

**Interview of retired Colonel Mary Ruth Pullig on her long career
in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps**

4Ruth Stewart: Mary Ruth Pullig is being interviewed as a member of the WOSL in San Antonio, Texas... [inaudible 00:10] 1919. Ruth Stewart is interviewing. Mary Ruth, tell us a bit about yourself.

8Mary Ruth Pullig: Well, I have a long wonderful history. Uh, I was born in Stamps, Arkansas, on the date which he just gave; lived there till I was three-years old. And then we moved to Minden, Louisiana, where I went to elementary school and went to some of the high schools in Calhoun, Louisiana; and finished in Jonesboro, Louisiana. I went into nursing school in 1937 at Shreveport Charity Hospital. It is not run by the nuns. There was a massive amount of people.

16 One of the funny things that happened while I was working in the emergency room, uh, there was an old truck that came up the road just a choogling and, uh, choogling along. When we got out there, there was a lady in the back about to have a baby. Well, she did have it and she had on long little bloomers and that poor little baby was kicking around in them old bloomers till we could get him out. That was funny to me, but it was exiting at the time.

24 And then, I had, uh, very good assignments there. I worked in the, uh, oh, through the [tumor 1:19] clinic; and met some very nice and very sick people then. I worked for two very good doctors at that time; also, the friends with whose class I was in was very supportive and we had a lot of fun together. And uh, I also worked in the kitchen for the night thing; and I would borrow a pound of bacon and take it home in my uniform, so we could fry it in the [quarters 1:41], so you'd have a bacon sandwich.

32 Then let's see, from there I went to... I worked there in the emergency room after I graduated, for a while. And then I went to the Lady in the Lake in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and was a night supervisor. And I had a nun that was absolutely fantastic. She was there when Huey Long was shot. She got all the policeman, "Out of that hospital. Get out here. We gotta take care of this man." And she did me the same way, "Now you go do this; you go do that; and go to the other thing." "Now you could have [inaudible 2:13] on the table and you sleep; and they'll wake you up in five minutes." That was a very nice assignment.

42 And then, the situation about the war came up; and I decided I wanted to go into the military. I took my entrance in, uh, at Fitzsimons Army

1 Hospital in Colorado. And then went from where to where? I don't know,
2 cut it off for a minute. Let's see, can you cut it off for a minute?
3
4 Ruth Stewart: [2:28] But you, you, uh, entered the Army Nurse Corps at Fitzsimons. Is
5 that it?
6
7 Mary Ruth Pullig: No, no. In Baton Rouge.
8
9 Ruth Stewart: In Baton...
10
11 Mary Ruth Pullig: No, no. Take it back. It was Fort Sam Houston. I entered in Fort Sam
12 Houston.
13
14 Ruth Stewart: [2:50] So that's where you entered...
15
16 Mary Ruth Pullig: Yep, that's where I entered...
17
18 Ruth Stewart: ...was at Fort Sam Houston.
19
20 Mary Ruth Pullig: But was never assigned to Fort Sam Houston. I went from there to
21 Denver, Fitzsimons. And as I said, if you'd cut it off for a minute so I can
22 collect myself. [chuckle] [pause]
23
24 ...General Nurse Corps in Fitzsimons and mostly on the, uh, medical and
25 cardi-, um, not the cardiac ward, but pulmonary ward. And learned with
26 some very good friends how to bowl. And I had a very good time bowling
27 with that. And from Fitzsimons, I had several beautiful assignments in the
28 United States, one of which I enjoyed most was West Point. And when I
29 went in to meet the good general, I was just trying to salute him; and he
30 reached up and grabbed my hand and said, "Welcome to West Point."
31 And I guess it was Mr. – oh, I can't even think of the man's name at this
32 point, but he was a beautiful general.
33
34 And uh, there I worked as a army health nurse. And uh, we had a
35 beautiful little school... Westmoreland was the general who shook my
36 hand. And uh, the new children there were just absolutely great. Uh, we
37 did, uh, testing – hearing, eyes, physical testing and we did give some
38 shots. In the well-baby clinic, we gave shots at that time also.
39
40 And uh, then I had another very beautiful assignment in Hawaii. I was
41 there three wonderful years as a community health nurse. They had
42 changed its title by that time. And uh, I had five nice young nurses that
43 were just very good, one of whom is now in, uh, WOSL unit, [Catherine
44 O'Neal 4:37] – [Catherine Rhineland O'Neal 4:39] So...

1
2 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
3
4 Mary Ruth Pullig: And she was really very good. We taught classes for the pregnant ladies
5 and gentlemen. And one of the funny things one of the men said, “My
6 wife is not going to breast feed, because those are mine.” I said... We all
7 got a good laugh out of that. I said, he added a lot to that particular class.
8
9 Ruth Stewart: [laughter]
10
11 Mary Ruth Pullig: And we did lot of traveling there. We’d go out to the recreation center and
12 get a cabin – a bunch of us when we had time on the weekend. We swam.
13 I learned to snorkel there; but never did learn to dive. I almost choked
14 myself to death because there was pretty fish down there and I dunked my
15 head down and got the snorkel all caught up. So, after coughing for a little
16 while, I [beschroomed 5:26] myself.
17
18 And then, I had, uh, [Fitzsimons 5:31] uh, New Jers-, [Fitzsimons 5:34]
19 wasn’t in New Jersey. Where is that one? Ohhh, anyway. I’ve already
20 forgotten that name. But I think it was Jersey. And that was another very
21 good assignment. In fact, I have had all good assignments – have enjoyed
22 them. Ran into some rough spots.
23
24 We went to the Pacific. I’ve got to tell you this one. We had to get down
25 on the rope to get into the little boats to go to shore. And one of our very
26 best friends froze on the ropes. So, another friend and I went up, hands
27 around her and over the rope with one foot; walked her down that rope.
28 And we just had a good time doing it, because we laughed like crazy. The
29 lady was very thankful that she got down off of the ropes. [chuckle] And
30 uh, we went, went into [Cebu at D28 6:20] hours. And we, we do... And
31 the crew chiefs – when the guys would come over, but we’d be sitting on
32 our helmets like stoops, watching the flyover. And then we went to the
33 shower. You couldn’t do it except at certain hours. And when you went
34 in, the man was outside, and I said, “Well I’ve got my leggings on”. And
35 he’d say, “Well it too late for you to be showering. Get outta there.”
36 [chuckle]
37
38 Ruth Stewart: [6:43] Now where was this?
39
40 Mary Ruth Pullig: In, in, uh, New Guinea. And uh... It’s just kinda hard to keep up, because
41 I did have such great fun. And... I jumped from Hawaii to New Guinea,
42 didn’t I? [chuckle] But anyway... Uh, let me see, let me see, let me see.
43 Well, let me see. Where did I serve? One place here tells me where I
44 served.

1
2 Ruth Stewart: [7:09] When you were in New Guinea, what were your living conditions?
3
4 Mary Ruth Pullig: Poor. Very, very poor. [chuckle] There were tents. We did have some
5 wooden floors put into them; and you slept under the mosquito nets. And
6 we were good buddies with the enlisted people, so they built us a swing
7 out of a box on a frame between the two tents, so we could sit out there
8 and have a good time. We did our laundry in a stream that was down
9 below there for quite a long period of time. And there, a whole bunch of
10 us got blistered – not just burned – but just plain blistered because we
11 were swimming while we were washing our fatigues in there.
12
13 Uh, we did have the mess kits, which we used and had pretty good food
14 most of the time. Sometimes it was just one vegetable for a week, like
15 cabbage, for a week because it didn't come in. We were lucky enough to
16 be friends with some air force people. And they would come over and
17 pick us up and we'd go have a fine meal over at the air force. And the
18 young gentlemen that I was with was over 6'4". And my nose came to
19 about his belt, but we had a lot of fun dancing anyway. And we just had a
20 lot of fun with each other. So, let me see here.
21
22 Ruth Stewart: [8:18] What other recreation did you have?
23
24 Mary Ruth Pullig: Over there, you just kinda made your own, you know. You could play
25 cards; or you could play badminton. We had badminton stuff. I was not a
26 very good basketball player, but we could swim. But that was another
27 nice experience. I caught the tide waves one time. I was pretty tired when
28 I got back enough sand to grab onto to get onto the coast. So, I just
29 thanked the good Lord for that one. But we stuck together pretty good,
30 you know. Oh, over there you couldn't go anyplace without two of you.
31 And you had to have a driver that had a gun. And my little friend lost her
32 brother, so we would go to the [inaudible 8:55] and I said I'd go with her.
33 And she was a very lovely lady. She was my chief nurse by the way. And
34 uh, mm, mm, mm. Of all of the wonderful things I've done, my mind is
35 going a little bit black at this point. [chuckle]
36
37 I went to Germany. In Germany, at Landstuhl 2nd General Hospital. I was
38 in with their community health nurse. And there, you get to see all of the
39 families; and all of them were not so upstairs, you know, but you, you
40 kind of help'm out. And I enjoyed that very much. And then we'd be sure
41 that they got their babies to the clinic for their check-ups. And the little
42 girls, uh, those young ladies, pardon me, would have to have some just
43 kind of serious talkin' sometimes. And we did that. And it was accepted.
44 That was good. I only had one family that rejected me. And I was sick

1 for a week after that one. [chuckle] But, it just happened that way
2 sometimes.
3
4 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
5
6 Mary Ruth Pullig: And let's see, I got my master's at North Carolina.
7
8 Ruth Stewart: [9:57] Was this part of the army?
9
10 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm-hm. The army sent me.
11
12 Ruth Stewart: The army sent you...
13
14 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm-hm.
15
16 Ruth Stewart: ...back from Germany to the U.S.
17
18 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm, yes.
19
20 Ruth Stewart: [10:07] And that's when you applied for school?
21
22 Mary Ruth Pullig: Yeah, University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.
23
24 Ruth Stewart: [10:16] And that was for a master's?
25
26 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm-hm.
27
28 Ruth Stewart: [10:17] Where had you gotten your bachelor's?
29
30 Mary Ruth Pullig: In, uh, Galveston.
31
32 Ruth Stewart: [10:21] When was that?
33
34 Mary Ruth Pullig: Uh, that was earlier. That was before the [inaudible 10:28].
35
36 Ruth Stewart: [10:31] Was that in the military?
37
38 Mary Ruth Pullig: No, no.
39
40 Ruth Stewart: [10:32] That was before you went into the military?
41
42 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm-hm. Well, I take it back. Part of it was reserve. I was working at
43 McKinney Hospital. And this friend and I went to the University of Texas
44 in Galveston for our BS. And she had a bird; and that bird ate up her term

1 paper. So, we had a great time putting that back together. And we also
2 went down to the coast at night... There's all these people out at night and
3 there were flashlight waving at us. And I said, "My goodness, somebody
4 has drowned for surely..." So, we got 'hold of one of the men and he says,
5 "On no, we just think it's a flounder". You couldn't see at night. [chuckle]
6 We would fish and try to throw the hook out [inaudible 11:11] if we get
7 our bait before we got into the water.
8
9 Oh my, I'm jumping around like crazy.
10
11 Ruth Stewart: [11:19] When was it you went to UNC? What era?
12 Mary Ruth Pullig: I am sorry Dori-, Ruth, I can't bring that up right at the moment.
13
14 Ruth Stewart: It was...
15
16 Mary Ruth Pullig: But it was, uh...
17
18 Ruth Stewart: [11:31] After WWII or before?
19
20 Mary Ruth Pullig: No, it was before WWII.
21
22 Ruth Stewart: [11:34] So it was sometime in the '40's?
23
24 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm. Late '40's I would say...late '40's
25
26 Ruth Stewart: Okay, that's good enough.
27
28 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm-hm.
29
30 Ruth Stewart: Okay.
31
32 Mary Ruth Pullig: And... In Germany we did an awful lot of traveling. We went up to Mr.
33 Hitler's hideout. And uh, we'd all go on tours. You didn't go by yourself
34 to those places.
35
36 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.
37
38 Mary Ruth Pullig: And we had a very good time there. Oh, I forgot to tell you a little funny.
39 I thought when I was going to France. "Oh me, I'm going to get some
40 culture." Well, on the way from the airport to [Cosco 12:11], two busses
41 were stopped on the side; ladies was on one side and men's was on the
42 other; and the steam was arising from the urination. I said, "Culture? I'm
43 not sure I really am getting culture." [chuckle] But it was a fun
44 assignment anyway.

1
2 And...[pause] Heaven sakes, Ruth – done run out of steam. Can we
3 turn'm off again?
4
5 Ruth Stewart: You've had a lot of assignments then...
6
7 Mary Ruth Pullig: Oh yeah.
8
9 Ruth Stewart: ...covering a lot of the Pacific, as well as a lot of the U.S.
10
11 Mary Ruth Pullig: I think the most in the Pacific. We had the Philippines, New Guinea and
12 like I said we went into [inaudible 12:52] at [Cebu – Cebu 12:53] at 28
13 hours. So, we in went under fire. But we were okay. No real problems.
14 And uh...
15
16 Ruth Stewart: [13:02] Where were you... You were taking care of combatants as
17 casualties?
18
19 Mary Ruth Pullig: Both...and families. When I went over to the Pacific, I was just, just a
20 plain old nurse. I got to be a army health nurse later.
21
22 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
23
24 Mary Ruth Pullig: So, that was that.
25
26 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
27
28 Mary Ruth Pullig: But uh, we had the people that... The Japanese had wounded one little
29 girl. They had sliced her across the back shoulders. Her both little arms
30 were just... They were there, but she couldn't use them. Sweetest little
31 thing you ever saw. She just had a lot of courage and a lot of guts.
32
33 And uh, the nuns and priest all moved into the same place. And the priest
34 was walking around, and he stepped on one of the kids skates and fell and
35 broke his arm and came to the hospital. He got it all fixed and he came
36 back later to see some of his family members. And his hand was hanging
37 down, you know, almost to his hip. And I pulled him around the neck and
38 I said, "Son, you don't wear your hand down here. You get your arm up
39 in the sleeves and cross your chest." He looked at me and said, "I think
40 that's the only time I've had a woman to hug me." [chuckle]
41
42 But, you know, that's kind of... They made it easy. You didn't have to be
43 crazy, but it helped a little bit. And you got into a lot of things you

1 probably shouldn't have gotten into. But that's just the way things were at
2 that time.
3
4Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
5
6Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm, mm, mm. Oh, while I was in New Guinea, they decided to perm my
7 hair. My sister sent me the solution and what have you. And they got it
8 all down and the old brown turban they wrapped it up in and my hair
9 turned as green as grass. It took it a little while to grow out, but it made it.
10 [chuckle] Did they ever laugh at me about that. I said, "Well you did it to
11 me". So, that's the other thing on that.
12
13Ruth Stewart: [laughter]
14
15Mary Ruth Pullig: Oh my. Mm, mm, mm. But I could never have done, seen and been to the
16 places that I was able to go to without the military. And I'm very thankful
17 for that. And its been very good to me.
18
19Ruth Stewart: [15:01] When you were overseas, how did you keep in touch with your
20 family and friends?
21
22Mary Ruth Pullig: We wrote. And they sometimes would... They would all look at your
23 letters and cut out things that you couldn't send home. And we were told
24 what we couldn't send home. But sometimes you would refer to
25 something that would do it and they would cut that out. So, the family got
26 big fun out of... It would skip a space; and it would go to another thing.
27
28 Oh, my sister sent me a Christmas cake, a fruitcake. We were excited to
29 get into it. Well, it was all moldy, because it takes it forever to get, to get
30 over there. But we didn't eat the fruitcake, but we ate the cookies. We
31 got along with that pretty well. My sister was very attentive to me about
32 sending me little things like that. [pause] Oh my, oh my.
33
34Ruth Stewart: [15:54] So, how long were you in the service overall?
35
36Mary Ruth Pullig: Forty...take it back, thirty-two years.
37
38Ruth Stewart: Thirty-two years.
39
40Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm-hm.
41
42Ruth Stewart: So, you had a really long...
43

1 Mary Ruth Pullig: From '43... I got out in '46, but I retired in, uh... I went back into the
2 military when Pearl Harbor was hit. And I was at West Point when Pearl
3 Harbor was hit; and they wouldn't let'm in. Actually, something else...
4 [chuckle] Oh me.
5
6 And while I was at West Point, I had emergency surgery for an appendix.
7 And when I woke up, I had a beautiful little doll in my arms. And I still
8 have the little doll. [chuckle] But the anesthetist said, "Mary, if you ever
9 have this again, tell'm that you swallow your tongue." And I said,
10 "Okay". [chuckle] I've not had any more surgeries since then. [Mary
11 Cabanara 16:56] did it, by the way.
12
13 Ruth Stewart: [17:03] Okay. Are there other events, either poignant or humorous that
14 you recall at this point?
15
16 Mary Ruth Pullig: Most of my life was. [chuckle] Well, we did have a pretty good
17 relationship with the enlisted people, from whom we got our liquor ration.
18 They got our rations and they fed us good with whatever fruit they could
19 get from anyway, so...[chuckle] It was a [inaudible 17:22]. "Why didn't
20 you give it to us?" I said, "Nope, these guys have been good to us, so we
21 just give our rations to them." Back then – tent mates, you know, you had
22 tent mates. That was the other thing on that. But, uh... Oh, my, my, my,
23 my.
24
25 Thought I was never going [inaudible 17:41] do my whole life actually.
26 And... I've only lost one real close nurse friend by death. And I have
27 several that I still keep up with and they're in the same ole shape that I am.
28 Their legs don't work, the bones hurt and all that kinda stuff. [chuckle]
29 But uh, it was really kinda hard.
30
31 Ruth Stewart: [18:09] Are any of them around here?
32
33 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm, no. I take it back. [Becky 18:16] and, uh, Mary Black and Doris
34 Cobb [inaudible 18:24] and, um, the names are leaving. Some of them
35 live right here in this... Mary [Gollar 18:38], uh...
36
37 Oh yes, I have to go back to another subject while we were at Fort Sam in
38 that big fancy class we had. We had a Texan – I mean, a Canadian, that
39 was in our class and she was known as "Tex". And with out activities, we
40 got... She and another male classmate into the Fiesta Parade. And later, a
41 general came to me and he said, "You all really won the first place." He
42 said, "We had promised the company down there that they could have it."
43 So, they were really second place in that. And they both looked very well
44 on those floats...very well.

1
2 And uh, oh, when General Dunlap's class would come in, we'd start
3 whistling the Colonel Bogey March. Until she passed away, she
4 remembered that. In fact, when she signed my book, she said, "Do you all
5 remember what you use to, do-do, do, do, do, do?" But we really did...
6 We had...
7
8 Ruth Stewart: [19:39] When was that?
9
10 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm. Oh my, that was early in the day. And that was before I went to
11 overseas or anything. It was probably in that, uh, training, training period.
12
13 Ruth Stewart: [19:54] So you were in the health service command, is that it...assigned?
14
15 Mary Ruth Pullig: Army Nurse Corps.
16
17 Ruth Stewart: [19:59] That's where you...
18
19 Mary Ruth Pullig: Mm-hm.
20 Ruth Stewart: Okay, at Fort Sam.
21
22 Mary Ruth Pullig: Yes, right. Yes, that time.
23
24 Ruth Stewart: That's a part of that.
25
26 Mary Ruth Pullig: You're right. Health science...
27
28 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
29
30 Mary Ruth Pullig: I'm drawing a blank. You better shut if off for a minute. [pause]
31
32 ...all this in New Guinea area. We had some friends from another outfit
33 that could fly a little plane. So, we flew over Midway Island and we got
34 shot at; but we didn't get hurt. The plane had a hole in it, but that was all.
35 But that was kind of exciting.
36
37 Ruth Stewart: I guess.
38
39 Mary Ruth Pullig: Things just turn up and you just do things and it just happens. I didn't do
40 as much things as a lot of people do, but anyway, I had fun; I enjoyed it;
41 and I think I contributed. I wanted to very badly.
42
43 Ruth Stewart: [20:46] Have you joined any veteran's organizations since you've been
44 out of the service?

1
2 Mary Ruth Pullig: Yes, I belong to VFW, American Legion, uh, hm... In the retired
3 officers... They're not now. That's the MO – military order officer
4 something or other – MO... Anyway, whatever. I can't remember right
5 now.
6
7 Ruth Stewart: [21:10] Is that that MOMU?
8
9 Mary Ruth Pullig: Yes. And, uh, [TRA 21:13] and uh, nearly all of them, Ruth – lifetime
10 members. [chuckle] And I've been very happy with what I've done with
11 that...
12
13 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
14
15 Mary Ruth Pullig: ...the information that they have shared with us. I like that. And I try to
16 send it to some of the people who do not belong to some of those
17 organizations, so they, too, could keep up with their military. But they
18 didn't know what's going on, so that's the other thing on that.
19
20 Ruth Stewart: [21:44] Did uh, your experience in the military during all those 30-some
21 years, uh, influence the way you look at the military now or the wa-, or
22 wars?
23
24 Mary Ruth Pullig: Absolutely. I have always admired... But those young men were
25 absolutely fantastic. There were a few of'm that were sorta cantankerous
26 and give you a little hard time, but they were good young men; did not
27 have any attacks or anything like that. In fact, my enlisted people in
28 Hawaii were very, very good.
29
30 In fact, I had a driver who took me to places where I had to go; and he
31 would not go through certain parts of town. So, I was very well-protected,
32 and I appreciated that. In France, too, I had a driver. And when I needed
33 to get my hair done, I couldn't speak French, but he'd pull his hair and
34 drive me to the beauty shop and tell me, "I'll be back in 30 or 40 minutes."
35 So, we got along that way pretty well.
36
37 Ruth Stewart: Mm-hm.
38
39 Mary Ruth Pullig: But we'd go to families there; and you had to kind of go out into the
40 country; and he'd be the one that would take me. I got the same one all
41 the time. Thank goodness.
42

1 Ruth Stewart: [22:58] Well, uh, I was just wondering if there was anything else you
2 wanted as we bring this to a close. Is there anything you'd like to add in
3 terms of your memories or just your comments?
4

5 Mary Ruth Pullig: I want to thank the good Lord for a good blessing and a good, interesting
6 contact with a lot of beautiful people, military and civilian. And uh, I'm
7 very thankful that I can at least sit up and take nourishment, even though
8 the old body is getting kinda tired and the seams are coming open and the
9 sawdust is kinda falling out. But other than that, I'm doing okay.
10

11 Ruth Stewart: Well thank you very, very much Mary Ruth for this interview.
12

13 Mary Ruth Pullig: Thank you, Ruth.
14

15 [tape stopped and then resumed]
16

17 Mary Ruth Pullig: I said another... Part of my first life, I lost my mother when I was 8 years
18 old; and I lost my father when I was 16 years old. And I still remember
19 both of them; and I would have rather anytime my father had whipped me
20 instead of sitting me down and make me talk to him. That was the hardest
21 part about my corrections at that time. But he did it. And very good
22 relationships with him. I had a lovely relationship with my mother, but
23 not enough time to really be with her at that point; but she was a lovely
24 lady.
25

26 [tape stopped and then resumed]
27

28 ...around my father when we would go to Arkansas to see his mother.
29 There was an old bridge that had the planks cut up and a little [inaudible
30 24:22] all over it. And he would let me lean over the back and pull the
31 spark plugs out and go bump, bump, bumping across the, across the
32 bridge. [chuckle] My mother wasn't there. My sister said, "Stop that." I
33 said, "I love to do this bumping." And I'd sit in the back seat and bounce
34 around. But he was a good guy.
35

36/al