

1 **INTERVIEW OF WINIFRED ANNE JACOBS WALKER ON HER SERVICE IN THE**
2 **U.S. ARMY NURSE CORPS DURING WWII**

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5 Winifred Jacobs: ...[inaudible 0:01] as an army nurse, February 1943 to October 1945.
6 Winifred Anne Jacobs-Walker, 783365. After graduation in 1942 working for
7 my nursing school in Great Falls, Montana, as a Nursing Arts instructor, I
8 joined the Red Cross and in January of 1943 was called to report to Camp San
9 Luis Obispo, California. This was a most enjoyable assignment, learning to
10 march, carry a pack, and nurse army style, which was different but presented
11 exciting challenges and experiences. One I'll always remember, during rounds
12 with a very austere orthopedic surgeon, I was walking backwards onto the
13 ward as he called a final order from his office when I was surprised to find
14 myself bottom down, legs and arms waiving in the air in a laundry basket.
15 Two ambulatory patients had tipped the basket, so I fell neatly into it and
16 came up red-faced and embarrassed. But the ward had a good laugh. So did
17 the surgeon. The many opportunities for fun – golfing, mountain climbing,
18 beach parties, horseback riding through the rolling hills, and formal-dress
19 dances occupied time off duty. Hard work and fun times at San Luis Obispo
20 went on for a year when I was assigned to a general hospital congregating at
21 Camp Myles Standish, Taunton, Massachusetts. After a long cross-country
22 train trip we assembled with several other hospital units, collected overseas
23 gear, marched with full packs and blisters on feet wearing stiff, new boots.

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25 After a week, we went to Boston, boarded the troop carrier George
26 Washington, joined a convoy and began a never-to-be-forgotten Atlantic
27 crossing. Zigzagging at times, chased by German U-boats, seasick many days
28 which were spent in my upper bunk so there were not so many trips to the
29 head. Most of us ate sparingly. We also learned to play shuffleboard and
30 poker with the infantry and artillery officers traveling with us. Landing in
31 Liverpool, England, we traveled by truck to Llandudno, North Wales, to
32 spend a couple of cold, miserable winter weeks until our hospital was ready in
33 Leominster, England. I and a friend were billeted with a grand Welsh family
34 by the name of Jones. They treated us with much hospitality, sharing their
35 meager supply of, of coal to keep us from freezing, and introducing us to fish
36 and chips sold in newspapers as well as English teatime. Tea was usually
37 served with watercress sandwiches as, as biscuits were rare to come by, and
38 watercress grew in all the streams. I never eat any greens today but what I
39 remember those dry, tasteless tea sandwiches. We were sad to leave our
40 newfound friends whose friendship lasted many years, but we were anxious to
41 get to our hospital. We set up each of our wards using much ingenuity to as
42 closely match stateside nursing as possible and were ready and waiting for the
43 invasion on June 6th.
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1 At this time, we worked 48 hours straight, caught rest when we could for that
2 first week. Eventually the heavy influx of invasion patients was eased. We did
3 get time off to enjoy the beautiful English countryside and accept gracious
4 invitations to tea in nearby manners and homes. Many nurses invested in
5 bicycles and toured the picturesque and historical villages and fields. In a few
6 months, we left our comfortable quarters in hospitals to embark from
7 Portsmouth to Utah Beach on the French shores. The English Channel 2-day
8 crossing was choppy. I was eating the only food that would stay on my
9 stomach, fresh bread, until on a tour of the boat I observed the turbaned
10 Indians kneading the dough with bare feet. What a revolting development. We
11 landed on Utah Beach, brought in on the landing barges and got our first
12 sights of bomb craters and junk vehicles. Then inland by trucks to our bivouac
13 area near Carentan in Normandy. Here in the early July, we enjoyed fresh fruit
14 from bombed orchards, observed our first POW, and enjoyed open-air
15 showers. The air boys learned of our shower time, and each day there was a
16 flyover and many squealing nurses. Oh, what fun. From Carentan bivouac, we
17 entrained to Paris piled 3 bunks high and terribly crowded but so happy to be
18 on our way to Paris. We spent a few days on detached service in a large
19 Parisian hospital formerly occupied by the Germans.

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21 At this time, we were able to see only a few famous sites as we had to get on
22 to Liege, Belgium, where the personnel were erecting our tent hospital. Many
23 months later, a friend and I returned for a few days leave in Paris, visited the
24 perfume shops, famous hat makers, [inaudible 5:36] and enjoyed the sounds
25 and smells of the world-famous city. Our nurses' quarters were made up of 3-
26 men tents with a potbellied stove in the center. This was fine until winter. The
27 snow fell. Winds whistled through the tent, and none of us could keep warm
28 even with Red Cross wool socks to sleep in. Our canvas cots did have
29 mattresses that consisted of 2 squares that always seemed to separate at butt
30 area, and after several shifts of position, one's derriere was on the cold canvas.
31 I don't think I spent one comfortable night in Liege, Belgium, that winter. We
32 had much work to do, but our time off we explored the countryside picking up
33 souvenirs of crystal, lace from Brussels, hand-embroidery gowns, and
34 sampling local cuisines. Here I tasted French onion soup, which is a favorite
35 to this day. Then the Battle of the Bulge was raging from mid-December
36 through January getting closer each day to our unit, so we, we were on alert to
37 move at a moment's notice. Rumors flew fast and had the Germans within 5
38 miles of the hospital. However, officially, our troops stemmed the onslaught
39 within 20 miles of Liege.

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41 Also during this time, we were being harassed with frequent overflights of the
42 buzz bombs. The Germans had a [inaudible 7:09] flight pattern for these buzz
43 bombs, and our hospital was on the middle flight. Over a period of a few
44 weeks, our hospital grounds were hit at the entrance gate, another near Red

1 Cross buildings, and the third strike, on January 8, 1945, landed in the
2 nightshift's personnel tent just after they had retired, killing all 25 men. After
3 the dust cleared, it was a gruesome sight with body parts strewn in trees, on
4 tents, and about the grounds. When the immediate shock lessened, anger set
5 in, and I picked up the fire bucket of water, and with a hefty swing aimed it at
6 the 2 German POWs who helped with ward cleanup. In later years, I was glad
7 it didn't hit the fellows as they were probably happy to be out of the German
8 Army and with our hospital unit. After the battle of the Bulge and the capture
9 of the buzz-bomb launching pads by our troops, our nursing dirties-, duties got
10 into uncomplicated routines, and the summer was filled with rumors of war's
11 end. At this time, we started counting our points, hoping to have the most and
12 be among the first to get back to the States.
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14 For our services, we received the European African Middle Eastern Campaign
15 Ribbon with 3 bronze stars. Coming home by plane, a C-47 with metal bucket
16 seats was another adventure but tolerated with ease. We landed at Mitchel
17 Field New York, and as it would be a few days more before transport to the
18 West Coast, I hitchhiked cross country by plane to Fort Lewis Washington to
19 join my fiance whom I had met in San Luis Obispo. Ironically, he had spent
20 all his army time in the States. The war in Europe ended in June. The war in
21 the Pacific ended in August. So I was discharged and we were married. My
22 experience as an army nurse was a great adventure. I'm glad I had the travel,
23 experiences of living with the different nationalities, war horrors, and hard
24 work. These all contributed in making me more confident and secure as an
25 American, nurse, wife, and mother. I would not wish anyone to experience the
26 horrors of war but do advocate military service to anyone who likes travel,
27 good pay, and further education.
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