

**Interview of Victoria von Dyck O'Hearns on her experiences
as nurse in France during WWI**

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5 Victoria O'Hearns: ...and since I could speak French, they, when they, they were going to
6 bombard a village, they always used to move the people.
7
8 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
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10 Victoria O'Hearns: And just [inaudible 00:16] there, uh, they had the barracks, military
11 barracks, but they couldn't put military in it because the Germans could
12 fly over and bomb it, so it was just idle, vacant...
13
14 Interviewer: Hm.
15
16 Victoria O'Hearns: ...all these big buildings. But when these refugees came, there was no
17 other place to put them except in these barracks. They asked me, I had
18 only been there 3 days in Paris. They asked me if I would go, and I said
19 "I'll go anyplace you tell me to." I didn't [inaudible 00:45] children down
20 there and I was getting a little fellow about 8 years old. He had to have
21 emergency surgery and I was giving him a bath and they only had a thin
22 tub, you know, a, a bench behind, and a potbelly stove. And the windows
23 were broken, some of them, not all of them. Primitive [inaudible 01:08] it
24 had been for the soldiers and not for the civilians, so some – and I always
25 put myself in front so that if the door opened that the cold air would not
26 blow on the patients, you know. And he was such a nice, little kid. And
27 somebody opened the door and the door didn't close and didn't close and I
28 thought, I said "Please close that door. Can't you see the future of France
29 may catch pneumonia." [laughter] You know, I didn't know who it was,
30 so they closed the door and I [inaudible 01:40] little bed, bed, and told
31 him, you know, [inaudible 01:42] whatever it is you do to a kid 8 years old
32 when he has to have surgery. And pretty soon [inaudible 01:50]
33 something like that and he said "Oh please, don't take mademoiselle
34 away." That was me, and I looked up and he said "[inaudible 01:58] is the
35 future of France safe?" It was Marshall Petain talking. [laughter] He was
36 the one I told to shut the door.
37
38 Interviewer #1: Oh for heaven's sakes. My gosh.
39
40 Interviewer #2: I got my [inaudible 02:10] like that once too.
41
42 Interviewer: Quite a story.
43
44 Interviewer #2: Yeah.

1
2Interviewer #1: Yeah.
3
4Interviewer #2: All right. Yeah. That, that's a good one, uh.
5
6Victoria O'Hearns: And then we had a little French fellow [inaudible 02:19] with the French,
7 with the civilians [inaudible 02:23]. It was not as glamorous, but to see
8 these people and the joy they have and they tell you "Oh mademoiselle,
9 it's you there. I'll let my kid come with you." You know, that's worth
10 more than anything else that you can do. But this little fellow, he was
11 about 6, cute as they make'm. His name was Marcel, of course. And, um,
12 maybe I should tell this or the other one. This one is shorter and maybe I
13 have a chance to tell the other one too because that's [inaudible 02:56]
14 picture of him a couple days. That I wouldn't trade [inaudible 03:00]
15 picture and I want to keep that picture myself. But there was this little
16 fellow and he was about 6 or 7 years old, real little, you know, and he had
17 one thing and another. And, um, he, he always had a cold. And I said –
18 his uncle was in the Moroccan Army with the red breeches and the red
19 [inaudible 03:21] and he had sent his little Marcel a little suit and he came
20 and showed me his suit. And I said "Oh." I said "I have to take a picture
21 of that for sure. The next time I'll have my camera." Well, I forgot my
22 camera, and the next day it rain, the next day I was assigned it rained and
23 there is no use taking a picture with the camera that [inaudible 03:43]
24 dark, you know. So the third time we had the camera and he looked at me
25 and he said "Oh mademoiselle. It's a good thing..." He said "...because I
26 cannot wear this costume anymore because I'm in mourning." [laughter]
27
28Interviewer #2: That's cute. That's cute.
29
30Victoria O'Hearns: That's why I say you, you have all these kids for – oh, the same thing he
31 told me one time and I said "Oh Marcel." I said "But you, you cannot
32 drink all that cough medicine I gave you..." Which some would steal
33 sometimes. And I said "...because you know that isn't good for you." He
34 said "Mademoiselle, my mother told me not to tell you that she puts the
35 syrup in, in her coffee." [laughter]
36
37Interviewer #1: For sugar.
38
39Victoria O'Hearns: I said "No. I won't tell your mother." Well, they have no sugar, you
40 know, so.
41
42Interviewer #1: Why sure.
43
44Victoria O'Hearns: So sweeten their coffee with cough medicine.

1
2Interviewer #1: He wasn't so dumb.
3
4Victoria O'Hearns: No. Oh, no. He wasn't so dumb. No.
5
6Interviewer #2: That isn't the one you told out at Lee's that day.
7
8Victoria O'Hearns: No, no. That, oh, that was a, another station again in that same hospital.
9 And there was a little girl and [inaudible 04:57] came and went, and went
10 and came. I can tell about that story. I often say that she said she wants to
11 go and buy a locket for her niece whose birthday it was and she said "Can
12 you go with June?" I said "Yeah. I have a couple of hours. Come on
13 [inaudible 05:13]." We had to go down the bridge and the hill and there
14 was this little town with streets so narrow that you could, you know,
15 winding like this. And we were in a hurry and we didn't know how late in
16 the evening it was, and we walked in that store and when we came out of
17 the store it was as [inaudible 05:29] black as could be. You couldn't see
18 your fingers. And we didn't know which way we had to turn to the
19 [inaudible 05:35] to the light to the – and so [inaudible 05:39] said "Let's
20 wait a little bit, we get used to." But you couldn't if you put your face like
21 that...
22
23Interviewer: Yeah.
24
25Victoria O'Hearns: ...you couldn't see. There wasn't a star in the sky.
26
27Interviewer: Yeah.
28
29Victoria O'Hearns: So pretty soon a, a, a dull flashlight came across the street on the, on the
30 curb and I said "[inaudible 05:57] can you tell us which way we have to
31 turn to go to the bridge?" He threw the light in our faces and he said "You
32 [inaudible 06:06]." I said "Please help us. You know, we cannot see a
33 thing, it's so dark." And he said "You just..." Somebody said "You just
34 wait a minute, we'll, we'll send a car over." And I said "Oh sure." And I
35 said "Let the general walk and, and we ride. No. Just tell us to get up to
36 the bridge." And pretty soon there came this car, the little chauffeur got out
37 and asked me, a little French soldier, you know, and he said
38 "Mademoiselle, get in." And I said "[inaudible 06:37]." I said "If you
39 [inaudible 06:38] in trouble with Marshall Petain. That's an order."
40
41Interviewer: Oh.
42

1 Victoria O'Hearns: I said to the girl with me "Come on. Let's go." You can imagine when
2 we got to the hospital in Marshall Petain's car. [laughter] We had
3 [inaudible 06:50] of explaining to do. [laughter]
4

5 Interviewer #1: I bet you did.
6

7 Interviewer #2: Yeah. I think, I think that was what you told.
8

9 Victoria O'Hearns: Yeah.
10

11 Interviewer #2: I don't...
12

13 Victoria O'Hearns: Oh, I can never forget that because that was too funny.
14

15 Interviewer #1: Yeah.
16

17 Interviewer #2: Yeah.
18

19 Victoria O'Hearns: Oh, I always [inaudible 07:05]. One time [inaudible 07:07] jumped from
20 there when the, when the [inaudible 07:09], the, the people were evacuated
21 to their room and we have to go someplace else, you know. So then they
22 were – they had the flu. Oh, they had the flu bad [inaudible 07:19] doctor
23 3 days. And the doctor said "Where did you come from?" I'd been there
24 3 days.
25

26 Interviewer #1: Oh my goodness.
27

28 Victoria O'Hearns: Yeah. And, um, so we had an Italian [inaudible 07:31] there and he must
29 have been des-, desperately in love with Marie in Italy. He wasn't a
30 soldier. He was – they brought [inaudible 07:38] Italy get out of war they
31 brought these men over to repair the roads because they were bombed and
32 shelled and the big trucks and the-, they were just nothing but potholes,
33 that was how they were. And he had the flu and he had [inaudible 07:52].
34 First of all, the first day he got out of bed twice. To pick up a person
35 [inaudible 07:59] heavy. You know, that's difficult.
36

37 Interviewer #1: Mm-hm.
38

39 Victoria O'Hearns: The second day he was there he gave me a wad, a, a, a roll of money about
40 as big as my arm with a rubber band around and he said "You, Marie."
41 You know, he'd been very sick. If he died, I was to send it to Marie.
42

43 Interviewer #1: Oh.
44

1 Victoria O'Hearns: And the address was on there. I said "I'll give it to the doctor." He said
2 "No, no, no. You."
3
4 Interviewer #1: Mm-hm.
5
6 Victoria O'Hearns: So I said "Okay." I put it in my pocket and walked around for, for 2 days.
7 He fell out, he climbed out of bed constantly. I tore up a sheet, which we
8 couldn't spare, to tie him up, but he got out. [inaudible 08:36] he was on
9 the floor again and I was trying to pick him up and somebody in the back
10 of me "Where's the doctor?" I said "I don't know. He's around
11 someplace, but I don't know where he is." And I said "But if you're a
12 gentleman [inaudible 08:48]." I said "Come and help me put this man
13 back in bed." So somebody came and helped me pick up the bed and
14 when I looked up it was [inaudible 08:55] from the Moroccan Army with
15 his red pantaloons and his red [inaudible 09:00] me and there was
16 Marshall Petain [inaudible 09:09] help and he said to the doctor, he said to
17 the doctor. He said "Never mind, mademoiselle. If we had a few like her,
18 we would have fewer casualties in the hospital." And, of course, the
19 doctor didn't like me because he does no good at all.
20
21 Interviewer: Oh.
22
23 Victoria O'Hearns: [inaudible 09:25].
24
25 Interviewer: Hm.
26
27 Victoria O'Hearns: And, uh, he was mad because then he didn't want me anymore there
28 because you see he...
29
30 Interviewer: You were getting all the glory and he wasn't.
31
32 Victoria O'Hearns: That is right.
33
34 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
35
36 Interviewer: Used to [inaudible 09:41].
37
38 Victoria O'Hearns: Then, you know, the, the flu died down and they didn't need it anymore
39 because then they closed the hospital up [inaudible 09:50]. You see, there
40 was never a dull moment.
41
42 Interviewer #1: No, no. I would say not.
43

1 Victoria O'Hearns: No. And I liked it. I, I really did like it because when I worked in a
2 hospital that was [inaudible 10:03] done but by that time the American
3 Army was there. They were so organized. The hospitals were run
4 properly. They had food. Everything was like in a regular hospital,
5 regular. My work was never, you never know when you worked from
6 5:00 in the morning till 5:00 the next evening.
7

8 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
9

10 Victoria O'Hearns: You know, but these people appreciated that [inaudible 10:29], but they
11 appreciated me.
12

13 Interviewer #1: Yeah.
14

15 Victoria O'Hearns: And you know that gave me real satisfaction.
16

17 Interviewer #1: Oh, I'll say.
18

19 Interviewer #2: I had the same kind of experience. It was the other war, the last one.
20

21 Victoria O'Hearns: Yeah, yeah. So anyway, that's, that was my [inaudible 10:45] of 4 years.
22 And what about the, about the wars, was that being re-, recorded all that?
23

24 Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. yeah.
25

26 Interviewer #1: [inaudible 10:55] more stories so Helen can pick either one of'm.
27

28 Interviewer #2: I pick'm all.
29

30 Interviewer #1: Good idea.
31

32 Victoria O'Hearns: Yeah. Then you have a whole magazine full. [chuckle]
33

34 Interviewer #2: [inaudible 11:04] you're going to have to help, uh, no, that's what I, yeah,
35 I'll send it to the editor of this book and she will take what she wants to
36 put in the history, you know. Okay, so, well, wait a minute. I – there was
37 something I...
38

39 Victoria O'Hearns: But my name when I was in the service was von Dyck, D-y-c-a-k,
40 [chuckle] D-y-c-k. Not O'Hearns, that was my wedding name.
41

42 Interviewer #2: [inaudible 11:30] [11:33] And Victoria was your first name.
43

1 Victoria O'Hearns: Yeah. Well, it was Victorine, yes, but [inaudible 11:38] Dyck before
2 [inaudible 11:40].
3
4 Interviewer #2: But I think they want that too.
5
6 Interviewer #1: The maiden name, yeah.
7
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