

**Interview of Laura Georgina Frost Smith
on her service as an Army nurse during WWI**

My name is Laura Smith and I'm a member of the Santa Clara Unit of the WOSL. They have asked me to make a tape about my experiences in the First World War as an army nurse. I've written a book for my grandchildren called *Grandmother's Story*, so I'll use some part of that for this tape. The war had been going on in Europe since 1914, and the Germans were getting nearer and nearer to Paris. My graduation as a nurse in Massachusetts Homeopathic Hospital in Boston almost coincided with our declaration of war, April 6, 1917. June 5 was fixed as registration day under the draft. So many young men rushed off to offer their services, it was difficult for the regular army officers to handle them all. At least one German submarine was off the Atlantic Coast all the time. The largest number was in August when they were active in attacking coast [inaudible 01:02] vessels. The Lusitania was sunk on May 13. Five submarines sunk in all, about 110,000 tons of shipping according to the U.S. Official Picture of WWI. The greatest loss was the San Diego off Fire Island, July 19, 1918. All the crew were saved, but six were lost and six injured. This was the same week we were crossing the Atlantic in a convoy.

The Red Cross organized Base 44 from our hospital, and most of my class signed up for it. There were 100 nurses chosen from a large number volunteering. Also, 250 men from other departments and 32 doctors. A hundred-bed hospital was planned. We all practiced marching down Commonwealth Avenue in Boston for the New York Parade where we marched for a bond drive. It was 20 blocks long. Finally, we were issued our uniforms and given our shots. The army took us over then, and I had an olive drab footlocker to put my clothes in. We all dressed in our navy blue ankle-length uniforms with a blue star sailor hat and high boots, also issued a felt hat and trench coat for winter. They herded us into the cemetery of Old Trinity Church in Boston to take our pictures. We were a lugubrious lot. I took the oath on February 15, 1918, and was sent with the contingent to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. I was put in the black medical ward, and the work was not as difficult as my private duty had been, and we had more time off. In 1918, blacks and whites were kept separate in the South, even when sick in a hospital. White orderlies were supposed to give their personal care to the men, but when one refused to give an enema to a black man, I was so angry, I put up a screen and took care of the patient myself.

Although we were under army regulations and were allowed insurance, we did not have the pay or any rank that the men had. Also, terrible lies were told about the nurses having to be sent home because of pregnancy. We laughed it off, but during World War – the Second World War, it was so vicious there had to be an inspection and an investigation for it was hurting the recruiting of the WACs who were needed so badly. They were all trained for secretaries and telephone operators [where 03:35] it took months to train them in. At first it was thought to be Nazi propaganda, but the sad discovery was the rumor being spread by the men who resented the women [inaudible 03:48]. They thought they would be shipped overseas as soon as enough women could be recruited.

1 We used to have good times on our hours off. Lookout Mountain was one of the places we went
2 on picnics. It was a grand view, and you could see the Tennessee River winding through the
3 country below. I also had a chance to ride horseback. I hadn't brought my riding pants so
4 borrowed a pair of olive drab from one of the enlisted men. The next day, a fr-, – it was on the
5 bulletin board, nurses will not be allowed to wear any part of a soldier's uniform. One day when
6 I had time to ride with a soldier – Soldier [inaudible 04:29] this time, I was invited somewhere
7 else. I called Evelyn Petrie, who liked horses. She took the horse I was supposed to have that
8 day, and it ran away with her. Another horseman trying to save her, rode straight onto her horse
9 stopping her so abruptly she was thrown and her neck broken. I was shaken up when I heard
10 what had happened. Some of the new recruits had never been more than a mile away from their
11 [inaudible 04:55] home, and the move was too much for them. I had been transferred to help in
12 the psychiatric ward. The first day on duty, when I entered the room, I found everyone cringing
13 in corners or under beds. A young fellow was brandishing a straight razor. I didn't know what
14 was happen...

15

16 We had waited so long, we thought we would never get overseas, but finally, our orders came to
17 leave Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, June 17, 1918, and report to the Nurses Mobilization Station in
18 Hoboken, New York. On June 18, we were quartered in the Holly Hotel in New York. My
19 sister came to see me, and since it was near my birthday, mother had made me a cake and we had
20 a party in my room. After being in New York about a month, we left July 14 on the troop ship,
21 the Northland. It took us about 18 days to get to Liverpool for we sailed right up to Halifax,
22 Nova Scotia where the convoy was formed. There were many troop ships with the destroyers
23 and battleships to protect us. I never knew how many there were but guessed about 18. I learned
24 from reading Admiral Sims' *Victory at Sea* that troops had been going over since May 1917, and
25 in July 1918, we part of 300,000 that went over that month. General Pershing had been there a
26 month getting things organized. I had packed my little box camera and material for developing.
27 We were told not to throw anything overboard as any floating object would reveal our course to
28 any lurking submarine. Lookouts were posted around all the decks for 24 hours. We watched –
29 to watch – and for the telltale periscopes. No sonar system then.

30

31 The convoy arrived in Liverpool about August 1. The next day, a group of volunteers took us to
32 see Stonehenge. It was a quiet and beautiful, peaceful place. The next night, we crossed the
33 channel with no light shining anywhere. I slept well in a little hammock and didn't worry even
34 though I didn't know then that the Americans had laid 56, 611 mines in the North Sea and the
35 British 13,552 at the cost of \$40 million. With the mines blocking the German submarines in the
36 north and all the sub chasers in the Atlantic, 20,079,000 men and women were convoyed to
37 England, and not a ship was lost. We landed in Le Havre, France, in the early morning, and a
38 notice was sent to our friends that we had arrived safely. The next day, we were sent on to Paris,
39 and on August 4, I was put on duty in Evacuation Hospital No. 7 [inaudible 07:51] Souilly
40 District. If there hadn't been the amputation ward, it might not have been such a shock and been
41 so devastating, but helping dress those quivering stumps and hearing the laughter and jokes in
42 spite of their misfortune was too much for me, and I cried almost all day. I thought they had
43 made a mistake in putting us through that experience so soon, but maybe it was best and I could
44 stand anything after that miserable week.

1

2We were all lined up one morning, all 12 of us were [cut off 08:22] off right between Marion and
3myself. We called ourselves *The Dirty Dozen* after that. Marion went to Pougues-les-Eaux with
4Base 44 and lived in a hotel for the duration. [Cooper 08:35] and I became buddies and went to
5Evacuation No. 5 where we were equipped with a helmet, gasmask, mess kit, and canteens.
6While we were being conveyed across the Atlantic and making our way to France, the
7Americans were planning their first big offensive in trying to turn the Germans back at Belleau
8Woods in their advance on Paris. But the fighting was intense, and the French general gave the
9order for the marines to retreat. No one knows how many – no one knows now who took the
10order, but the officers receiving it said, “Hell no, we just got here.” It was then the initiative was
11snatched from the Germans who were at Château-Thierry and nearing Paris. It never ended until
12November 11, 1918.

13

14It was here that we 12 came into the picture and set up a mobile tent hospital with about 30 other
15nurses. We were camped at what had been a town near Château-Thierry on the River Marne.
16The nurses traveling with the – was about, uh, 12 in an ambulance, had a red cross painted on the
17roof. A seat made of planks was on each side. In spite of all the equipment and all the personnel
18on the move, we never saw any other truck or car on the way. They were all stretched out some
19distance apart so that some enemy plane coming over would not spot any unusual troop
20movement. When we were finally set up and the wounded began to come in, the stretchers were
21laid on the ground and the corpsmen stripped’em of their muddy clothes and deloused them.
22Those that could stand it were given a shower before we received them in the operating tent. I
23did find one cooty on me once. Most of my work was in the operating tent, and I can still hear
24the sound of a leg being sawed off. I remember the boy who had one side of his face blown off
25asking me, “Do I look bad?” We worked 8 hours on and 8 hours around the clock. By the time
26we got up and back into bed, it was more like 6 hours off in the 24.

27

28The patients were given only necessary operations and were sent back to the base hospital as
29soon as they could be moved or when a train was available. The trains were setup to hold the
30stretchers three deep and side by side the whole lengths of the car. It was a long way back to the
31base on a jolting train, but it was the first leg of their journey home for some. It was
32unbelievable what the engineers did in replacing tracks that had been bombed out and getting
33trains running. Twenty thousand cars and 1,500 locomotives were shipped to France for the
34railroad troops. The cost of each engine was \$45,000. Our next move was to Villers-Cotterêts
35where we were set up in a wheat field. The wheat was still in stacks, and the corpsmen all
36moved in and the huge space was all cleaned in a few minutes. I think this was called a
37[inaudible 11:49] front. The marines had been fighting here since July 18, 1918, but were
38pushing the line back when we arrived in August. The 26th or “Yankee” Division had been on
39the line for 8 days and nights and lost 500 men. They were relieved by the 42nd and the 32nd, the
40Wisconsin Division. We always asked the patients what division they were in but never realized
41how many were being sent up to the front to live sometimes for weeks in the muddy trenches.

42

43I had collected the insignia of dif-, of different ones and divisions, but when my bag was lost on
44one of our moves, everything went, including my diary and some films that I had developed.

1 Our tents were large and our locker fitted under the cot with a box between to keep our things in.
2 A cone-shaped stove was in the middle of the tent called a Sibley. It took off some of the chill.
3 One of the enlisted men had the chore of keeping it stocked with coal or something that looked
4 like coal. A wooden floor kept us out of the mud for it rained a lot and there were many
5 strapping feet. We had to walk on slippery duckboards everywhere. The operating tents were
6 covered with khaki blankets to keep the light from showing at night and we couldn't have any
7 light showing in our tent. That made it difficult to find our way back and crawl into bed. When
8 she came off duty, one used to make herself – one nurse used to make herself a cup of tea on her
9 little alcohol lamp. She kept a small pail of water under her cot. Also one in case she had to get
10 up in the night. One late night, we were awakened by her cussing. She had mistakenly used the
11 wrong bucket for her tea.

12

13 I don't remember much about our menu or the mess as we called it. We joked about the Santa
14 Clara Prunes. Little did I know that someday I would be living in Santa Clara Valley. One dish
15 comes to mind, a cabbage leaf wrapped around a spoonful of canned bully. The cook was really
16 proud of that one. A basin and pitcher for hot water that we heated over a bonfire in a big can
17 was used for our washing and bathing when a big push was over. The only real bath we had was
18 when we were taken back to R&R. Sometimes it was a French bath and they lined the tub with a
19 sheet [inaudible 14:2] a place for us to have a tub bath. Sometimes we were invited to dances.
20 The English and the French could go home for rest, but it was too far for the Americans so
21 recreation was planned in plays and dances. I put on a show for our own group one time. I
22 taught Maude, who was only a little over 4' tall, to put on gloves and have a make-believe fight
23 with Marion Thomas, who was almost 6'. One of the medics acted as referee and it was quite a
24 boxing match. Why, of course, Maude knocked Thomas down.

25

26 I had never learned to dance and when a soldier came and asked me, I said, "I can't dance," but
27 he grabbed me and said, "You'll dance with me." Sure enough, that was my first lesson. I
28 learned during the evening that he was a drummer in the band. I guess he thought if he could
29 make a drum keep time, he could make me dance. I still have an invitation to the 39th Engineers
30 that they sent me so long ago. I think this is the one where they asked me to dance with a French
31 general since I spoke a little French. He never said a word, and he was a terrible dancer.
32 Afterward, I hid in back of the barracks so I wouldn't have to dance with him again. I think his
33 name was Pétain. When we were being moved to another front, we often stopped at interesting
34 places along the way. We visited some of the Napoleon castles, Pierrefonds was one, and
35 Compiègne was being renovated where it had been bombed. One time we stopped at the
36 entrance to Verdun Citadel where the French held out for so long. It is a huge underground
37 fortress, and the last shot of the German army was fired at at November 11, 1918. In spite of all
38 the sandbags around the Reims Cathedral, it was pretty well shot up but nothing compared to the
39 devastation we saw later in Belgium.

40

41 Our next move was to the Meuse-Argonne Sector. I didn't know that at that the time. Our
42 movements were kept very secret, and we were never told a name of the town where we were
43 going to set up our camp. France was France, just somewhere without any geographic
44 distinction. The Americans launched their attack on the Meuse-Argonne front the 26th of

1September at 5:30 a.m. The German soldiers had been living on the land for four years, and they
2had built some clever housing for themselves, even with running water and toilets. Reims was
3taken that first day of fighting. The German characters were so great they weren't published at
4home.

5

6...127 years before, Louis XII and Marie Antoinette were captured here and turned back to Paris
7and the guillotine. By October, the strengths of the First Army, including the French, was one
8million men. There was a rolling artillery barrage, and the infantry advanced. On October 2, the
9Second Army was created, and the wounded were pouring in from the 28th and 35th Divisions.

10

11I remember very little of the setup of our hospital there. Flu was beginning to take its toll along
12with the other casualties. I came in one day and found mys-, – I came to one day and found
13myself in bed in a little tent all by myself. I hadn't seen a bed before as all our patients were put
14on army cots and that's what we slept on too. The head nurse took care of me and I'm sure she
15saved my life. Although I was isolated, my friends, Maude, Margaret, and Emma came to the
16little opaque window and sang silly songs to me. That helped me to get well, and after a few
17weeks, I was up and back on duty again. This was October 1918 when the Americans were
18fighting the greatest battle in the American history. But General Foch called upon General
19Pershing to assist the French Army in Belgium. General Pershing complied and sent the 37th and
20the 91st Divisions to the Front. They entered the fighting October 30 and shared the German
21offensive for the French in Flanders until the Armistice. There were 4,000 casualties, and I
22don't know how many came through Evacuation No. 5; maybe they all did.

23

24So we packed up and moved again, this time by train. The men were riding in boxcars that had
2540 Hommes/8 Chevaux printed on their sides. We were six nurses in one small compartment
26and on several trains. When it came night, we put all our luggage on the floor and laid on them,
27head to foot, all of our heads on one side and our feet across on the other. We always brought
28along some food on our travels, and one day, I tried to heat a can of soup on my stern stove. Just
29then, the train was shunted and everything tipped over, including the burning alcohol from the
30stove. There was a nice little stream of fire running down the train corridor but I soon stomped it
31out. So much for army shoes. We were fortunate to have a toilet on board, but the men stopped
32along the way at different sidings. Lieutenant Evans, one of our nice doctors, was caught with
33his pants down when the train started up unexpectedly. He usually – he really got an ovation
34from the crowd as he scrambled aboard clutching his clothing. We made fun out of every little
35incident and were hilarious at times.

36

37We sang all the songs written for the times, *Over There*, *Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit*
38*Bag*, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, *There's a Long Long Trail A-Winding*, and *The Rose of No*
39*Man's Land* sung in our own way: " 'Neath the war's red curse stands a cross red nurse, she's
40the rose of no man's land." We finally arrived in what had been a village in Belgium. The name
41Staden was still on one of the ruined walls. All our equipment was set up, and we didn't move
42again until after the Armistice on November 11, 1918. Our own supplies seemed large but you
43can imagine the volume of work performed by the SOS. if you knew that each combat division

1of 28,000 men required 25 French carloads of supplies every day and they had to get everything
2to 2 million men. The average shipment of supplies approximated 1 million tons a month.

3

4While waiting for the casualties to come in, we discovered lots of interesting things to do:
5Visited the bombed-out homes, pushed ourselves on the little flatcars of the Narraguagus
6Railroad. It had been used to bring ammunition up to the front line. Collected German helmets
7and other souvenirs. I found a large [inaudible 21:04] that was to carry a German [howitzer
821:08] shell and it got home – I got it home by packing it with my clothes in my sleeping bag. It
9made a fat-looking bag, but no one noticed. To think I'm ashamed of bringing it home with a
10U.S. 40 automatic. One of the corpsmen knew he couldn't get away with it and asked me to take
11it for him. So to be nice to him, I agreed. We soon learned the sound of the German Fokker
12plane. I didn't have the – it didn't have the same droning sound of the allied ones, and we were
13hardly – waited for the sound of the alarm to take cover and go into an [arbory 21:46] for safety.
14It seemed cruel to leave the bed patients but reasonable that someone should be left to take care
15of them in case the hospital was bombed.

16

17One of the ambulances was returning to the Front one morning. Margaret and I asked the driver
18if he would take us up there. It was about an hour's ride over muddy, bumpy roads. When we
19arrived at the field hospital, one of the officers balled us out and said, "You girls better get out of
20here. Do you see that hill over there? It was shelled this morning." He was still shaking. I got
21some pictures of the empty trenches before leaving. The Germans were getting desperate now
22and used more and more mustard gas. Our casualties were 20 and 30 percent gas. It, it made
23huge blisters on their skin and they suffered painfully. Even though they were cleaned, I
24sometimes got a whiff of the stuff. Margaret and I became very fond of one of our patients. We
25kept him several days trying to get him to talk. He was only about 18 years old and had a bullet
26hole right in his – middle of his forehead. All he would say was [inaudible 22:56] but he wasn't
27paralyzed. When he wanted something, we would keep asking him until we hit the right thing,
28and he would nod his head. One day, Margaret sang *Over There* to him, and he followed along
29saying all the words. That was a great day for us. When he was finally evacuated, we went to
30the train with him and sat by his [inaudible 23:18] until the train pulled out.

31

32At the end of one ward, there were several wounded German prisoners, young, towheaded, blue-
33eyed boys. A guard stood over them with a US .45. Having American and German patients
34together brought home the fact of how stupid war could be. Why can't they settle things in some
35civilized way? Jesus taught us to love one another, maybe it will take another four-letter word to
36be the answer: fear. About November 7, we began to hear rumors that an armistice was being
37planned. We didn't believe it for we still heard the guns and the wounded were still coming in.
38Finally one day, the 11th of November, everything became quiet about 11 a.m., and you
39wondered what was different. There wasn't a sound for there were no birds to sing or cows to
40moo. We still couldn't believe it possible as the wounded were still coming in by the [inaudible
4124:15]. A group of French trumpeters came and played for us in the afternoon, and that was our
42only celebration.

43

1Finally, all our patients were moved back to the base hospital, and Margaret and I thought we
2would go to Bruges if we could find a train. We walked to a siding where a train was sitting with
3its engine puffing. It was headed in the right direction, but it was a freight and there were no
4passenger cars. That didn't faze us. A big Pierce-Arrow truck was on a flatcar, so we climbed
5aboard and settled down in the front seat to ride in luxury to Bruges. Some stores had been
6opened although they showed signs of having been bombed. I bought some plates. One said in
7Flemish, The Clock Ticks Nowhere Else as It Does at Home. The other is a blue Delft. I still
8have them. We visited a little corner shop where they were making pillow lace just as if there
9had never been a war. I bought a few things, including a table runner that is wearing out after 60
10years of use. My French was still use – of a – to us here and after having lunch in a little
11Belgium bistro, we bought a ticket for a train ride back to Staden. We had no idea where to get
12off and it was so dark, we couldn't recognize anything, but a kind French soldier told us when
13we got to our destination. Then we found our way back to camp.

14

15Evacuation 5 was about to be disbanded, but it took a while to load everything and get us all
16reassigned. Colonel Leary, who was our commanding officer, asked four of us if we would like
17to drive to Ypres. This was a great adventure. Ypres is a city that had been bombarded for four
18years. It was about 20 miles away. We set out one morning in a touring car with a driver. The
19devastation along the way was unbelievable. Houses just a pile of rubble, dead cows in the
20fields, bloated bodies of horses along the muddy roads where rats were scurrying out of the way.

21

22We arrived about lunchtime, and our English officer greeted us as mayor of the city. He invited
23us to his quarters for tea. We couldn't imagine where he could live in that ruin but were escorted
24along a boardwalk down into a basement that was unique in the way it was furnished, even had a
25carpet on the floor. His orderly brought us tea and biscuits, which was to be our only meal that
26day. The officer took us around and told us what the different buildings had been. I took several
27pictures of what had been the cathedral, then it began to rain and I placed my little No. 2
28Brownie on a wheelbarrow and took a time exposure of a tower, all that was left of Cloth Hall.
29The developed picture was on a slant. *Life* magazine had a – printed one of the same tower
30before it – last bombardment, saying it was a cathedral. I was always going to correct them but
31never did.

32

33We started to drive back in the late afternoon, but partway home, the car stopped. Our driver
34wasn't a mechanic, so the five of us started to walk. I felt very sorry for the driver. Colonel
35Leary told him he would send a car for him in the morning, but I shivered at the thought of that
36poor kid sitting there all night among the dead horses and the rats. After walking for hours in the
37dark, we only had a flash – one flashlight – no one was sure of the way. Luckily, we saw a light
38in the [shelter 27:41] and a Belgium soldier came along way with us to point out the right road to
39take. We trudged on all night until 4:00 in the morning. We were happy to see our tents, and I
40fell into bed. All I could think of how lucky we were to have been with a commanding officer;
41coming home at that hour in the morning would've been a disaster. Winter was still on its way,
42and the rain with it. Since the troops were sent back from what had been the Front, we were sent
43back too and set up a smaller hospital in what had been a hotel at Malo-les-Bains near Dunkirk.
44It was good to be in a building at last. The patients were mostly flu and pneumonia.

1

2 On our hours off, we would – which were 8 in the 24 now, we walked on the beaches. Huge
3 mines had washed up on the shore, and at Christmas, the men put on a boxing match. We tried
4 to cheer the patients up on Christmas Day by singing carols, but some tears we saw made it
5 doubtful if we succeeded. The U.S. Naval Air Station was in Dunkirk, and the officers invited us
6 to dance there. On our last day, they gave us a farewell party at the casino in Malo-les-Bains. It
7 took a long time to send us all home as there weren't enough ships for so many people. The
8 nurses were sent to Tulle to Base 82, and I went on duty in the [inaudible 29:04] Clinic.

9 Walking by a bed in a ward one day, I happened to look down, and under the bed on the floor
10 was a [cone 29:10] of clotted blood. I pulled down the clothes and took one look. The
11 hemorrhage was leaking right through the mattress. He was rushed to the operating room and
12 given a transfusion.

13

14 Travel was – Tulle was so near Paris, Margaret and I went there every chance we got, once
15 without leave. We got away with it because, as one MP said, "There was no jail available." A
16 troop train loaded with returning soldiers heard our rather flippant conversation with the officer
17 and egged us on. We overstayed our leave one night too so we could go to the opera. It was
18 *Aida* and well worth the bawling out we got. The only tickets available were from a scalper, and
19 we paid nearly a month's wages for them. Visiting the Louvre was wonderful. To really see the
20 *Mona Lisa*, she looked so small, and to stand before the *Venus de Milo*, it was so huge, was a
21 great experience. The Eiffel Tower was closed, but I don't like heights anyway. On the way to
22 Tulle, we stopped at Base 44, the Nièvre Hospital Center in Nièvre, France. It seemed we were
23 getting nearer and nearer to the coast, yet they managed to put us to work as we moved along. It
24 was on January 29 we found ourselves in Tulle, and on my record, I find I was given leave on
25 March 1, 1919, for 7 days.

26

27 The traveling Margaret and I did certainly did took more than a week, and I find I returned from
28 leave on March 15. A group of us visited Coblenz and took a ride down the Rhine River passing
29 many old castles and a huge escarpment, the Lorelei of legend. It was quite a sight to see the
30 American flag flying from Ehrenbreitstein, the great impregnable fortress. It was occupied then
31 by U.S. 17th Field Artillery, the 2nd Division. Margaret and I went on to Nice and stayed at the
32 Hotel [Anglican 31:11], but it was so expensive, we discovered the [pension 31:12] was more
33 fitting for what we were able to spend. Margaret and I went to Monaco and saw the Monte Carlo
34 Casino where the king lived – and where the king lived. It must have been very different before
35 the war. There was only a few service people about and they certainly went – weren't gambling.
36 We took the train to [inaudible 31:39] to see the French Alps. On the way, we met two officers
37 who were on leave and enjoyed their company. Emma was with us now, and all five of us
38 entered the hotel at the same time. The clerk was puzzled that there were three women and only
39 two men. She finally put us in adjoining rooms with a connecting door that was locked.

40

41 On return to Tulle, we were ordered to Base 87 and were there from April 3 to May 7 when we
42 were ordered to [Inaudible 32:12]. This was a quaint old town on the southern coast of France.
43 The people were very friendly and several of us were invited to a wedding in our – in an old
44 church. We thought the bride would receive the money they were collecting, but I learned it was

1to pay the sexton of the church. After the ceremony, a procession was formed and led by an
2accordion player, and we walked about a mile out into the country. The little – the bride’s family
3was entertaining us with a dinner of soup and some kind of stew that was delicious. It was
4served on a long table in a backyard of an old farmhouse. We thanked the host and hostess, and
5one of them walked all the way back with us to town. Another day, we took a long walk out into
6the countryside. It was good to see whole houses and trees that had not been touched by the war.
7We sat down by the side of the brook to listen to the birds sing and for the first time, I heard a
8cuckoo bird. This is one of the species that lays its eggs in another bird’s nest to be hatched.

9

10After staying in a large camp made up of barracks like buildings, we were moved on to
11[inaudible 33:21], a hospital center near Brest. While there, the Masonic Lodge gave us a huge
12party with music and food. We all gathered at the beach and had our pictures taken. There
13must’ve been all the people who were waiting to go on the next boat to the U.S. The navy also
14gave us a dance on May the 24 on the ship *USS George Washington*. It was at anchor in the
15Brest Harbor then. Finally, on May 31, [inaudible 34:02] was ready to take us aboard. It had
16been a long wait, so everyone was happy to be on their way at last. On – one deck was given
17over to the French war brides and their soldier husbands. I felt sorry for some of the pretty
18French girls and also for some of the really young boys who would be facing unknown problems.
19Coming into New York Harbor was an unforgettable event. Tug boats and fire boats came out to
20meet us, and in my exuberance, I flung my blue straw hat right at the Statue of Liberty. Bands
21were playing on board, and rolls of toilet paper were strung all over the ship like confetti on a
22happy cruise ship. All the returning nurses were put up at the Hotel Albert, and we had plenty of
23time for shopping in New York. I bought another hat almost like my uniform one.

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25Saying goodbye to all the friends we had made in service was very sobering. On the train and
26the streetcar home, I never felt so depressed and forlorn in all my life. No one knew me or
27noticed that I was a returning veteran. I do have empathy for the Vietnam Veterans, but the war
28was over and that was all that mattered. So I’ll sign this, Laura Frost Smith.

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