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4Lois Collette: ...Army Nurses Corps. She is one of the first members of the Detroit Unit of  
5 the Women's Overseas Service League. I am Lois Collette, a World War II  
6 member of the League. Today is October 23, 1982. [0:21] Estelle, why did you  
7 decide to join or enlist in the Army Nurses Corps.

8

9Estelle Mack: Patriotically. I could not be – I could not think of not being with my Country at  
10 a time like that.

11

12Lois Collette: And, uh...

13

14Estelle Mack: And, uh, so I enlisted with the Red Cross, uh, and served with – through with  
15 the Red Cross at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, and left for overseas September 17,  
16 about, around September 17, and, uh, do you want...

17

18Lois Collette: Right.

19

20Estelle Mack: Getting over there, there just didn't seem to be – There were 6 nurses in the  
21 group, and evidently there was no place at that particular time that we were  
22 really assigned to. So a call came through for volunteer nurses for the front line  
23 duty. We discussed it among ourselves, and, uh, one girl, probably should  
24 never have gone overseas died while we were there. It was lonely. It was out in  
25 the cold. So Kitty, who was an old time friend, we had gone to school together,  
26 went o-, went in Service together, so Kitty looked at me and I looked at Kitty,  
27 and Kitty said will we? And I said, so what, it couldn't be any worse. That  
28 okay?

29

30Lois Collette: That's just fine. [1:58] What had you been doing before you enlisted?

31

32Estelle Mack: Before I enlisted, I was a public health nurse in Jersey City, New Jersey. Uh,  
33 my father had a feeling after I finished training, I've – I really realized that I  
34 wanted to be a public health nurse, and I remember by dad saying to me a  
35 rolling stone gathers no moss. So when it came time to go in Service, I was  
36 really afraid to tell him I was gonna do this. So I finally decided I would just go  
37 to the American Red Cross office and enlist. I figure they couldn't do much to  
38 me after that. So when the time came, my notice came through from the r-,  
39 American Red Cross that I was to, uh, was assigned to Fort Oglethorpe. I told  
40 my mother and she took one look and she went to bed, and my dad said I'll  
41 show you something young lady. So we went down to the bay where the ships  
42 and boats were coming in. There was a great deal of talk about these, uh,  
43 submarines being around. And my dad said you'll either be blown up or you'll  
44 come back pregnant. But I went in the Service just the same.

1  
2Lois Collette: [chuckle] Of course you did. [3:22] What kind of uniforms were you issued,  
3 Estelle, when you went over?  
4  
5Estelle Mack: Don't make me laugh. I've never been so shoddy in my life. By the time I  
6 arrived home with this worn out uniform and a pair of rubber boots in New  
7 York City in July, I wanted to drown myself.  
8  
9Lois Collette: [laughter] [3:51] Um, how were you reimbursed? What were your wages?  
10  
11Estelle Mack: Well if I can remember, we got \$50 a month and \$10 of that went for insurance.  
12 That's what I remember.  
13  
14Lois Collette: [4:07] That was a lot to live on, right? [laughter] And, of course, you didn't  
15 many expenses did you?  
16  
17Estelle Mack: Well they fed us.  
18  
19Lois Collette: Yeah, they fed you and there – you didn't have much time...  
20  
21Estelle Mack: They fed us, and we had our clothes as such as they were. So [what 4:10]. I  
22 guess we – I don't know what I d-, – Oh, I don't know. Oh, I don't know what I  
23 did with it.  
24  
25Lois Collette: [laughter] [4:26] Uh, then where did you serve when you went overseas?  
26  
27Estelle Mack: Overseas I served at, um, [Inaudible 4:33] France and in Germany. It was a  
28 little small town in Germany. Oh, I can't think of the name of it. I h-, I'd have  
29 to look at my, uh, discharge papers. Um, but it was – it was a university town.  
30 We'd taken over the university for a hospital. Oh! We – we – that was it. I had  
31 taken care of especially – taken care of especially boys, so I was told as a  
32 reward, I could either go home or I could go to Germany. So you know me, I  
33 went to Germany. And th-, they made all the boys march from France to  
34 Germany to prove their gallantry. So that was the reason for nurses being  
35 needed in Germany. They boys when they got up there, we had a great deal of a  
36 typhoid, pneumonia, things of that sort, not – not much surgery. So that was  
37 why I – why I was in Germany.  
38  
39Lois Collette: Good. And when you were on your way overseas, earlier this evening you said  
40 – I said well is there anything particular interest in your travels on the boat, you  
41 said you could fill up pages. [5:54] So do you want to tell me a little bit about  
42 the conditions on the ship going overseas?  
43

1 Estelle Mack: Well we went overseas, 350 nurses. Uh, no 350 passengers, some soldiers. Uh,  
2 it turned out, we were not aware of it until we got there, until we got off the boat  
3 that we were carrying grain, which was very dangerous, and about the middle of  
4 the night one night choo. We woke up, this [Inaudible 6:26] and I, Kitty and I  
5 were in the same b-, uh, same bunk together. The water was up to our knees.  
6 And Kitty said, Estelle, I think we're bombed. And I – I still remember that the  
7 boat, it was little. It w-, it was terrible to send people over in a boat like that,  
8 just terrible. [6:47] And we got o-, we got out and s-, uh, uh, no lights, you  
9 know? There were no lights on the boats at all. And, uh, we weren't supposed  
10 to get out of those bunks, and I said to Kitty, well, gee, let's go up o-, up on deck  
11 if we can, so we went up. The most beautiful night I ever remembered. The  
12 moon was shining. The boat was tipping. We got through. Nothing happened.  
13 It was just a rough sea [inaudible 7:14].  
14

15 Lois Collette: [7:14] Just a rough sea?  
16

17 Estelle Mack: Just a rough sea. But we were sure when we put our feet out, eh, up – right up  
18 to your knees water.  
19

20 Lois Collette: Oh, my gosh.  
21

22 Estelle Mack: And we were sure we were hit.  
23

24 Lois Collette: Yeah, I don't blame you. [laughter]  
25

26 Estelle Mack: We were sure we were hit. And but, as I say, Kitty was just r-, remarkable in  
27 those days.  
28

29 Lois Collette: [7:33] Where did you land then when you got overseas?  
30

31 Estelle Mack: We landed – That was another thing. We landed in – We had to get across the  
32 North Sea, so we were in Calais. I'd have to check that.  
33

34 Lois Collette: [7:50] Oh, you landed in Calais?  
35

36 Estelle Mack: But I'd have to check that. Now I can't remember and I should because I've  
37 been back so many times. [7:57] I can't remember whether to from Calais, why  
38 would we have to go across the North Sea? And we had to.  
39

40 Lois Collette: I don't know. [laughter] I wasn't there.  
41

42 Estelle Mack: You know, I – I [better 8:13].  
43

44 Lois Collette: Yeah, well you can check those things out now, and we can talk again.

1  
2Estelle Mack: I – I'm just trying to think. Uh, we had a very bad experience with that. Um,  
3 I'm just going to look at my map before we talk about this  
4  
5Lois Collette: [8:31] Do you want me to turn this off a second?  
6  
7Estelle Mack: No.  
8  
9Lois Collette: Okay.  
10  
11Estelle Mack: [8:34] [Inaudible 8:34]?  
12  
13Lois Collette: No.  
14  
15Estelle Mack: Um, we – I do know – I do know that before we got to this god-awful place that  
16 we finally landed in where no one wanted us that we had to cross the North Sea,  
17 and as we came into this town, which I think was Calais.  
18  
19Lois Collette: Mm-hm.  
20  
21Estelle Mack: I'll look at my map one of these days. We got into town. We were all ready to  
22 get out of the boat. When we were rushed back to what we thought and I have  
23 always thought it was a house of ill fame, there was no place to put us.  
24  
25Lois Collette: Oh.  
26  
27Estelle Mack: And we sat up all night watching what was going on, and about 4:30 in the  
28 morning, they got us out of bed to get us across because there were U-boats.  
29  
30Lois Collette: Yeah.  
31  
32Estelle Mack: And it was the, oh, rough – the, uh, you – you couldn't stand or sit or anything.  
33 But we finally got across there, and then we landed in this god-awful place that  
34 I just told you about.  
35  
36Lois Collette: Okay.  
37  
38Estelle Mack: So that was the only a-, that was the experience...  
39  
40Lois Collette: Yeah.  
41  
42Estelle Mack: ...of getting to our destination.  
43  
44Lois Collette: It – it's really hard to comprehend now that we're so comfortable, the conditions.

1  
2Estelle Mack: I think of it now, and I've gotten to be such a pantywaist.  
3  
4Lois Collette: [laughter]  
5  
6Estelle Mack: I want all my comforts.  
7  
8Lois Collette: [9:59] Um, what were your conditions then like overseas both working and  
9 living and what were when you were over there?  
10  
11Estelle Mack: Well we, uh – As I say, we were a surgical hospital, and, uh, the French had  
12 given us, uh, part of the French barracks. There were French nurses on one end  
13 of the barracks, and we were on the other. And, uh, Spartan, no running water,  
14 no place to bathe. We got lice in our underwear, so we threw the underwear  
15 away that the Red Cross had given us. We had, eh, absolutely just our uniforms  
16 left. Uh, the food was – It was – [10:41] You know, it was just what the  
17 soldiers were eating?  
18  
19Lois Collette: Yes.  
20  
21Estelle Mack: There was nothing else. We had soup, and everybody – w-, they said it was  
22 meat, horsemeat and I r-, I didn't eat a bit of meat all while I was there because  
23 I figured I didn't want any horsemeat. That's true.  
24  
25Lois Collette: Yeah. I imagine. Yeah.  
26  
27Estelle Mack: We had, uh – We just had the – Eh, when I – When I think about it – When I  
28 think about those boys coming in, patients and badly wounded and nothing but  
29 that awful stuff to feed them. Awful. [11:15] Why should we complain?  
30  
31Lois Collette: Yeah. Right. [11:18] What were the, um, and what were the hospital  
32 conditions like?  
33  
34Estelle Mack: Well we w-, they were very primitive. We had – we had this barracks, and, uh,  
35 um, actually, and this will be unbelievable to people who can't understand this,  
36 but we had very little – we did our surgery under the most primitive means, not  
37 primitive in those days...  
38  
39Lois Collette: Yeah, right.  
40  
41Estelle Mack: But today.  
42  
43Lois Collette: Right.  
44

1 Estelle Mack: We had nothing in the way of medication but morphine to had these p-, patients.  
2 And what they used for cleaning up wounds, you would – you wouldn't believe  
3 it but maggots, the ones – the ones that were walking with maggots. Those  
4 maggots cleaned up the wounds better than any medication. You [inaudible  
5 12:07]...  
6  
7 Lois Collette: [Inaudible 12:07] I just can't...  
8  
9 Estelle Mack: ...just loaded with maggots, and we were advised leave them alone, and, of  
10 course, a nurse will wanta [slapping] [clean them 12:16].  
11  
12 Lois Collette: Yeah, right.  
13  
14 Estelle Mack: But those maggots cleaned up all the infection in those wounds.  
15  
16 Lois Collette: Just – I don't see how you, uh, you girls, you know, could have kept s-,  
17 [chuckle] sane during all those conditions. [12:33] Um, did you – Were there  
18 any particular highlights in your – Would you like give us a few highlights  
19 overseas?  
20  
21 Estelle Mack: Well all I can remember is we worked so hard and was so tired most of the time.  
22 I think, uh, we really worked very hard. Uh, there was no such thing as hours.  
23 If you went on duty, you stayed on duty, and there were constant boys.  
24  
25 Lois Collette: And I often wondered about that. [13:06] You nurses, um, especially when you  
26 were working in surgery up at the front, uh, you must have been on, um, did you  
27 work 12 hours before you were relieved or what was, uh, what were you  
28 supposed to do?  
29  
30 Estelle Mack: We – We, eh, we had a – There was very little relief. That was one reason why  
31 they called for volunteers. And, see, uh, we didn't have any – We didn't have –  
32 We had – The nurses that – You were in the surgery and then – We didn't keep  
33 the patients, that's one thing. As soon as...  
34  
35 Lois Collette: [Oh 13:37].  
36  
37 Estelle Mack: ...they were operated on, then the – the trains took these boys out, but we  
38 always had new – We couldn't – There was no – Well we'd keep some that were  
39 terminal...  
40  
41 Lois Collette: Mm-hm.  
42  
43 Estelle Mack: ...that we knew were going to die on the...  
44

1Lois Collette: Yeah.  
2  
3Estelle Mack: ...that and that sort of thing.  
4  
5Lois Collette: I see. [13:50] So the trains would...?  
6  
7Estelle Mack: The trains were there and took the boys. God knows how long it took the poor  
8 kids to get there. But usually it was ambulatory patients, patients that now, for  
9 instance, uh, maybe, oh, if you had a leg off, if you – if you could move to the  
10 train, you went on the train...  
11  
12Lois Collette: Yeah.  
13  
14Estelle Mack: ...for something of that sort. As I say, I – I don't think you ever, anybody,  
15 unless they lived right there with those boys as a nurse, uh, and took care of  
16 them could realize their – the nobility and the courage of those boys.  
17  
18Lois Collette: [14:24] How – Were – How far were you from the front line?  
19  
20Estelle Mack: We were – We were, um – We weren't more than 50 miles away from, uh,  
21 Grandpre. Our hospital was right out in the woods between Verdun and  
22 Grandpre, and we were at-, the, uh, 89<sup>th</sup> Division was attached there.  
23  
24Lois Collette: [14:48] Um, but I – I understand that there was a little romance during, uh, your  
25 service?  
26  
27Estelle Mack: Oh, very much.  
28  
29Lois Collette: [14:58] Will you tell us a little bit about?  
30  
31Estelle Mack: Well, uh, that – That was interesting in this way – That would be a long story if  
32 I told it to you, but the – the Armistice was signed, and we came off duty, and,  
33 as I say, we had been working very hard all that time, and then the Armistice  
34 came along, and there was a, um, there was a lull, but then – then they went out  
35 and picked up these boys that were on the field and brought them into the  
36 hospital, into our place, but most of the, uh – There were very surgery – surgery  
37 because they died by that time. But we had a lot of illness.  
38  
39Lois Collette: Mm-hm.  
40  
41Estelle Mack: Boys with, uh, uh, illness, and among them – [15:41] Well I guess I told you  
42 about this young boy?  
43  
44Lois Collette: Yes.

1

2Estelle Mack: This young boy that I – And I – I could've – I – I didn't have anything to do  
3 them because I was a surgical nurse, and this older nurse came over, and she  
4 said, say Davis – or Mack. I wasn't Davis. Mack, she said what are you gonna  
5 do, we need nurses over here, and she said we've just got in an – a bunch of,  
6 men and officers with, uh, wounds, and we need help. And I said, oh, I'll come  
7 over. I'll come over and work. I'd rather work than do nothing.

8

9And among them – I say there were 5 men, all – my own – the man that finally was my husband  
10 had a – was wounded with shrapnel. And, uh, they came in, and we were  
11 working with them, and this – this m-, this fellow, eh, I looked him r-, he was  
12 helping everybody, and I go well there isn't much the matter with you, and he  
13 said no, not much if I get this junk out of my arm. So we used to, uh, you  
14 probably did it too – Some of you mothers would send us bread, you know, or  
15 send us, so one of the girl's mothers had sent us a great big can of cinnamon,  
16 and we had a little stove, and we were on night duty, and when we got o-, I  
17 [inaudible 16:57] and we cleaned up these patients and got them in bed and got  
18 things settled. And we nurses started over to our little kitchen to have some  
19 cinnamon toast. And all of the sudden, we looked out, and here was this face,  
20 this man was there, and he said gee, I love cinnamon toast. It was Ray, Ray  
21 Davis.

22

23Lois Collette: [17:21] Your husband to be?

24

25Estelle Mack: Yeah.

26

27Lois Collette: Right. [laughter]

28

29Estelle Mack: So we said – We said well come on it and you can have some with us, so Ray  
30 hung around, and he was – He, uh, hung around the hospital, then he was  
31 discharged, and his outfit was about, oh maybe 10 miles up the road, and he'd  
32 come down every night, and I'd go walking. That's where I learned to walk my,  
33 do my 2-3 miles a day in my rubber boots, and every night after we'd have a  
34 walk, there was – we walked in mud. There was nothing but mud. Ray would  
35 clean my rubber boots for me after I and put them outside the door. Well this  
36 night we were walking, and we found this young boy that we took in.

37

38Lois Collette: Yes.

39

40Estelle Mack: And, uh, as I say, that was my romance, and then when I came – when I – and  
41 this young kid, he was just a kid, and actually he became very jealous of Ray  
42 because I'd go out to dance at night with Ray, and used to, um, take care of him  
43 in the daytime, and I finally remember when – when he was getting a lot better,  
44 you know, and, uh, he, like all patients, he didn't think anybody could do



1 anything, only myself because I'd been with him for so long. But so this night,  
2 Ray came down and we w-, we all – there was a big dance. It was – the war  
3 was over. And I said, oh I can't go [inaudible 18:44]. I can't leave that kid. He  
4 feels so bad. And Ray said, well that's ridiculous, he said, he's better. So I got  
5 this one nurse – Oh, this one nurse, I can't – I wish I could remember her name.  
6 She was a dear girl, you know, a girl that's sort of plain and [inaudible]  
7 [prodding 19:02], and, uh, I said to her, uh, will you – will you relieve me  
8 tonight [stuttering] and take care of this boy? She said I sure would. She said if  
9 I ever have a man that had the love on me like Davis on you. And I go gee, he  
10 doesn't love me, does he?

11  
12Lois Collette: [laughter]

13  
14Estelle Mack: I thought she's crazy. I can remember thinking that. Oh, she said I would die  
15 right on the spot. But it was a – he had – It was a-, I – he was overcompensated,  
16 you know? To him – I think in those days men weren't used to seeing a woman  
17 running around in an ol' butcher apron and a pair of rubber boots and being able  
18 to, you know, work.

19  
20Lois Collette: [19:52] What were you doing on Armistice Day, Estelle?

21  
22Estelle Mack: [laughter] I'd been on duty for something like, I don't know how many hours  
23 where we were very, very busy. [Inaudible 20:02] the fighting was terrifically  
24 heavy up there at that particular time. And, uh, I'd been on duty I think all night  
25 if I remember rightly, it was all day and all night. We all were. You know there  
26 was so few of us there. [Inaudible 20:17] the girls were up in Paris and had an  
27 awfully nice time, but I've always glad I wasn't.

28  
29Lois Collette: Yeah.

30  
31Estelle Mack: I was always glad.

32  
33Lois Collette: Right.

34  
35Estelle Mack: If my duty was just what I went – what I had in mind when I went over to that  
36 American Red Cross and [asked to 20:36] enlist. I think I've been very  
37 fortunate in being able. I think it's been the biggest thing in my life that I've  
38 been able to – to see the kind of service that I did see. Well, anyway, came off  
39 duty, and we had a kind of an enclosure where we had taken in some German  
40 prisoners, just kids, and I came across, uh, to go to my barracks, and here were  
41 all of our boys and these German boys loving and dancing up and down and –  
42 with each other, and I'm like well, huh, I didn't even know there was an  
43 armistice. We didn't – we didn't know there was an armistice.

44

1Lois Collette: Right. You're too busy working.  
2  
3Estelle Mack: [21:18] I thought are these kids crazy? What are they doing? But I was awfully  
4 tired, and I didn't pay any attention, and I went in, and I looked up at the wall,  
5 and here on my – on my m-, roommate's tin hat was a great big rat, as big as –  
6 as big as a cat, and I'm so tired I didn't care. And I'm a scared of a mouse  
7 today.  
8  
9Lois Collette: [laughter]  
10  
11Estelle Mack: Even a bee.  
12  
13Lois Collette: [laughter] And that's just wonderful, Estelle. I really thank you. [21:48] And,  
14 consequently, you came home, you married Ray, and you had...  
15  
16Estelle Mack: Three children.  
17  
18Lois Collette: ...3 children, and they're all living right near you and...  
19  
20Estelle Mack: [**Inaudible** 21:58] and, uh, I feel I've been a very fortunate person.  
21  
22Lois Collette: Thank you.  
23  
24  
25/lo