

**Interview of Dorothy Schroeder on her service
in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps during WWII**

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5 Jean Campbell: This is Jean T. Campbell member of the [inaudible 00:04] Unit Women's
6 Overseas Service League interviewing Dorothy Schroeder another
7 member for the Oral History Committee of the Women's Overseas Service
8 League. The date is Friday, March 7, 1986.
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10 Dorothy Schroeder: Hello Jean. Um, I'm Dorothy Schroeder. I'm a native of Minneapolis,
11 Minnesota and, uh, I have, I married a Louisville man so I am now a
12 Louisvillian for the last 36 years. But, uh, my family are all in Minnesota.
13 I had, uh, one sister and one brother. I graduated from Washburn High
14 School in 1938. I went into nurses training at Saint Mary's Hospital in
15 Minneapolis and, uh, graduated in 1941. And at that time, I had a first
16 cousin who was in the same class and we decided we wanted to see the
17 world so we flipped a coin to see whether we would go to Florida or
18 California to work. And that's how we ended up going to Florida. We
19 worked at Saint Francis Hospital on Miami Beach in 1941. At that time,
20 the, uh, [inaudible 01:29] from the Air Corps was very active in Miami
21 Beach and, uh, we, uh, made a lot of friends and got to love the service.
22 Uh, and while we enjoyed working at Saint Francis and, uh, we worked in
23 the operating room together, um, it wasn't long before we began to wish
24 we were in the service too. We had met some nurses [inaudible 01:55]
25 and so we, um, both went on down and joined and, um, had executed our
26 oath of office on January 28, 1944. And then we called home and told our
27 folks. And, uh, they weren't too surprised. Um, there already was talk in
28 Minneapolis of having to, uh, freeze the nurses in their jobs because so
29 many were leaving for the service. And, uh, uh, as I said my family kind
30 of expected we would. I guess our letters told them that we were planning
31 to do that. Um, Drew, Drew Field in Tampa, Florida that's where we had
32 basic training and, uh, from, the first assignment I had was at [inaudible
33 02:49] and, uh, loved that. It was just like a country club then and still is
34 [laughter]. Uh, but I have had a lifelong problem with overweight and
35 there was no possibility of my being accepted for Air Evac school which
36 is what all the nurses wanted. And so I decided to transfer to regular army
37 in order to be able to go overseas. And I did that. And I was, uh,
38 transferred to, uh, Camp Claiborne in Louisiana. Uh, had just a short time
39 there.
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41 Um, in September of 1944, I was transferred to Camp Barkeley in Texas.
42 And, uh, joined the 191st General Hospital which was just being put
43 together then. And, uh, went across country by train to, uh, Camp Myles
44 Standish in Massachusetts which was outside of Taunton. Not far from

1 Boston. And, uh, there we waited to, uh, for a ship to take us overseas.
2 And we did finally go on the USS West Point and, uh, left Boston Harbor
3 on October 31, 1944. Uh, and that was a wonderful trip. I, uh, had no
4 problem with seasickness. It was very crowded. West Point of course
5 was Americans show, uh, the equivalent of Queen Elizabeth I guess. And,
6 uh, uh, we were crowded into bunks 4 high and, uh, showers of course
7 were with sea water and the girls thought we were really roughing it. We
8 found out later it was a luxury. And, uh, we arrived at Liverpool and went
9 in November 9, uh, from there went by train to Glasgow, Scotland. And
10 then had a staging area at, uh, a place called Nitshill. It was just that a
11 small hill. Uh, [inaudible 05:21] and had coal stoves. And it was very
12 very cold and wet and raining like Scotland is in the fall. Uh, but we did
13 have time enough to do a little sightseeing from there. We had to wear,
14 uh, old [jeans 05:37], combat boots, the whole thing, and a helmet liner.
15 [Laughter] But we weren't anywhere near, uh, battle. Uh, on December
16 15, we crossed the Channel and, uh, were sent to Etretat, France which is a
17 beautiful little resort community north of Le Havre. And, uh, there we had
18 another staging area. We, I understand they were waiting, uh, for the
19 hospital to be evacuated so that we could take over when we arrived in
20 Paris. And, uh, on, uh, December 24 the day before Christmas in 1944,
21 uh, we were in a train station in Paris at, uh, Saint-Lazare and taken by
22 truck to the first general hospital which had been an American hospital in
23 Paris. And we were on temporary duty and that was the first nursing I did
24 overseas. Uh, they were busy and we worked, I worked night duty. Not
25 in the operating room but, uh, just on the floor. And, uh, the day after
26 Christmas, uh, we went back to the 191st General Hospital which was
27 opening up in, Etre, in, uh, [inaudible 07:05]. It's a small suburban town
28 just outside of Paris up to, uh, Orly Airport. Um, this hospital had been a
29 mental institution for the French and all of their patients had to be
30 evacuated. And on the day that, the day after Christmas when we nurses
31 went back there, um, the civilians were still taking out, uh, mental
32 patients, and, uh, it was a heart rendering scene. But, um, let's see, uh, the
33 place that the army had found that we could use the buildings as, as they
34 were and it was, uh, a wonderful place to have a hospital. It was a [walled
35 07:59] grounds and, uh, the administration buildings were 2, uh, 4 stories.
36 Most of the wards, uh, were 2 stories. No elevators. And, uh, the
37 operating room had been set up on the ground floor and they made a
38 recovery on the second floor which was a big mistake because the
39 [inaudible 08:20] were wearing themselves out. And it didn't take them 2
40 days to change those arrangements. Um, I went to work in the operating
41 room and, uh, Battle of the Bulge of course had just been completed, uh, 2
42 weeks previously and we were then getting casualties from the station
43 hospital up there and we worked around the clock [inaudible 08:47]. Uh,
44 it was an awfully busy time. Uh, it was while working in the operating

1 room there that I met my husband who was a surgical technician. He, uh
2 was the noncom in charge of our operating room and we were good
3 friends for about 4 years before we had our, found romance and married.
4 Um, the head nurse of our hospital was [Ines Haynes 09:17]. At that time,
5 she was Captain [Haynes 09:19] and she was promoted to major while still
6 in Paris. And, uh, later was the, uh, first full colonel in the nurse corps
7 here in America [inaudible 09:35] and, uh, was head of the Army Nurse
8 Corps for several years. Uh, let's see, while I was overseas, I took
9 advantage of all the time off I could get for leave and those were
10 wonderful experiences I had [inaudible 10:01] in the Riviera, uh, went
11 down with 5 friends and we stayed in Caen. Spent a day at Eden-Roc,
12 visited the casino in Monte Carlo. Spent a day sailing on the
13 Mediterranean. Lots of wonderful experiences. Uh, a few months later I
14 had an opportunity to go to [inaudible 10:25]. That was a train trip south
15 to [inaudible 10:30] and I did enjoy that very much too. About this time
16 my young, my only brother [chuckle] was, um, in London getting ready to
17 go back home and get out of the service after completing his, uh, required
18 number of flights in a B-17. And, uh, so I requested a 10 day leave and
19 was granted that and got back to London and spent some time with my
20 brother before he went home.

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22 And, uh, my last leave before coming back to the states was Switzerland.
23 We went to a small ski resort village called Grindelwald and, uh, that was
24 Christmas of 1945, and uh, one very memorable occasion that happened, I
25 was in Paris, was, uh, the memorial service in honor of Franklin Delano
26 Roosevelt who had died. Um, Captain [Haynes 11:37] asked me to go
27 with her. She had tickets to the service which was conducted at Notre-
28 Dame and, uh, it was just very stirring, uh, a momentous occasion. All of
29 the allies sent representatives from all over Europe. There were uniforms
30 of every sort and, uh, it was a [solemn 12:05] occasion by invitation only.
31 Notre-Dame was packed and the courtyard with steps out in front were
32 packed with people who wanted to be there and couldn't get in. And of
33 course, when they played Taps, uh, there was the echoing bugler way up
34 high in the dome of Notre-Dame and, uh, as I said it was one of the most
35 moving experiences and made me realize how much, uh, Americans as
36 well, as well as, as Roosevelt were loved [inaudible 12:40].

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38 And in, uh, January 15, 1946, uh, the 191st hospital went home and we
39 went through Camp Phillip Morris and on the, uh, [Western 12:58]
40 Victory Ship, uh, landed at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and, uh, that first
41 meal home was all everybody ever said it was. We had steak and ice
42 cream, fresh milk and fruit [inaudible 13:15].
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1 Uh, I was discharged from Fort Sheridan, Illinois on February 4, 1946 and
2 went home to my family in Minneapolis. Uh, my dad insisted that I take
3 advantage of the GI Bill so I enrolled at the University of Minnesota and,
4 uh, put in about 1½ years toward public health nursing. But, uh, uh,
5 romance happened and, uh, my husband who's a native of Louisville and
6 whom I had worked with in the operating room all that time in Paris, uh,
7 started visiting and we corresponded and decided to get married. So I quit
8 school and went to work at the VA Hospital in Minneapolis. Then after
9 we married I transferred to Nichols VA Hospital here in Louisville and
10 worked until, uh, I was pregnant with my first son. And we went, uh, built
11 our first full house and, uh, had 3 more sons. I, uh, worked at St. Joseph's
12 Infirmary for about 12 years part-time while the boys were small and
13 when they, uh, were getting on toward teenagers I decided to stay at home.
14 So I was out of nursing for, uh, 9 years. And then, uh, Jewish Hospital
15 offered a re-entry course for nurses who had been out for a while and I
16 took that early in July and worked for 5 years at Jewish. When my
17 husband retired from the Post Office, I decided to retire too and, uh, now
18 worked just 2 nights a week, uh, private duty, and have been the same way
19 for 3 years. I keep my license up because I think I always wanted to be an
20 RN. And, uh, I thank you Jean for this opportunity to tell my story.

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