

**Marguerite Noutary talks about her childhood
and her career in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps**

5 Vivian Peterson: Marguerite Noutary (capital M-A-R-G-U-E-R-I-T-E, capital N-O-U-T-A-R-Y). She lives at 213 Claire (capital C-L-A-I-R-E) Avenue in Fullerton, California (capital F-U-L-L-E-R-T-O-N), California, zip code 92635.

9 Marguerite Noutary: ...have heard, I was born in Fullerton and raised there. My folks came directly from southern France and they landed in Anaheim. From there, they had to walk to Fullerton. [audience reaction] And the reason they came to Fullerton, my mother had a brother there already living in Fullerton. And my mother, many times, told me, oh, if she could've returned to France that very day! [audience laughter] That this area here was just a desert, and she mentioned that many times, a desert. And my father died in 1953, and he told me, "You know what? This place could come, could return again to a desert. [audience laughter] And, if he only knew how many drought years we, we've had. It's not funny, really. The reason, um, my father came to, um, the United States, there were a lot of people at that time from businesses and, uh, ranches and the big land owners would go to France and tell them all the opportunities and for them to come here. I thought that was very interesting, way back then. So, that's when they decided to come to Fullerton, 1905. They were very happy and contented and never went back. [audience laughter]

26 As you know, I graduated from the school of nursing in, uh, Orange, which is now UCI. I had toured many of the, uh, hospitals in Los Angeles and all, but they seemed oh, so crowded to me and so far away! [laughter] So, that's why I decided to come to Orange County. I had been to Fullerton College, of course, and, uh, Fullerton High School. At that time, even, they required you to have at least 2 years of college before we could go into the school of nursing. I was there for 3 years, and, uh, the third year, there would be, uh, Red Cross nurses would come and encourage us to join the Army Nurse Corps. I don't know if they had an inkling what was going to happen or just ['cause 2:54].

37 But anyway, there were about 6 of us that volunteered but we could not go into the service until we had taken our state board. So, we graduated in October of '40, and I think it was about a month before we could take our state board. Then, the recruiter would come again and ask us, you know, if we were ready and all this and that, but we weren't ready. We didn't have our, uh, um, we had our diploma, but we weren't registered yet in the state of California. So, by July 1st, I received my orders and, you know what? They had my name all spelled wrong!

1
2Audience: [laughter] [Inaudible].
3
4Marguerite Noutary: Oh, I would go to different places [in forts 3:38] and show'm my orders
5 and what should I do? "Oh, go on, go on – they'll take care of that when
6 you get to Camp Roberts."
7
8 So I went to Camp Roberts and the chief nurse looked at my orders and
9 she chewed me out that I had come on orders that were not right and so on
10 and so forth. And I could not go on duty until my name was all corrected
11 and spelled right, so I just sat and sat for about a month before everything
12 was corrected. And so that was the start of my career. [audience laughter]
13
14 Um, Camp Roberts, at that time, in 1941, the hospital was not completed,
15 and the roads were mostly just dirt, and the camp was really crowded. So
16 we started going on duty, well, the nurses, as soon as they arrived, would
17 go right on duty. But I had to wait about a month. And then, as the time
18 went on, uh, Camp Roberts was really a place where the soldiers would
19 come and be stationed until they were sent into, uh, the South Pacific,
20 mainly. That was the staging area. And we worked, uh, our hours were
21 usually, uh, 3 shifts if, if the chief nurse had enough nurses but if she
22 didn't have enough nurses, we just worked 12 hours, 20 hours, whatever
23 she said, we worked. And, um, as soon as war was declared, December 7th,
24 all the – we had no days off then, she just canceled everything. No days
25 off. No vacations. No one could get out of the service at the end of a year
26 because, at that time, they said ser-, you went into the service for 1 year
27 only but that was canceled. The only way you could get out was if you
28 were pregnant. [audience laughter] So, that was managed, also. [audience
29 laughter]
30
31 Also, at that time, it was interesting to know as soon as war was declared
32 on December 7th, I'll never forget, um, there were a group of corpsmen
33 and doctors. They left that evening. We weren't told what was going on or
34 nothing. But, you know where they went? If you remember, along Morro
35 Bay, Santa Barbara, because apparently there had been a ship seen there.
36 [inaudible audience response] That was very interesting. It wasn't until
37 about 1942 that nurses started to get orders, um, either to go to South
38 Pacific or to England and, um, my orders never seemed to come, never
39 seemed to come, so the chief nurse told me once, "I don't know what it is
40 but your, you never seem to get orders!" [audience laughter] I don't know
41 why, I don't know. [audience laughter]
42
43Audience: [Inaudible].
44

1Marguerite Noutary: Because my name was spelled wrong, yes. [audience laughter]

2

3 Then, finally, uh, I did receive orders and it only stated to prepare for 2
4 years. It didn't say which theater, the South Pacific, CBI, or Europe –
5 prepare for 2 years. So, I prepared for 2 years, not knowing where we'd
6 go.

7

8 From Camp Roberts, we went to Camp Beale. Um, that's east of San
9 Francisco, where the staging area was for, uh, most of the enlisted people
10 and officers to go to the South Pacific so I felt sure I was going to the
11 South Pacific. But from there, um, a group of nurses were shipped down to
12 Los Angeles, uh, and then we got aboard ship on, at Los Angeles Harbor.
13 Then, we docked at Perth, Australia. From Perth, Australia, well, I thought
14 well, here I'm going to be in Australia. But no, we were there just for
15 about a day, so they could re-, uh, refuel the ship and get supplies, I was
16 told. I might mention, onboard ship, there were 18 nurses to a cabin – 3
17 decks, 1 washbasin [audience laughter]. So, we got up, uh, I was on the
18 top, of course, so we'd get up first; I was on the third layer and then the
19 second and then the first. Made it a little more convenient.

20

21 When we first crossed the equator, you know what they did to the women?
22 They turned off all the water, ducked our heads in flour [sounds of
23 wonderment from audience], and we stayed that way all day. [audience
24 laughter] So, when we crossed it again, to go up to Calcutta, they didn't
25 do that, though. Thank goodness! Once was enough. [audience laughter] If
26 I remember correctly, there were 3,000 nurses and enlisted men onboard
27 that ship. And the enlisted men, I was told, slept, um, 8-hour shifts
28 because there wasn't enough bunks.

29

30 We landed at Calcutta and the nurses were taken to the hospital there. The
31 hospital in Burm-, in, uh, Calcutta, as a whole, was very nice. It was a
32 beautiful quarters. It had been, um, I believe, a, like a large hall or, and
33 then they had added buildings to it, but it was, as a whole, very nice and,
34 uh, very clean and all. We were told when we'd go into Calcutta, all we
35 had to do to the taxi driver is, when you were ready to come back, to tell
36 him that you wanted to go to the American hospital. That's all you had to
37 say, American hospital, and he knew where to take you. Because they
38 didn't speak English at that time, anyway. Most of'm, well, they could
39 understand or else they just didn't want to, I don't know.

40

41 The patients there, they were taken very well, taken care of very well and
42 then those that could go back to duty would go back but those that had to
43 be sent back to the USA usually were flown, either directly from Calcutta

1 or they were flown to Karachi, and from Karachi, they would return by
2 ship to New York.
3
4 Then, from Calcutta, I received orders to go to, uh, M'ichina Burma.
5 M'ichina Burma is real close to the Burma Road and if any of you have
6 seen pictures of the Burma Road, believe you me, you haven't seen dust
7 until you've seen the Burma Road...
8Audience: [Inaudible 11:09].
9
10Marguerite Noutary: ...or mud, too, yes. But, M'ichina, we were in tents at that time and the
11 mo-, right in the middle of a monsoon season. There again, the nurses
12 were 2 to a tent and, uh, I have never seen anything mildew so fast like in
13 Burma. Our billfolds, all mildewed. Everything in our suitcases or, uh,
14 foot lockers. Our hair was never dry; it was moist all the time. And we all
15 had a little Burmese girl to each camp. You know how much they paid
16 her? The army paid her.
17
18Audience: [Inaudible 11:53].
19
20Marguerite Noutary: Well, 15 cents, American money, in a day. And I don't know 1 or, was it 5
21 pounds? 5 pounds of rice a month, or something like that. But they were
22 excellent. The army had set up a, a washing room with washing machines
23 and all but, you know, they would never want to us the washing machines.
24 They would go down to the [Ariwani 12:18] River and they'd wash
25 everything by hand, right on the rocks. The nurses, uh, we wore either the
26 fatigues on duty or, if you remember the seersucker dresses...
27
28Audience: [Inaudible 12:33].
29
30Marguerite Noutary: ...and the seersucker, um, the pants and the blouse. And we always had to
31 have after, was it 5:00, I believe, uh, our sleeves rolled down because of
32 malaria. Our, uh, showers weren't very close at all to our tent. You had to
33 walk quite a ways and by the time, it seems like when I would get there,
34 the water was turned off. [audience laughter] The water always turned off.
35 Whenever you'd receive, uh, word there was a party somewhere, you
36 know, well, what did we do? Go to our tent and change our fatigues.
37 [audience laughter] We never wore our street dress at all. That seems so
38 strange to me when I look back now, God, not even a dress! [coughing]
39
40 Um, our duty there was hard. I thought being on duty in M'ichina was the
41 hardest. By that, I mean we would receive word, "Well, you're gonna get,
42 uh, 50 basket cases," or "You're gonna receive 100 basket cases today."
43 So, um, in the emergency room, we would, uh, use the triage method and
44 whichever the nurse, usually the doctors would choose certain nurses to

1 work in triage and triage then, it was up to the nurse to, uh, see which
2 patient, uh, looked the least injured and, uh, those that you thought would
3 recover. But those that were dead on arrival, you just had to wait and, uh,
4 the chaplain took care of them, took care of the bodies.

5
6 There were, uh, just plain – the hospital was just plain tents, real long,
7 narrow tents and you, we would have patients on both sides of the tents.
8 The first thing you knew, one side of the tent, the rain would start coming
9 through. Then, you'd have to move all those patients over to the other
10 side. By the time you had'm all moved over to the other side, here comes
11 the rain over here, so back you'd go to the other side. [laughter] And the
12 latrines for the patients were quite a ways from the tent and that was very
13 hard on the patients. I remember that very clearly. And the, uh, food, the
14 food to be served to the patients in Burma, I thought, was very, very hard.
15 And, as a whole, I thought the food wasn't too, too good but the be-, we
16 did the best we could.

17
18 I was there, uh, uh, 4 months in Burma, then I received orders to go to
19 Kunming, China. And, uh, oh, by then really, I'd just as soon, I would
20 have liked to have stayed in M'ichina, myself, but you know how it is.
21 You don't get what you want. So away I went to Kunming, China, another
22 nurse and I, we had orders. And you know that's the only time I ever wore
23 my dog tags, when we flew over the hump. I had to wear my dog tags. I
24 always kept them in a pocket or something but this time, I thought I better
25 wear them. [audience laughter]

26
27 Um, over the hump, that's quite an experience. You look down and you
28 see those mountains and you see that little Burma Road down there, you
29 wonder how in the world they ever got through. To this day, I just can't
30 imagine with all that equipment that they drove through that Burma Road
31 into Kunming. And, of course, all this time, you know, people ask me,
32 "Well, what were you doing in China and Burma?" I said, "Well we had a
33 war!" "You mean they were fighting there?" I said, "Yes, they were." The
34 Japanese were there and it's amazing how many Japanese we had as
35 prisoners in M'ichina. In fact, I went over the hump once with a plane full
36 of just Japanese prisoners, from M'ichina to Kunming. But, um, as a
37 whole, the prisoners, though, they were meek at the mouth. They couldn't
38 say anything. They do, the Japanese would do anything you'd want them
39 or ask them to do but, um, they were fighting, believe me.

40
41 Of course, in Burma, too, there was a lot of malaria. We had tents and
42 tents full of malaria patients only. And if you've never seen anyone go
43 into tremors, I have never seen anything like it, in, only in, uh, malaria
44 patients, how bad they can go into these tremors. And, um, usually, it

1 would always happen on the ward that I'd be assigned to and they'd all go
2 into it, it seemed like the same time at night. [audience laughter] It was
3 something.
4

5 Then from, uh, Kunming, as you know, war ended, what was it, August
6 the 5th or 7th? [audience response] 7th. Okay, and then, uh, October 5th, that
7 was it, the nationalists and the communists started fighting and they were
8 only a few miles from the hospital. Then we received orders right away to
9 evacuate the hospital immediately to Calcutta, because you could hear
10 them fighting. But before we did that, we did receive, uh, the General
11 Doolittle's flyers that were captured in Japan and they were flown to
12 M'ichina Burma and, uh, they were very, very ill. By that, I mean some
13 were mentally ill and others were physically ill. And as soon as we could,
14 we would, uh, fly them back to the United States. But there was a large
15 group of them that we received. They were very, very good patients. Very,
16 very thin. Then, when the hospital was moved back to Calcutta, I
17 remained there for quite a while, until almost November, because we had a
18 skeleton crew of army personnel there only. But as soon as we got orders,
19 we were moved back to, uh, Calcutta. Then from Calcutta, we had to wait
20 for orders again, so they were sending the, uh, the patients from Calcutta
21 back to the United States very rapidly. I don't know what happened there
22 all of a sudden, but everybody was leaving.
23

24 In the meantime, though, I want to mention that, in Kunming, if you
25 remember [inaudible 20:01] that we had as [inaudible 20:04], well, right
26 outside of Kunming, there were acres and acres of equipment, Jeeps,
27 tanks, everything, and all these fur-lined jackets that the, uh, pilots wore
28 and all that, and some of the nurses thought, "Oh, we'll go over and see if
29 they'll sell us some of those jackets," and all this and that. Boy, we went
30 over there, and they told us in nothing flat that this was [inaudible 20:30]
31 and everything remains right here, that nobody could touch'm. So, you can
32 imagine how much we [laughed 20:37]. [audience laughter]
33

34 The hum-, the humidity over there is unbearable. It's just unbearable, the
35 humidity. And, uh, several of the nurses, especially in, uh, Burma, the
36 chief nurse did send a few of the nurses back to the United States because,
37 uh, it was hard to take. Everything we ate was canned, in Burma and in
38 China, canned food. And I ended up eating [inaudible 21:10]. No, it was
39 steamed, uh, stewed tomatoes. That's all I could eat. And the chief nurse
40 came to me one day and she said, "You've got to eat more or I'm gonna
41 send you back to the States." [audience laughter] So, I thought, well, I'll
42 try, I'll try, but it just seemed so, um, it must be when you're in a foreign
43 country or something, I don't know, that I just couldn't swallow that stuff

1 down, I just couldn't take it. [audience laughter] But I finally did start
2 eating a little more.

3
4 In Calcutta, they did not put us on duty. I think they felt sorry for us. They
5 didn't, uh, send us on duty. We could just take it easy and rest and see the
6 sights. Oh, the sights! [audience laughter] They told us, "If you go to the
7 burning [inaudible 22:01] – you know, where they burn the bodies and all
8 – I have a picture in there – you weren't supposed to go inside but I did. I
9 went inside and you could see the legs and feet, you know, and then hear
10 [inaudible 22:16] and burning and all, oh, it was unbearable. Also, they
11 told us, "If you see a body in the street, if you go back in 1 or 2 days and
12 you still see that body, if the vultures haven't eaten it. So I went back, just
13 for the heck of it, and I wore my gas mask [audience laughter] and here
14 was, would be these bodies so that's how the filth was. And some friends
15 of mine went over to India a few years ago and I asked them if they really
16 thought it had been cleaned up much and they said, "Oh no, I think it's
17 still the same way you saw it. There's new hotels and all that but, as a
18 whole, there, they haven't improved that much, so I don't know." But it
19 was pretty bad, very bad.

20
21 From, uh, Calcutta then, we received orders to go by plane to Karachi. To
22 Karachi, we waited for a ship. The ship, we had to wait there, I think,
23 about 30 days and we returned by, uh, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, in the
24 Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean. And, believe you me, in December,
25 that Atlantic was rough. [audience laughter] It was rough! Several of the
26 nurses landed in the sick bay, I remember. We landed in New York. From
27 New York, we were sent to, uh, Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. From Camp
28 Kilmer, we received orders then to be flown to Camp Beale in California.
29 And there, they kept us, again, for a month or two, I don't know why,
30 before they would process us through to be separated from the service.
31 And the officer that spoke to a group of nurses, he told us, "Don't throw
32 away those active years of yours! You go back wherever you plan to go,
33 and you join the reserves." So, dumb me, [audience laughter] I joined the
34 reserves and I stayed in the reserves until age 60, which included,
35 altogether, my active and reserve, 36 years and 8 months. [audience
36 response] We would meet one weekend a month, usually at the UC-, what
37 is now UCI, and then when UCI came in, they didn't want the reserves, so
38 we had to go to the naval hospital in Long Beach for our weekends, which
39 was very nice, really.

40
41 Then we had our 2 weeks of active duty, usually in the summer. And
42 wherever you worked, I know the state of California, they had no problem
43 at all there, you showed them your orders and, uh, you went directly then
44 for your 2 weeks active duty. However, I didn't mention this but

1 December 1st of, uh, 1961, I received orders to, I was recalled on active
2 duty. I thought, “Oh my gosh, what have I done now?” [audience laughter]
3 And I was sent to, uh, Fort Polk, Louisiana. They recalled 500 nurses and
4 we arrived at Fort Polk. And all these nurses, half of them, you know,
5 madder than you know what! And, they were gonna write to this
6 congressman and all this and that, and I just told’m, “Well, I’m sorry. I
7 don’t know any congressmen, so I guess I’ll stay.” [audience laughter] So
8 I stayed, which I’m grateful now. It added up the, uh, points toward your
9 retirement. And, my job here in the state hospital at Norwalk was still
10 there waiting for me when I returned.

11
12 I asked the chief nurse from Washington, when she came down to visit us
13 at Fort Polk, “Why did you call back all these nurses from California when
14 you have so many out here on the east coast?” She looked at me and she
15 said, “I’ll call any nurse back when I want.” [audience laughter] So I kept
16 quiet. But, it’s amazing how many of those nurses left right away. They
17 did not go on duty, which I thought was terrible in this matter because the
18 expense to get there, then the expense to process them to get out as soon as
19 they got there. There were several from this area.

20
21 When I was chief nurse of the Orange County Medical Unit, uh, it was
22 very interesting. Some of you might remember Colonel, uh, [Carl 27:13],
23 Paul Carl from Orange? Dr. [Roland 27:17]? He was in the unit. All these
24 doctors from Orange County, and it was a very, it still is – see, we do have
25 a very active, um, um, medical unit here in Orange County. And we
26 thought certainly we were gonna be called several times, as a whole, as a
27 whole unit, to go back. And they would tell us, “Be sure to have your
28 finances and your home and everything taken care of because, if we
29 receive orders, we’ll have to leave in a hurry.”

30
31 When I received my orders to go to Camp, to Fort Polk, I thought the
32 same thing. What am I going to do with this house? I received orders at
33 11:00 in the morning and by evening I had my house rented and
34 everything taken care of. I called my hairdresser and she said, “Don’t
35 worry, don’t worry. I’ll take care of it for you. I’ll see that it’s rented and
36 everything,” and she sure did. And, by that evening, I had everything
37 taken care of and I left in 8 days. And the other nurse went to Fort Polk
38 and one went to Oregon as I recall. And we thought sure we were gonna
39 leave from, uh, uh, Fort Polk, uh, they kept mentioning, uh, Europe ‘cause
40 Europe was very bad apparently at that time in ’61 and ’62. And then I had
41 orders to come back to California from Fort Polk and [ended up 28:49]
42 with that other deal, the Bay of Pigs started in [audience response] Cuba.
43 But, uh, they let us come home. They didn’t keep us.

1 So all in all though, really, as I look back, I'm very grateful that they sent
2 me to these countries 'cause I don't think I want to go on my own.
3 [audience laughter]
4
5 Vivian Peterson: This was a Women's Overseas Service League oral history project taped at
6 the Orange County Unit in, uh, Laguna Hills, California at the general
7 meeting on March 3, 1990. The background noise is the rest of the people
8 in the audience.
9
10
11/ab