

**Interview of Patricia W. Pasback on her experience
in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps in post-WWII Germany**

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Elsie Hornbacher: Pat Pasback is being interviewed for the Lansing unit of WOSL for our oral history project. [0:11] Pat, where were – uh, when did you go overseas and why did you go?

Patricia Pasback: I went overseas in December of 1945. I had graduated from Butterworth School of Nursing in June of '45 and, uh, was inducted in the army in July of '45. I l-, learned...

Elsie Hornbacher: [0:38] Did you volunteer or were you inducted, Pat?

Patricia Pasback: I, um, I, I volunteered.

Elsie Hornbacher: [0:44] And then you were inducted.

Patricia Pasback: And then I was is-, inducted, right. In fact, I not only volunteered, I – um, tsk, uh, they had closed enlistments at the time I had graduated and although I had put in an application to join the army, um, we were told that, that no more applications were being p-, processed. And so, I did, uh, go down and talk to the, uh, recruiting people down there, uh, in, in Chicago and, um, I s-, when I left, I not only had signed myself up but four or five of my, my classmates. Um. Anyway, we, we, we were about – we were the second to the last, uh, class of nurses that, uh, went through the, the orientation program, um, at, um, tsk, at the camp in, uh, La Crosse, Wisconsin. Tsk. I learned that, um, a very good friend of mine, uh, had orders to go overseas, uh, uh, this was in October I believe. I immediately, uh, went to my own chief nurse. Uh, I had then by that time been assigned to Fort, uh, to, to Fort Custer in Battle Creek, tsk, and, uh, got my own name on the, uh, transfer list to go overseas, and, um, we left, uh, Michigan early in December. We stopped at three camps on – before we finally, uh, got on our way. We, uh, were at, um, Camp Myles Standish in Massachusetts, a camp in Georgia, and at a, a camp, uh, in New Jersey, Camp Kilmer. I called my mother so frequently saying goodbye to her, she finally told me she wished I would get on my way. [laughter] Um, tsk, but we did get on our way.

We, um, uh, went – we sailed on the SS John Ericsson about the 18th of December, tsk, and it was a cold and rather rough trip on the Atlantic that time of the year. We landed in Bremerhaven on New Year's Eve of 1945. There, um, were about 500 nurses onboard ship and about 2000 troops. Um, the nurses were the only ones allowed off, uh, the ship on New Year's Eve, and we were only allowed off to attend some New Year's Eve parties. Um.

1 I had, um, uh, been signed up to, to go to a hospital in Bremen – to be
2 assigned to a hospital in Bremen with friends of mine. My name happened
3 to be the last name on that list. Uh, as an aftermath to the, to the New
4 Year's Eve parties, um, several nurses were in a jeep accident and one of the
5 nurses broke her leg; she'd been assigned to Salzburg, so my name was
6 taken off of the list to stay with my friends, and I was then assigned to, uh, a
7 hospital in Salzburg. At the time, I thought this was the worst thing that had
8 ever happened to me because here I was fairly young, never away from
9 home before, and I was being separated from everyone I knew going to a
10 strange place with no one I knew. As it turned out, it was a very fortunate
11 incident. Um, tsk, I, uh, still c-, claim as a very good friend a, a nurse that I
12 met on the train as we went to Salzburg. That was just a really great
13 experience.

14
15 Um. As soon as I arrived in Salzburg, I knew I was going to really enjoy it.
16 Of course, it was in the middle of winter – au-, it was in Austria, it was in
17 the mountains, a lot of snow on the ground, and it was just beautiful. We
18 were assigned to the 124th General Hospital, uh, which was right outside of
19 Salzburg in a little town – a little village called, uh, called Glaserbach. Uh,
20 the hospital was in what had been an old SS barracks and the nurses'
21 quarters were, um, above the administration building. Um. Our showers
22 were on the 1st floor. We had to go through the administration building to
23 take showers, this kind of thing, but it was really quite an experience. Um.
24 I was there about three months, but it seemed to me that I must have lived a
25 lifetime in that three months. Um. It, it, um, uh, it was winter, of course,
26 when, when we were there, and we had many, um, opportunities to, to enjoy
27 the w-, winter in, in Austria. Uh, we had opportunities to visit places such
28 as Berchtesgaden and, um, tsk, uh, and see Hitler's home there. We were at
29 – uh, [inaudible 6:22] had a, a home somewhere that was used for R&R.
30 We, uh, would be able to go there on, on trips and i-, it was really a, a great
31 place to be.
32

33Elsie Hornbacher: Oh. Berchtesgadener Hof is one of the most beautiful sights I believe I have
34 seen in the world. [6:46] Um, did you stay at the hotel there?
35

36Patricia Pasback: Uh, we certainly did. We, um would have every other Saturday and Sunday
37 off, and we would go down to the – to Berchtesgaden, uh, uh, whenever we
38 could just so we could get a hot bath. Uh, we, we, we really enjoyed it. We
39 loved, um, uh, the whole, the whole place. It was just, you know, just
40 beautiful. And, um, we were there a g-, a good many times.
41

42Elsie Hornbacher: Yes.
43

1 Patricia Pasback: As I said, I, I was in, [sighing] um, I was in Belin – I was in, um, tsk, uh,
2 Salzburg for, uh, about three months. We really enjoyed Salzburg. We, we,
3 uh, um, went into Salzburg frequently. We, uh, went to Mozart's and, and
4 to the, um, um, [Mozarteum 7:46] there. Um. I, I remember they had one
5 little bar that we used to go to frequently in the evening to dance. It was, it
6 was – um, they always had beautiful, um, uh, music there and, and I
7 remember they had a weird pole right in the s-, center. A rather
8 disappointing thing, I went back to Salzburg a number of years l-, l-, later
9 and went back to this to see what the same bar was like, and it really was,
10 uh, not very good when we [laughter] went back a second time.
11

12 Elsie Hornbacher: [laughter]
13

14 Patricia Pasback: Um. Tsk. From Salzburg, we were – uh, I was transferred along with
15 several ol-, other people to Berlin. In fact, the hospital – the 124th hosp –
16 uh, General Hospital was closed down, and we were transferred to Berlin
17 and we went to the 279th g-, g-, General Hospital in Berlin. Um. At that
18 hospital I worked primarily on the s-, in the psychiatric ward there. And it
19 was while I was in Berlin that Axis Sally, uh, came, uh, to the hospital and
20 was an a – assigned to the ward. She had, uh, been captured and was going
21 through a series of psychiatric evaluations at the time before, um, uh, I
22 believe, before she was being placed on trial. Tsk.
23

24 Elsie Hornbacher: [9:22] Did you get any [inaudible 9:23]?
25

26 Patricia Pasback: I was, uh, in Berlin about four months and again, we seemed to have had a
27 lot of experiences at that time, met a lot of people, and did, did many things.
28 Uh, the – most of the patients that we had in the hospital, um, were i-,
29 individuals that were, um – just had the usual illnesses, that kind of thing.
30 We, we – uh, all of the war injuries, of course, had, had been sent back to
31 the States. Um. It, it – I, I, I think probably the worse kind of, of injuries
32 that we saw were simply kinds of a-, kinds of, of, of accidents that
33 happened. One that I remember when I was in Berlin, probably, uh, one of
34 the worst things, was a fire. Some, some soldiers that were assigned to a m-,
35 motor pool had been cleaning the motor pool and the gasoline caught fire
36 and, and, um, they were burned pretty badly. And at that time, tr-, there was
37 not the kind of treatment for burns that we have now, and, uh, I think of the
38 – I think of the about six or seven that were burned, I think probably all of
39 them died and not from their burns necessarily but from other complications
40 of the b-, burns.
41

42 I, I think th-, that one of – uh, I have many impressions of Berlin. I think
43 one of the impressions I, I have was of all the bombed-out b-, buildings. Of,
44 uh, the people trying to sell any belongings that they had in order to get a l-,

1 little of extra money. Of course, this was a time during the black market and
2 the marks were so under-, uh, valuated th-, um, what, uh, \$10 to us would
3 be, uh, \$100 to them, uh, th-, the exchange was, uh, so out of proportion.
4 Um. I remember seeing nice l-, nice-looking people, people that you could
5 tell w-, were, were p-, probably before the war had been upper middle-class
6 people, uh, looking through trash cans and that trying to, uh, find s-,
7 something. Um, the people really had a pretty rough time of it, uh, during
8 that period of time. While I was in Berlin, also – of course, Berlin was a
9 divided, divided city. There was the American sector and the English sector
10 and, uh, the Russian s-, sector.
11
12Elsie Hornbacher: [12:32] Was movement, uh, free for the Germans throughout the city at this
13 time? This is 1946?
14
15Patricia Pasback: Tsk, 1946, yes.
16
17Elsie Hornbacher: Right.
18
19Patricia Pasback: Uh, yes. The, the m-, movement, uh, for the Germans was, uh, uh, very
20 free. It was free for us also.
21
22Elsie Hornbacher: [12:49] Uh, were they allowed to go to West Germany at that time?
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24Patricia Pasback: Uh, I'm, I'm really not sure whether they were allowed out of Berlin. I
25 would say no because, um, Berlin, of course, was in the, uh, r-, Russian part,
26 um, of, um, Germany. Um. I, I f-, and I can't remem-, member whether
27 there were three or four sections, but I think there were four.
28
29Elsie Hornbacher: I've heard many Germans say that they were able to get out but, uh,
30 undoubtedly through a black market of, um, an underground, uh, uh, way.
31
32Patricia Pasback: Well, I would think so because when we came – I can recall when we came
33 in by train, um, th-, there were, there were always – when we went through a
34 certain – um, th-, the certain Russian s-, sector, uh, there were always r-,
35 Russians that came on the train and, and investigated and, and ch-, checked
36 y-, checked you over. And of course, there wasn't t-, too much of a problem
37 as long as you were in, uh, in a, a army u-, u-, uniform. I would imagine
38 that the civilians might have a, a pretty tough time of it, but I, I'm sure that
39 there were ways, um, to, to, um, go from one section of the country to, to the
40 other if you just knew how to do it. I, I think most of the Germans in, in
41 Berlin at that time were a little bit uneasy. I can, um, recall one of the
42 secretaries that we had, uh, working on our ward who, uh, was taking, uh, r-,
43 Russian because she wanted to be sure to be able to speak that language
44 when the r-, Russians took over. Uh. They actually never took over that

1 section, but, uh, they certainly did a pretty good job in their own area. Uh. I
2 remember going to the opera in, uh, Berlin, and it was, uh, really
3 remarkable. It was g-, great. That's when I really learned, I think, to, to
4 appreciate classical music and opera, uh, when I was g-, Germany and in
5 Berlin.

6
7 Um, you must remember that I was, uh, assigned, uh, right after the war and
8 our principal, tsk, uh, m-, mission was to replace other, uh, n-, nursing staff
9 that had been there for a long period of time, so, uh, they were closing down
10 hospitals, uh, reassigning people, so we didn't stay in one place very long
11 and we weren't part of, of a hospital u-, u-, unit the way people were that,
12 uh, would – that went overseas together, set up a hospital, and stayed there,
13 uh, you know, during the war itself.

14
15 I was transferred then from Berlin to Bay-, r-, reuth, which is, um, in
16 Bavaria close to n-, Nuremberg and, um, again, I was there for, uh, three or
17 four months. Um. Uh, uh, in Bayreuth we were assigned to the 120th
18 Station Hospital. It was a, a very, uh, pleasant assignment, uh, a nice place
19 to be. I, uh, worked on a dependent's ward part of the time. Um, I also
20 worked on the general m-, medical ward. Uh, it was about this time that,
21 that the – more – the dependents started coming over; I w-, talking about the
22 dependents from the States but also some of the, um, uh, German and
23 French, uh, wives – uh, girls who had married American soldiers, uh, were,
24 were in, in these areas too. And, uh, for example on the OB ward, uh, we
25 had some, um, uh, French and German girls who had their babies there. Uh,
26 I think those of us that were in the hospital were sometimes a little, um, tsk,
27 disappointed with the reaction of some of the, uh, American wives who
28 came over. It seemed to us that about all they did was complain about the
29 lack of, of, um, facilities over there when it seemed to us at least that they
30 had such – much better quarters and, and access to the PX and, and supplies
31 and all of that than w-, we did. Um, tsk, maybe we were just, uh, um, rather
32 jealous that they had, uh, more than we did [laughter] and that's why we felt
33 that way. I don't know. Uh, but this was in, in, uh, the fall of '46 and as far
34 as the army was concerned, things were getting a little bit back to normal
35 again.

36
37 Um, tsk, we, we had, we had many good times. We worked hard, um, we
38 were – when we, w-, when we were on nights, we worked, um, two weeks
39 of nights and, and 12-hour n-, night duty, but when we had time off, we did
40 many things. We went to ski lodges, and we went to some of the r-, rest
41 areas and, and, um, tsk, I went to plays and, and, and did a lot of sightseeing,
42 uh, around the, uh, general areas. Of course, we had a lot of friends there
43 and, uh, I, I think we spent an awful lot of time, uh, dancing and going to
44 parties and it, it was, you know, good f-, good fun.

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2Elsie Hornbacher: You were right where [inaudible 19:14].

3

4Patricia Pasback: W-, while I was, um, i-, in Bayreuth, uh, Bayreuth, I had a chance to take a,
5 uh, several days' l-, leave and I couldn't find anyone else with the time
6 available so I went by myself, but I wanted to go to the r-, Riviera, so I, um,
7 got transportation, got on the train. I went to Paris. I spent several days in
8 Paris by myself. I got on a train and went down to Nice and spent several
9 days there by myself. But, um, tsk, I think Nice was really quite a
10 disappointment. Uh, I guess I thought of our nice sandy beaches on Lake
11 Michigan and the beach at Nice is – all it is is big r-, rocks; no nice sand
12 beaches like we have at all. Uh. It was, tsk, interesting, we s-, I stayed at a
13 hotel in Nice called the Hotel r-, r-, Ruhl. R-U-H-L. It was right across
14 from the beach and we, of course, would put on our bathing suits and a little
15 jacket or something and walk across the street to the beach, but the French
16 people thought that was a little bit t-, tacky. What they did – would go
17 down to the beach, have a big, flowing, tsk, uh, uh, robe of some sort and
18 change their bathing suit right there on the beach. Now that to them was the
19 way to do it, not, not to walk [laughter] across the hote-, the street in your
20 bathing suit, but you change right on the beach.

21

22 One of the little trips I remember taking while I was d-, when I – while I
23 was in Nice was taking a little tour up to g-, Grasse, which is, uh, up in the
24 mountains above, um, the Riviera. And, uh, one of the reasons why that
25 meant something to me was that, uh, I believe my grandfather's, uh,
26 relatives came from that area. Um, that was his n-, n-, name, was Grasse,
27 and I always heard that's where he came from.

28

29 Uh, in November of '46, I had my – the opportunity of either signing up for
30 another year or going home. Tsk. Uh, all of, um, my close friends were
31 going home at that time and it just seemed too long to stay another year, and
32 so I did sign up to go home and, uh, we, tsk, uh, left on – oh, uh, the SS
33 General Ballou, which was, um, tsk, a, a not a very big ship. It was one of
34 the General ships, um, and we again managed to cross the Atlantic in the
35 wintertime. It was another rough and cold trip. One time I almost thought I
36 was gonna drown in the shower, our ship was rolling so. But, um, we did
37 get home, got back to Camp Kilmer, and I was discharged from Camp
38 Kilmer. Uh.

39

40Elsie Hornbacher: This was recorded by Pat Pasback, 4819 Gull Road, Apartment 16, Lansing,
41 Michigan, 48917. Her telephone number, the area code is 517, and her
42 telephone number is 321-3206.

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