

**Interview of Virginia Louise Brown on her service in the
U.S. Army Nurse Corps during WWII**

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5 Ruth Stewart: Virginia L. Brown is being interviewed today on, uh, January the 14th,
6 2004, at the Army Community – Army Residence Community in San
7 Antonio, Texas. She's a member of the WOSL, which is sponsoring this,
8 uh, taping. The interviewer is Ruth Stewart assisted by Carol Habgood.
9 [0:39] Ginny, how about starting in by telling us a little bit... Just
10 summarize your early life – where you were born, brought up and how
11 you got interested in nursing and then eventually the military.
12
13 Virginia Brown: I was born in Johnson City, Tennessee, in 1921. I lived in town for a
14 while. Then my family, uh, moved to the country and I was out there for a
15 good, uh, 10, 15 years. And I was hit by a car and I was hospitalized for a
16 week and that what – that's what caused me to decide I'd like to be a
17 nurse. And then I was in the hospital a few times after that, uh, because of
18 this car accident. And we worked on the farm and walked to school 'bout
19 3 miles and...
20
21 Ruth Stewart: [1:32] Each way?
22
23 Virginia Brown: Each way. Sometimes we got a ride. In the wintertime, a neighbor would
24 take us to school. His daughter was in the same school I was – until high
25 school – and then we walked or rode the street car – walked a 1/2 mile and
26 then got the street car.
27
28 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
29
30 Virginia Brown: And I graduated from Science Hill School in 19 and 39 and was in the
31 band and the orchestra and...
32
33 Ruth Stewart: [2:02] What instrument did you play?
34
35 Virginia Brown: In the orchestra, I played the oboe. And in the band, I played the
36 glockenspiel and the cymbals and...
37
38 Ruth Stewart: Interesting.
39
40 Virginia Brown: Then I went a short time to East Tennessee State University – a college
41 then at, uh, Johnson City. But, uh, money was short, so I had to get out.
42 And then I applied for a school of nursing in Memphis, Tennessee – the
43 Baptist Memorial Hospital School of Nursing. I entered in 19 and 40 and
44 graduated in 1943.

1
2 Ruth Stewart: [2:52] And then what? Did you work as a nurse?
3
4 Virginia Brown: I graduated a nurse.
5
6 Ruth Stewart: [2:55] You went directly into the army?
7
8 Virginia Brown: Well, I had to wait to pass state boards cause we graduated before state
9 boards. And I went home and I worked in a ENT hospital for, I guess a
10 month. And then I worked in the general hospital there for a couple
11 weeks. And then I went into the army – July 21st, 1943. I was ordered to
12 Kennedy General Hospital.
13
14 Ruth Stewart: [3:27] Kinsey?
15
16 Virginia Brown: Kennedy General Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.
17
18 Ruth Stewart: [3:34] And that was a military hospital?
19
20 Virginia Brown: Yes. It's no longer there. It was turned into a veteran's hospital; and then
21 they tore it down not too long ago.
22
23 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
24
25 Virginia Brown: So...
26
27 Ruth Stewart: [3:49] So then go on about, a little bit about what went on after that when
28 you got really into the Army Nurse Corps activities and tours.
29
30 Virginia Brown: Well it – in Kennedy General, it was an interesting assignment, because,
31 uh, having never been in the military, you wondered what you were going
32 to do and... Some of the time we had, uh, to get the basics, like marching
33 and how to salute and that sorta stuff – after duty hours. And I worked on
34 a surgical ward; and then I was transferred to a, a GE ward. And I was
35 only there for six months. I volunteered to go overseas; and so, in 19
36 and...December of 1943, I joined the 48th General Hospital, which was
37 stationed there. And about the first part of December – I don't remember
38 the exact date – we, uh, went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, for deporting
39 overseas. And we were there being – getting field clothes and shots and...
40 Then we were supposed to go out on the Ile de France on New – on
41 Christmas Day. And we got on board; and then we had to get off because
42 something's wrong with the engine. And so, then we went back to Kilmer
43 and stayed a week... And on, uh, New Year's Day, we sailed for England
44 on the Queen Elizabeth.

1
2 Ruth Stewart: [5:36] That was in '44?
3
4 Virginia Brown: January of '44. We landed in Glasgow, Scotland on the 10th of January;
5 and got on trains and went from there, Scotland, all the way down to the
6 Southern part of England, Petworth – Petworth, England. We, uh, were
7 stationed in a camp that had been occupied by the Canadians. And I don't
8 think they ever washed anything, but we were so tired when we got in, it
9 didn't matter. We put towels over the pillows cause they smelt so; and
10 just pulled up the blankets and went to sleep. One of the interesting things
11 that went on in, uh, Petworth, which most people said they never had – we
12 had strikers to come in and keep our stoves going. There were potbelly
13 stoves. And so, the enlisted people, whoever was assigned to that, made
14 rounds every so often and made sure your stoves were, uh, burning.
15
16 Ruth Stewart: [6:48] What kind of, uh, building were you in?
17
18 Virginia Brown: Well it was like a four-sided quarters. There were two people in each side
19 and there were four of us there. They were all separated. They had this
20 door to go in. But, uh...
21
22 Ruth Stewart: [7:03] And all of you were nurses?
23
24 Virginia Brown: Yes. It was interesting to wake up in the middle of the night and see guys
25 poking your stove, but... He was very nice [maybe 7:14]. Then, uh, we
26 had nothing to do there but, I guess, get back on – made it to England.
27 Uh, we took in some of the sights around there a few times and had to
28 walk to breakfast and... I don't remember eating dinner very much, but I
29 guess we did. But it was a mess hall.
30
31 Ruth Stewart: [7:37] But it was a mess hall type of situation and you really weren't
32 assigned to any nursing duties at that point?
33
34 Virginia Brown: No. Nothing.
35
36 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
37
38 Virginia Brown: We stayed that...
39
40 Ruth Stewart: [7:46] And so how long were you there?
41
42 Virginia Brown: I guess about a month.
43
44 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.

1
2 Virginia Brown: And then we got on a train and went up to Swindon, England. I don't
3 remember the dates, but we lived with English families...
4
5 Ruth Stewart: Mm.
6
7 Virginia Brown: ...and it was rather interesting and, I don't know, apprehensive a little bit
8 cause they put us in their truck with our baggage and they'd go along the
9 street and you – they wanted one or two, it depended on where you were
10 sitting. I was sitting by myself, I guess, and I got selected to go into this
11 house; and it's really scary cause you didn't know these people. They
12 didn't give us any phone number to call if we got into trouble. And the
13 people were very nice but it's rather interesting to go into a place that you
14 don't know the people and you're gonna to stay there a week or two. The
15 people I stayed with, uh, I think the gentleman worked for the railroad
16 company. It was a man, his wife and one daughter – 12-year-old. This
17 lady, uh – they were very nice to me. We were not allowed to eat with
18 them, unless we were particularly invited. And then we had to take some
19 coffee or whatever – get it from the mess hall.
20
21 Ruth Stewart: [9:19] Why were you assigned to live with families? Were...
22
23 Virginia Brown: There were no billets there in Swindon.
24
25 Ruth Stewart: Oh, okay. [9:25] Well then after a week, what happened? I mean, you
26 said...
27
28 Virginia Brown: We were there for a month, I think.
29
30 Ruth Stewart: Oh, longer than...I was thinking a week, but...
31
32 Virginia Brown: No, a month.
33
34 Ruth Stewart: [9:35] So, but you didn't stay on in Swindon then longer than that?
35
36 Virginia Brown: No, no.
37
38 Ruth Stewart: Okay.
39
40 Virginia Brown: Uh, but while there, uh, some of us got detailed. I got detailed to the, uh,
41 Air Force – British Air Force Hospital, which was near there – for a
42 week's duty. And they did things a little different than we do. Like, they
43 give all their baths in the afternoon. In the mornings, the nurse goes by
44 and straightens up the beds and they get breakfast; and then about 10:00,

1 somebody's assigned to make the toast and tea, cause they got tea and
2 toast every morning at 10:00. Sometimes we were detailed to do that. I
3 don't remember doing very much there. But, uh, they had a matron who
4 was head of the ward and a couple nurses. And lunchtime was interesting,
5 cause we all went to lunch at the same time – sat a big table, about this...
6 And there was one lady that sat at the head table; and you didn't eat
7 anything till she did. It was all passed around. And then we were – you
8 might be hungry, but you didn't dare take more than one helping of food,
9 cause they didn't have – there wasn't a lot there.
10
11 Ruth Stewart: Interesting.
12
13 Virginia Brown: And, uh, at the end of the day, a bus picked us up and took us back to our
14 billet. And I don't remember that little town that the hospital was in, but I
15 think there were about four of us got detailed to that hospital. And the
16 interesting part too was when the – the lady did not want, at least me,
17 coming back to the house after breakfast. She did not want me coming
18 there in the afternoon. So, our things and everything closed at 4:30, so
19 you were in a quandary because they had high tea at 4-something and
20 dinner at 8. So, you just went home or went there about dark and hoped
21 that you didn't disturb'm too much. But otherwise, we, uh, had been
22 going to the Red Cross – the nurses. But then they said, well we couldn't
23 come back there anymore. I don't know why they thought we disturbed
24 anybody, but we didn't. So, then we ended up finding a hub that had a...
25 You know in England, they had these other rooms that, uh, we could stay
26 in during the morning and day...
27
28 Ruth Stewart: ...hang out?
29
30 Virginia Brown: Yeah. Then we used to get food, uh, on the street. They had, uh, fish 'n
31 chips, which were delicious. I know this lady that I stayed with, Mrs.
32 [Beasis 12:36], asked me to dinner one night. And she asked me what I
33 wanted to for dinner. Well, what do you say to somebody who doesn't
34 have...?
35
36 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
37
38 Virginia Brown: I said, "Well I don't know, but how about fish 'n chips?" And she says,
39 "Well where do you get them?" I said, "They're just right down the street
40 there." And she said, "Oh". So, for dinner that night I think we took
41 butter and... She had said that I could invite a friend – butter and I don't
42 know, coffee I think. And we had – I'd never had it, it was pressed tongue
43 – great big thing on the table in gelatin. And pretty good.
44

1 Ruth Stewart: Mm.
2
3 Virginia Brown: I thought, "If you don't like it, you gotta eat it anyhow", so...
4
5 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
6
7 Virginia Brown: Then I asked for a cup of coffee and that was a sad mistake...
8
9 Ruth Stewart: Mm.
10 Virginia Brown: ...because they had coffee, uh, like extract in, uh, a bottle. Then they had
11 like water and they poured a tablespoon full of that in it. And I thought,
12 "Oh my."
13
14 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
15
16 Virginia Brown: I tried to drink it. It was difficult, but...
17
18 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
19
20 Virginia Brown: Then she was very nice, cause my feet always got cold – and their – they
21 didn't always have heat at night, I guess. So, she loaned me a pair of her
22 husband's wool socks. And she'd bring me tea every morning before I got
23 out of bed. But the time I got myself awake to drink it, it was cold. But it
24 was very nice of her to bring that up and... She was nice enough to write
25 my family and tell them I was there and what a nice daughter they had.
26
27 Ruth Stewart: Good credentials. [chuckle]
28
29 Virginia Brown: Yeah. And then from Swindon, uh, we went to Winchester, Virg,
30 Winchester, England. And we took over a hospital. It was a general
31 hospital. And we were there when D-Day started. It was interesting.
32 About a couple days before all the troops were going over, planes were
33 flying over our hospital, wing-tip to wing-tip as far as you could see.
34
35 Ruth Stewart: [14:52] And where was this now?
36
37 Virginia Brown: Winchester.
38
39 Ruth Stewart: Okay.
40
41 Virginia Brown: And, uh, we had Quonset-type hospitals, you know, for... And then we
42 began to get patients when they were going over to France. I guess some
43 of 'm got in water, some of 'm... But we did get them from the coast of
44 France. It was rather interesting because I guess somebody was sorting

1 them up at the – when they came in – but we’d get patients and... All the
2 doctors were scheduled to go to surgery. And our ward officer was going
3 – or went. We didn’t know we were getting patients till I was staying one
4 day to help a nurse, uh, admit some patients. At about 8:00, the supervisor
5 came down and asked me what I was doing there. And I said, “Well I was
6 helping her get these patients in.” “Well you better go home because you
7 have to come back at 11:00.” So, we worked 8 hours on and 8 hours off
8 for about a week. Our corpsman I think had to work 12 and 12 or
9 something. Because sometimes when weren’t busy, they could go in the
10 living room and have a nap. But there were no, uh, I guess, I guess there
11 were some controls, but when the patient would go to surgery from your
12 ward, they’d come back and there was no indication what ward they were
13 going to. So, I know they were wheeling in a patient in our ward and I
14 saw him, and I said, “He doesn’t belong here”. So, he went across the
15 hall, but, uh, [inaudible 16:39] ...

16
17Ruth Stewart: [16:39] But the nurses themselves had to do the controlling about the
18 dispatching, if you will.

19
20Virginia Brown: Yeah, and the ward officer, when he went to surgery, he said to the other
21 nurse and I – cause there was no ward officer on the ward at the time –
22 “Do whatever have – you have to do, pain medicine, whatever – I’ll cover
23 you when I get back.” But they sent a... Usually there’s written orders
24 when they came from surgery. So that was no problem.

25
26Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.

27
28Virginia Brown: They evac patients pretty soon, so it get’m. Of course, you had to keep the
29 lights out, so we’re using lanterns to... I guess I shouldn’t – I’ll tell ya this
30 later when that’s cut off. But we had to get them ready; and then they’d
31 come in at night and we’d have to strip off their clothes and help’m get
32 ready for surgery. Most of’m are gone. Then I don’t remember the date
33 that, uh, someone else replacing our hospital, but we went down the coast
34 of England for a couple weeks. But I was detailed back to that hospital to
35 work for two weeks. And so, when we got back to our unit on the coast,
36 our stuff was all packed and we went to South Hampton, uh – shipping
37 over – this is August. We left the 10th of August, I think, and landed in
38 France the 17th of August. And that was a interesting thing. It was on a
39 British ship. And if you weren’t seasick, you would after you got smelling
40 the fish that they had for breakfast. But to get off of that ship, you had to
41 go down the side on a rope – you know one of those mesh things – and get
42 a bouncing LST boat sitting at the near. And on you, you had a [pause]
43 purse, uh, pistol belt, a backpack, a bedroll, a helmet... So, you hoped you
44 landed when it came up and not when it missed.

1
2Ruth Stewart: Pretty tricky.
3
4Virginia Brown: [coughing] Then we, uh, landed in, uh, I think... I know it wasn't a week
5 we were on that ship, but sometime about the 17th of August or
6 something. And we, [clearing throat] ... First off, we went to a field and
7 we always wondered why they wanted us to set up, learn how to set up
8 pup tents. Well in this area, all of the nurses had to put a pup tent – two of
9 ya to a tent. And when it rained, if you touched it, it leaked in. But
10 apparently, somebody flew over and saw all these tents out there and the
11 directions came back to get us in under a big tent. So, we all had to move
12 into a tent. We already – they gave us cots.
13
14Ruth Stewart: [20:16] How long were you in the pup tent?
15
16Virginia Brown: Oh, I don't think more than a week. But it's interesting because we got
17 invited to a few parties. And we had some big nurses in the unit. And
18 part of this is just funny, but I used to get tickled because most of us could
19 get dressed in the pup tent, but they couldn't get their girdles outside. So
20 here they are outside the tent, pulling on these girdles. [laughter] And we
21 went to a party one night and, uh, we were supposed to be back at 9:00.
22 Well we started way before that. But you had to drive without lights; and
23 I guess the driver got lost, cause we didn't get back until 1:00. And we all
24 got restricted to the post for the duration. But the commanding officer
25 went out and he didn't get back one time either, so our restrictions was
26 lifted. I guess he thought we were fibbin' or somethin'. But out in the
27 field and eating out of mess kits that you dumped in a barrel to clean. And
28 the bees were swarming around and...
29
30 But it's interesting, I guess the commanding officer got mad at a physician
31 talking about the food. So, he made him mess officer. And it was pretty
32 good food after that. [chuckle] And we – I don't know how long we
33 stayed there – but then we, uh, got on a... Oh, and getting back, we rode
34 in a truck for about 30 minutes to the showers. We got them about every
35 other day. Of course, you're about as dirty when you got back as you
36 went because of all the dust and stuff. But they were in open tents. The
37 guys were up there controlling the water and looking down and...
38 [coughing] So, uh, but it was nice to have a bath instead of out of a
39 helmet. The, uh – we moved from there and we were put on trains – a
40 train – and it seemed like it took us forever to get from there to our next
41 field activity, which was outside of Paris. And an interesting thing
42 happened there. The Red Cross lady asked me if I wanted to ride in a, up
43 in the ca-, train with her. I said, "Sure". So, she asked the commanding
44 officer and the chief nurse if we could go. And they said, "Yes." Well we

1 had to have a male officer with us too. But we didn't have time to get on
2 that train when it pulled out. And here we were back here in the middle of
3 no place. And what tickled me, I guess I was silly, is this officer who was
4 with us had a whistle. And he was blowing a whistle and the train was
5 going...

6

7Ruth Stewart: As though he could stop it. [chuckle].

8

9Virginia Brown: The train finally stopped. I don't know why they were going and starting
10 and going, but we got on the back end of the train and, uh, the train
11 commander – whoever was commanding – came back and said, "Uh, get
12 on up there if you're going to ride." So, we got to ride on this train until it
13 stopped at the next water tank, which wasn't very long. And then we got
14 back in our – with our regular group. But on the train some people had
15 seats, but we were like in caboose. And to sleep, they gave us stretchers to
16 sleep on. You're better off on the floor cause the air just came up through
17 the stretchers. But that was better. Fairly comfortable.

18

19 Next place we got was in, uh, another field outside of Paris, in a potato
20 patch. They put up tents and we'd have to... If your cot was unsteady,
21 you'd look around and you'd be sitting on a potato. Our rations had gone
22 – had not come with us. They had gone up to Le Liège, France. So, we
23 were, uh, on skimpy rashes, rashes, rations – uh, two meals a day. And so,
24 one day in a potato patch, we asked the mess officer, "Could we have
25 French fried potatoes?" Well, if we dug'm. It's surprising the number of
26 people that didn't know how to dig potatoes, but we got the potatoes.
27 Then we went up and there was nobody to peel'm. So, there were about 4
28 or 5 nurses – we peeled potatoes and got'm so that they could French fry
29 them. And we had French fried potatoes. Those were delicious. And
30 shortly after that, I got detailed to go into, uh, the 108th General Hospital
31 in Paris. It was a week after Paris had liberate – was liberated. And we
32 stayed there about a week and then they called us back. And we moved in
33 to a hospital in Paris, the Lariboisière, which is right back of the Gare du
34 Nord Railroad Station. And it was, I guess you could get – I don't
35 remember how many patients... At one time on my ward I had 50 patients
36 on that one ward, cause it's 2 beds down the middle the center and on each
37 side. That was an orthopedic ward. And, uh...

38

39Ruth Stewart: [26:20] So then, how long were you in France overall?

40

41Virginia Brown: We landed in '44 to, uh, May of June of '45

42

43Ruth Stewart: So almost a year. [26:37] And then, after you left France – '45 was
44 after...

1
2 Virginia Brown: From Paris, from Paris, we went to Marseille. Some of us were – you
3 know, at that time, you got points. And the high points were allowed to
4 come home and those – they broke up the unit. And I went to the 69th
5 Station Hospital down on the Riviera. And I was there about a month.
6 And then we came back to Marseille. And I think I – we sailed on 1st of
7 September, cause I got home the 15th of September.
8
9 Ruth Stewart: [27:15] Okay and then you stayed in the army though...
10
11 Virginia Brown: No, I got out.
12
13 Ruth Stewart: You didn't. Okay.
14
15 Virginia Brown: '46...1946. After all the leave and stuff, I got out.
16
17 Ruth Stewart: [27:29] But then you went back in later, did you?
18
19 Virginia Brown: Yeah, 1953. [pause] In the meantime, I went to school and I taught
20 school.
21
22 Ruth Stewart: [27:43] Nursing or otherwise?
23
24 Virginia Brown: Uh-huh, nursing school. Taught – went back to the Baptist Hospital and
25 taught there for – I think from '49 to '53.
26
27 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [27:55] What decided you to go back into the army?
28
29 Virginia Brown: More pay. [coughing]
30
31 Ruth Stewart: That's a good reason.
32
33 Virginia Brown: I was in the reserves and I went on reserve duty, I think it was to
34 McClellan. And, uh, the lady who was in charge of the assignments was
35 there and she said, "Why don't you come back in the army?" And I said,
36 "I don't know." So, she, uh, she quoted a salary \$100 more a month than I
37 was making. And she said I could be – they needed instructors and I could
38 go instructor in school. I said that sounded great, so I put in my
39 resignation from the Baptist Hospital and reported into Walter Reed 5th of
40 December 1940 – '53.
41
42 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [28:50] And then when were you...did you finally retire from
43 the army?
44

1 Virginia Brown: 1980.
2

3 Ruth Stewart: 1980. [28:57] And in that time you were stateside most of that time?
4

5 Virginia Brown: No, no. I was at Walter Reed at that time for 2 years; then I went to Korea
6 for a year and then I went to Japan – it was about 10 months. And then in
7 Japan for a year; then I went stateside for 2 years – did recruiting. From
8 recruiting I went back to Walter Reed and I was there 6 years, cause I got
9 a – went back to school and worked there. And, uh – long time ago...
10

11 Ruth Stewart: It's okay. You've covered a variety of, of tours then during that period.
12

13 Virginia Brown: Yeah, uh... For a year...and then Fort Bragg, uh, Fort Ord, back overseas
14 to Okinawa, uh, and back to...I came back to Port Sam from Okinawa – I
15 mean from Fort Ord to Okinawa. Okinawa to Fort Ord to Fort Sam. Then
16 from Fort Sam to Europe and Europe back to SGF in 1978.
17

18 Ruth Stewart: So, you certainly covered a lot of territory in your career. [30:38] And all
19 that was in various aspects of nursing including...
20

21 Virginia Brown: Yes.
22

23 Ruth Stewart: ...teaching, recruitment...
24

25 Virginia Brown: Supervisor, chief nurse, chief nurse at health services community and then
26 assistant chief to the Army Nurse Corps.
27

28 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. [30:58] So then since you retired from the military...
29

30 Virginia Brown: I've been involved with WOSL. I've been involved with the Army
31 Medical Museum. I've been involved with my hospital from overseas,
32 48th General. I've been involved in needlepoint, sewing, quilting.
33

34 Ruth Stewart: [31:30] We're now going to proceed a little further with your post, or your
35 last time, ending time in the Army Nurse Corps and some of the things
36 that occurred during that period where you got some significant
37 recognition.
38

39 Virginia Brown: During WWII, we had only – nurses had relative rank. There were some
40 regular army nurses [clearing throat] but there were no nurses such as we
41 knew of as reserve. I think it was 1947 that nurses received rank. But
42 when we were leaving the army, we were separated. We were not
43 discharged. So, uh, we could be called back at any time. Also, uh, I guess
44 they didn't realize what nurses could contribute, cause we had one

1 commander when we started, uh, said that he did not need nurses. All he
2 needed was doctors and corpsmen. Later on, after receiving patients from
3 D-Day and Battle of the Bulge and that sort of thing, he had a staff
4 meeting and said he was wrong, uh – nurses were essential and did a
5 wonderful job. Rank at that time was a little different than we have today
6 in that I don't think they had any routine way of promoting, cause we had
7 been overseas a year.

8
9 In our unit, there was one captain, one lieutenant and the rest of us were
10 second lieutenants. We had two pre-Pearl Harbor nurses in the unit. And
11 when we began to get nurses in our unit who had only been in 6 months
12 and been promoted to 1st lieutenant, we asked what was happening to us.
13 So, our nurses – we did have a meeting with the chief nurse and we
14 suggested that the pre-Pearl Harbor nurses be promoted first and then
15 whoever they want to promote. We apparently had some others because
16 they asked us who we wanted to be promoted. And you would think it
17 was, uh, open discussion but I found out differently that when I got
18 promoted in that time, all they did was post it on a chief nurse's door. If
19 you didn't happen to go by there or somebody tell ya, you didn't know.

20
21 Ruth Stewart: [chuckle]

22
23 Virginia Brown: But I went in and got mine and I met the chief of professional activities
24 and my ward officer and the ward – on the road. They didn't say
25 congratulations, they said, "Well, you'd been promoted earlier if you
26 learned to keep your mouth shut." I thought, "Okay". So, I got promoted
27 to 1st lieutenant then.

28
29 Ruth Stewart: [35:49] And that was when you were in France – when you were still in
30 France.

31
32 Virginia Brown: That was in France. Then throughout my career, I've been promoted. At
33 the time I went in as a reserve nurse and elected to join the regular army in
34 '58. And I retired as a regular army officer. Uh, at, uh, we began – it's
35 interesting because nurses were not often recognized by, uh, awards. My
36 first one was 19 and, uh, 65. And then I got them after that. One of the
37 things that I'm very proud of is I was selected as the nurse of the year by
38 the DAR in 1980. That's a program that the Army Nurse Corps is
39 involved in. And I also was very surprised and very appreciative, I
40 received the Distinguished Service Medal, DSM, which in the Army
41 Nurse Corps is usually chief of the corps got it. I was the first nurse to get
42 it after that. There have been a couple others, uh, since then that have
43 gotten the DASR, but... And also, when you retire from the surgeon

1 general's office with 30 year's service, they give you an army medical
2 department medallion – if you've got 30 years in.
3
4Ruth Stewart: So, you have had an exceedingly distinguished career in the Army Nurse
5 Corps throughout your career. [37:13] Have there been any special, um,
6 emotions or feelings that have evolved in relation to being in war as a
7 nurse from that experience?
8
9Virginia Brown: No, except you wonder how the patients are going to do when they get
10 home. Like they come – I was only in WWII. I'm sure we got patients in
11 other hospitals that were in war. But these were frostbite. The people had
12 feet that were very injured. We got people who, uh, lost arms and legs.
13 People who – prisoners of war we got back. Uh, you just wondered how
14 they're going to make it and that kind of thing – how they would react
15 when they got home.
16
17Ruth Stewart: [36:13] Did it change you in any way?
18
19Virginia Brown: I'm more concerned about the patients...
20
21Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
22
23Virginia Brown: ...realizing what they'd been through. And sometimes they'd be a little
24 upset. I can remember having a patient – he was a paratrooper – and those
25 people are always very proud of their shoes. They would always shine –
26 you could see yourself in them. And they were sitting at the foot of the
27 bed and I happen to hit'm. Well, he got very upset. And I thought, "Well
28 there's no sense of doing anything cause he's really having problems."
29
30Ruth Stewart: That was his only control – was his boots. [chuckle] Yeah.
31
32Virginia Brown: Yeah. Things like that you often wonder... I always wondered too, cause
33 – and I guess I could understand cause I had some patients – uh, I
34 happened to be on night duty on an officers and enlisted ward; and they
35 were ready to go back to duty. They went AWOL to get back to their unit.
36 And I'm sure it was because they didn't want to go through a separation
37 center or, uh...
38
39Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
40
41Virginia Brown: ...where they were re-assigned to another unit. But I'm sure nothing was
42 done to them once they were back to their unit.
43
44Ruth Stewart: Back in service.

1
2 Virginia Brown: Well, we were in Paris and they went from there back to combat, to their
3 unit.
4
5 Ruth Stewart: Yeah, yeah.
6
7 Virginia Brown: And we had some that [inaudible 39:48].
8
9 Ruth Stewart: So, the AWOL was ignored at that point. Yeah, interesting how rules get
10 bent.
11
12 Virginia Brown: Well if they went back to the unit, they were AWOL from the hospital but
13 not AWOL from their unit, so...
14
15 Ruth Stewart: Yeah, yeah – they can do that, yeah. Well thank you so much for all this
16 information. It's really very valuable to have all this recorded and have it
17 in our veteran's history project. And we appreciate your time.
18
19 Virginia Brown: Thank you.
20
21 Ruth Stewart: Thank you.
22
23
24/al