Service League on October 23, 2003, at the Army Community,
6 Army Residence Community in San Antonio, Texas. Um, she was born
7 August 02, 1921. Ruth Stewart is interviewing, assisted by Carol
8 Habgood.

9

10 [00:31] Betty, tell us a little bit about your early life and getting into
11 nursing and into the military.

12

13Betty Vogel: Oh, well, I just, um, I was an only child so, of course, I enjoyed life. Uh,
14 and then I went and graduated from high school in 1939. This was a small
15 town, and, uh...

16

17Ruth Stewart: [00:54] Where was this?

18

19Betty Vogel: [Blumsbury 00:55], Minnesota. Then I wanted to be a nurse 'cause I
20 thought I'd see the United States – never think about anything else – uh,
21 and my parents thought I should be a teacher, but I didn't want to. Uh, so
22 then I went into nurses' training at Abbott Hospital and, uh, then I
23 graduated in 1942, 'cause in that time, my dad died so I had to make up
24 time. And, uh, then I, I went to, uh, well, I went out to California to start
25 seeing the world, I mean, the United States. And, uh, I went to a movie
26 and the Japanese were shooting at the young men that were coming down
27 in the parachutes. And I got so excited, I joined the army! [laughter] Then,
28 uh, so then I was assigned to the 203rd. I joined on the 1st of September of
29 '43.

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31Ruth Stewart: [1:54] In 1943, okay.

32

33Betty Vogel: '43. And my orders were for the 203rd General Hospital and, uh, so I was
34 assigned to Fort MacArthur, uh, at San Pedro in California and everybody
35 said, "You'll never [inaudible 2:15]." Well, in 3 months, I'm on the train
36 going to Camp Kilmer and I wrote all my Christmas cards. And when we
37 arrived at Camp Kilmer, we had a meeting of the whole group and the
38 colonel said, "Did anybody tell anybody where they were going?" and,
39 I'm sorry to say, I raised my hand (the only one). [laughter] So they teased
40 me all the way from then on about if our ship was sunk, you know, it'd be
41 my fault. Anyway, then we – oh, and when I was in nurses' training, we
42 got the, uh, little Red Cross, uh, you know, it's like a little nametag and it
43 said Red Cross and we got a Red Cross pin, which I've given to the
44 museum because it was one of those that was first given and they didn't

1 have very many of them. Anyway, so I'm on the train and we arrive at
2 Camp Kilmer and everything was, on Christmas Day, the soldiers lined up
3 and we walked between 'em with a big bag, a laundry bag, and as we went
4 to each [inaudible 3:24], we said, "What size?" and they just threw it into
5 the bag. And then they, uh, the soldiers came and did our bedrolls for us.
6 Then, uh, what el-, oh, that was on Christmas Day, the 25th. I got it written
7 down so I could remember, uh, and let's see, we were...

8
9 Ruth Stewart: [3:45] And that was which year?

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11 Betty Vogel: That was, um, '43. We arrived at Kilmer on December 25th, 21st. And then
12 we departed the camp on the 28th. And, the 28th, we leave by train for
13 Camp Kilmer, I mean for New York. And, when we got there, the Red
14 Cross had donuts and coffee and they said, "Oh, where are you going?"
15 and I said, "I haven't any idea!" [laughter] because I was so upset by
16 having told people. So, we got on the train and it was na-, I mean the
17 plane, the ship, and it was named the Brazil. And, uh, then we leave on the
18 29th and then we have New Year's Eve on the ship, but it was so crowded
19 and we could only wash in, uh, salt water and we couldn't wash our
20 clothes. And one shirt I had, I wore it so much I had to turn it inside out
21 because its collar got leather, like leather. And [laughter] then a lot of
22 people, of course, were sick going over.

23
24 Then we, on January 8th of '44, we landed in the [inaudible 5:05] in
25 Scotland. [inaudible 5:08] Then we arrived at Petworth, which is south of
26 London, and lived in cantonment huts, 2 to a room. And when I walked in,
27 there were, um, straw mattresses on horses, you know, the wooden horses?
28 And a little stove and a little table. And then, uh, the lieutenant that took
29 us to our rooms, I looked at it and I said, "I don't wanna stay here and I'm
30 going home!" [laughter] and he said, "Oh, Lieutenant [Austin 5:41], I
31 don't think they'll let you!" And so I got, well, the first night, I couldn't
32 eat anything. The next morning they had powdered eggs, I didn't eat
33 anything. Well, by noon, I could eat [laughter] whatever they fed us. And
34 then, uh, from Petworth, we went to [inaudible 5:58] in England and we
35 were bivouacked, Dorothy [Balso 6:03] and I were bivouacked in this
36 private home, where people were divided up in a private home. So cold
37 that we took our jacket and [skirts 6:13] on and she put her army blanket
38 on the bottom and I put mine on top and, uh, that's the way we slept. And
39 then in the morning the water – we'd put our hands in the water just like
40 this, [laughter] a little bit because it was so cold. And I look back and I
41 think, I can't remember where we brushed our teeth. Of course, the next
42 day, she, the lady moved us in where we had a bunk, not a bunk, a cot this
43 way and a cot this way and then a chair and the bathroom was outside.
44 Once a week, they'd pull in the tub in the kitchen and that's when we got a

1 bath, just once a week. And it was cold! And then we'd gather over in
2 what was called [Rafter 6:57] Hall. We were not doing anything, and we
3 were just standing around and they only had a little fireplace. We almost
4 froze. [See, you start me talking 7:06]...

5
6 Ruth Stewart: [7:08] [inaudible 7:08]

7
8 Betty Vogel: And then, [laughter] uh, let's see, March 17, we arrived in Barford and,
9 uh, we were, uh, they'd just finished the hospital there and we did get a
10 few patients. But, uh, and then of course we heard all the planes going
11 over so we knew it was D-Day. And then when we got some of the
12 patients back, having never been in a war situation, we put'm to bed and
13 tried to wash'm and get'm all cleaned up and they kept coming too fast so
14 we just went in and just put'm in bed. And, uh, then we stayed there. We
15 all got bikes 'cause we had to ride around and then June, oh, about June
16 the 6th we, that's when we heard all the planes all night and I remember we
17 said, "Uh-oh, D-Day today!" Then, July 10th, we left Barford and then the
18 trucks we went to Exeter on the way to South Hampton. And on South
19 Hampton, when we left for France on the HMS Duke of Wellington and
20 we all got sick.

21
22 I didn't even tell you about the first [inaudible 8:20]. Well, 'cause we were
23 stationed at Cherbourg when we first got out, we went into Utah. That's
24 going backwards. No, we went into Utah Beach and then we were at
25 Sainte-Mere-Eglise and then we were at Cherbourg and we thought we
26 were gonna stay at Cherbourg but then they said, no, we were going to
27 Paris, Garches, this little town. So we rode a train. If you can imagine
28 sleeping on the floor of a train and I said to Edward, "I imagine we all
29 smell." And he said, "That's all right. Everybody smells so you can't
30 smell one another." [laughter] So then we arrived in Garches and, uh, then
31 I was married to Edward December 14, 1944.

32
33 Ruth Stewart: [9:07] What was that?

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35 Betty Vogel: I married Edward.

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37 Ruth Stewart: [9:09] Just, just a minute then. In Garches? You were stationed in
38 Garches?

39
40 Betty Vogel: Uh-huh. And had to go to Paris to get married.

41
42 Ruth Stewart: [9:17] Okay.

43
44 Betty Vogel: Then we came back and the chaplain had the service for us.

1
2 Ruth Stewart: [9:21] Okay.
3
4 Betty Vogel: It was during the Battle of the Bulge and, uh...
5
6 Ruth Stewart: [9:27] Tell us, tell us a little more about being stationed at Garches and
7 what was going on there.
8
9 Betty Vogel: It was a little, little town then. And we'd walk to get the train, 2 miles
10 away. Uh, and then we'd go into Paris and the metro was nice then and
11 there weren't any cars in Paris so it was just wonderful. You just wandered
12 all over the street. We went in there and got our hair fixed. We took our
13 own soap. Uh, other than that, we didn't le-, you know, you couldn't go
14 anyplace. So we just stayed there and, good heavens, I don't know. We
15 were bisad-, billeted way up on the hill so that gave us good exercise, up
16 and down. But, other than that, we didn't do anything. You know, worked
17 12 hours a day and that was about all.
18
19 Ruth Stewart: [10:19] And these were casualties you were taking care of?
20
21 Betty Vogel: Mm-hm. [inaudible 10:22] when I looked out the window after the Battle
22 of the Bulge, you could see the ambulance. Our par-, I mean our hospital
23 was in a [Q 10:32] shape, so they'd have to come up one side and right
24 under the, this part of the building, uh, was the [admittants 10:39]. And
25 they were lined up from there and as far as you could see down the road
26 were the patients. And we also took care of German patients. I, I was on
27 the ward for the German patients and one had a little, uh, shrapnel and I
28 did an awful thing. I went and got a little knife and I cut it out. And after
29 that [laughter] they called me [Herr 11:06] Doctor. [laughter]
30
31 Ruth Stewart: [11:07] [laughter]
32
33 Betty Vogel: And, uh, so, but oh my, it was [easy 11:12] when the, they'd come around
34 to inspect, those Germans really, their beds were straight, their arms were
35 out, uh, you know, they knew discipline. They did everything. Then, let's
36 see, oh, on the 10th of July of '45, our [inaudible 11:30] was broken up and
37 I was sent to a train in [Gardinore 11:34]. Now I cannot remember ever
38 eating and I can't remember brushing my teeth. That worries me.
39 [laughter] Anyway, to when we were stationed, when I was stationed at
40 the train hospital, to bathe, you had to go upstairs in the train station to
41 where there was just a big bathroom with showers and that's where we got
42 our showers. From there, I was sent to the 123rd up in [Raymond 12:05].
43 And, uh, that was awful. We went on the train again and in the middle,
44 and I was gonna call somebody to find out, one of the small towns on the

1 way was bombed out and the train station, and we got off the bu-, the
2 truck and we were just sitting in the, uh, blown-up, uh, rain, train station
3 when finally somebody came from another, uh, small hospital and picked
4 us up. And then we got on the train, oh, and went off to the 123rd. And
5 Edward was at the, whatever the center was there, I forgot, in [Raymond
6 12:45].
7
8 Then, finally, they said, "Oh, you have 58 points and you can go home!"
9 So the next thing I knew, I'm down to, uh, um, [inaudible 12:58]. And we
10 went off to Luxembourg one day and I rode back with a cake in my lap, all
11 the way back. I liked sweets then. Then, let's see, after we, so then we
12 went off to, uh, uh, where did we go? Oh, we left [inaudible 13:21] to
13 come home. And at Camp Phillip Morris, and, I, our ship on the way home
14 was called the West Point. And then on the, when we were taking the train
15 to Fort Sheridan, where we were relieved of duty. And then finally when
16 Edward came home, well then, I became a housewife. And I was always
17 gonna go finish but I never got around to it. [laughter]
18
19 Ruth Stewart: [13:47] So, how long were you actually in the military?
20
21 Betty Vogel: Eh, I think this was 2 years and, 2 years and 3 or 4 months.
22
23 Ruth Stewart: [14:04] And, where was it that you were discharged?
24
25 Betty Vogel: Fort Sheridan. It's outside of Chicago.
26
27 Ruth Stewart: [14:12] Okay. And, since then, have you joined any military or veterans'
28 organizations?
29
30 Betty Vogel: Just WOSL. I'm not much of a joiner.
31
32 Ruth Stewart: [14:24] What kind of activities have you followed since your, um,
33 retirement from the military?
34
35 Betty Vogel: Bridge and bridge. I came in for a while and then I would go into a little
36 craft group. But since I've been out here, I just play bridge. And eat.
37
38 Ruth Stewart: [14:44] Did, going back to the 2 years, a little over 2 years you were in the
39 military in active combat area, has this affected your view of the military
40 or war?
41
42 Betty Vogel: I don't think we're meant to be com-, combat. I'm against that. And, of
43 course, now – have you got that thing turned on?
44

1 Ruth Stewart: [15:07] Mm-hm. Oh, it's on.
2

3 Betty Vogel: Well, then I can't tell you what I was going to say.
4

5 Ruth Stewart: [15:11] [laughter]
6

7 Betty Vogel: I don't think it's, you know, I look back and we had a good time, we think.
8 After the war is over, you always have a good time. So, uh, I guess that's
9 all.
10

11 Ruth Stewart: [15:28] Is there anything else you could, like to tell us about the time that
12 you were in the service?
13

14 Betty Vogel: Well, no, because it's kind of silly.
15

16 Ruth Stewart: [15:36] Oh, that makes interesting stories.
17

18 Betty Vogel: Edward and another, 2 other nurses, I think, were sent off to a field
19 hospital and, now, I was a whole chicken the whole time I was over there,
20 scared I'd step on a mine, and so they let us ride along, and a couple of
21 other women, and we got there and, of course, the people that were gonna
22 work were sent off to bed and we were sent to the surgery ward. And I'd
23 never been one to stay up late at night and, at 3:00 in the morning, I'm
24 holding the head of a, a [poor 16:07] soldier while we were putting a cast
25 on him and my eyes began to circle. So they said, they called for
26 somebody and said, "Betty, go out." So I went out and here were all those
27 German prisoners. I didn't care whether they were prisoners or not, I
28 thought, "I can't faint in front of those people!" So I put my head down on
29 the grass and finally got better. [laughter] Uh, oh, and then we had, I was
30 afraid when we went through [Saint-Lo 16:34], I just knew we'd be
31 [inaudible 16:36] behind the buildings that were all bombed out and then
32 we had, oh, a couple tracer bullets on the way to this place and I said, "Oh,
33 I'm going to get in the bottom, under the truck!" and a sergeant said, "Not
34 if I beat you to it!" [laughter] Uh, that's all I can really think. Well, that
35 when we finally, before I came home, we finally got to go to the Riviera
36 for 3 or 4 days, I can't remember.
37

38 Ruth Stewart: [17:07] Mm-hm.
39

40 Betty Vogel: So, and I have no desire to go back there to look at things. And when I
41 saw, uh, Private Ryan, and I said, "Oh, that looks just like the colors we'd
42 see!" And when they walked with their legs up, [inaudible 17:24].
43 Anyway, that's, I think that's all.
44

1 Ruth Stewart: [17:29] Well, I surely appreciate your giving us your memories of that
2 period of your life very much. Thank you.
3
4 Restarting with a few more additional memories of Betty from her days in
5 France:
6
7 Betty Vogel: Uh, when we were in Cherbourg, we did not have a bathroom and,
8 because they made a slip trench and we didn't like that, they made what
9 they called a [floor 17:53] holder. And, so women in those days, when we
10 had our period, we used the old-fashioned Kotex and it was very difficult
11 to keep yourself clean. Very difficult.
12
13 Uh, we'd eat out, of course, there were no big tents. Well, we had tents for
14 the people that lived in'm but we didn't have a tent for the dining room.
15 We ate out on the grass and the bees just loved our food. [laughter] But
16 that's why I would, I'm not sure that I'm ready for women in combat.
17 'Cause some of the nurses ended up pretty close, but they weren't out
18 shooting people. And so I can't get used to that. I think I'm too old to go
19 with the new modern.
20
21 Ruth Stewart: [18:43] And then you were talking a little bit about the, uh, difference in,
22 in, um habits, bathroom habits from the French to the Americans and
23 they...
24
25 Betty Vogel: Oh, well, the, uh, yeah, well the [coughing] bathrooms, so many of'm
26 were just 2 feet and a little hole and then you bent over that. And then that,
27 of course, was France.
28
29 Ruth Stewart: [19:12] Have you been in France lately?
30
31 Betty Vogel: They had only [inaudible 19:16] that, that's where the men went in. We
32 women didn't. Uh, so the men would go in there and the next thing, the
33 French women would come in there to go and they'd almost collapse.
34 They thought [laughter] it was so terrible. And I guess I told you that I was
35 a chicken, didn't I? During the war? I said, "Ugh, we might get on a, we
36 might walk on a mine." I wouldn't do very well [inaudible 19:42] at all.
37
38 Ruth Stewart: [19:46] Tell us a little more about D-Day. You said that was quite an
39 occasion. Why don't you describe your day on D-Day and what you heard
40 and saw?
41
42 Betty Vogel: What I did on D-Day, I worked. [laughter] [inaudible 19:54] I wasn't one
43 of those that got to go to town so I had to hear everything, uh, second

1 hand. But everybody went in and it was just like, uh, an orgy, I guess. It
2 was wild! But I worked so I didn't get to see it.
3
4Ruth Stewart: [20:16] But there was a celebration then? A major celebration throughout.
5
6Betty Vogel: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
7
8Ruth Stewart: [20:21] Was there a lot of noise or did they shoot off firecrackers...
9
10Betty Vogel: Not like they do [laughter], not in, like in the rocks, they don't shoot guns
11 off.
12
13Ruth Stewart: [20:29] Mm-hm.
14
15Betty Vogel: And, I don't know about the firecrackers. Oh, another thing, we would go
16 in to hear Glenn Miller's band. Of course, he was, he'd already died but
17 his band kept on. And, uh, I can't think of anything more. I told you about
18 going to the field hospital to faint, didn't I?
19
20Ruth Stewart: [20:54] Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
21
22Betty Vogel: All right, that's it, then. [laughter]
23
24Ruth Stewart: [20:58] Okay, well, thank you very much and thanks for adding in those
25 other comments.
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27
28/ab