

Interview of Helen McPherson Reynolds on her service in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps during WWII

Helen Reynolds: Helen Reynolds. Helen McPherson Reynolds. [chuckle] I went, uh, into the service October 20, 1942, uh, to Camp Swift, then went to b-, to, uh, Brooke General in July 1, 1943, and took an anesthesia course. And when we – when I finished that, then I joined the 232nd General Hospital at [Inaudible 0:34], and, uh, went overseas February 5, 1945. I – they just took us out on the – [inaudible 0:48] [laughter] uh, took us, um, put us on the, uh, on the railroad. You know on just...

Interviewer: Train.

Helen Reynolds: ...on the train, and we left in the middle of the night one night. And, uh, right in, uh, Saipan, March 22 of '45, and, uh, I worked there with the, uh, another general hospital waiting for us – our orders to go to Iwo Jima, which we would go to, um, for the invasion of Japan.

We were the first ten nurses to arrive on Iwo Jima. The, uh, first – our first hospital was, uh, were in tents. Then, uh, we did work for a – did have a – then we lived in tents, too, for a while. And then, uh, the hospital, we finally got, uh, just a Quonset hut built, and we used that for surgeries with, uh, we had just sheets in between to make the rooms, and it was so hot. And, uh, going overseas, we did do one surgery in the, uh, it was an appendix on ship, and they had the sterilizer and everything right in the s-, operating room, so it was really hot. It was very – and we had a lot of, uh, excitement most of the time on Iwo Jima because, uh, as the B-29s brought in the wounded from Okinawa, we would get them by shiploads because the, uh, Japanese were doing, you know was having the suicide planes coming down on our boats in the ocean, and those are the ones that they brought over to us.

Interviewer: [3:21] Burns?

Helen Reynolds: Yeah. Very severe burns. And we would take – all day it would take us to dress the, um, the wounds before we would send them back home again. Our tents were near the airstrip, so every time we had an air raid, the planes would go over our, uh, the hospital area. And, uh, the, uh, one night, we had an air raid – [chuckle] they had an air raid, and it was raining, and, uh, of course, we had to slide down the embankment because that was just all soft dirt, you know, down there. And, uh, the water was a dripping down, [laughter] and, uh, the boys that were supposed to be guarding us said, um, said to the other boy, he says do you have an ammunition, and he said no. So we never did find

1 out whether they had, um, did that to scare us or whether they really didn't
2 have any ammunition. [laughter]
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4 And, uh, while we were there, by the time that, uh, they had – we got out
5 hospital really built so it was halfway decent, well the war was over. So then
6 we left right away to come home. And we came from – through Saipan again.
7 And as I remember, it took us about, uh, 56 days to go over by boat. We went,
8 uh, over on the USS Ernst, and it was on a hospital ship, and the, uh, it was –
9 we were clear down in the hold, and there were water down there, and, uh,
10 the, uh, fumes were so bad that even 75 percent of the crew got sick. And, uh,
11 [inaudible 5:26] and it took us about, uh, 64 days, uh, 64 hours to come home
12 because we flew back – flew home. And, um, [inaudible 5:39].
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14Interviewer: [5:41] Did you stop any time on the way home or come straight home?
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16Helen Reynolds: No. No, we didn't come-, coming home. We just, uh, fuel. But going we s-,
17 landed on Iwo Jim-, on – in Eniwetok, which was all boys, and, uh, so we had
18 a good time there. They really yelled when we got the women coming aboard.
19 [laughter] The, uh, [inaudible 6:07] in our – in our, uh, ship going over, there
20 were 3 high, and they weren't even far enough apart so we could...
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22Interviewer: [Inaudible 6:18].
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24Helen Reynolds: ...turn over hardly in bed.
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26Interviewer: [6:19] You couldn't sit on the bottom one?
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28Helen Reynolds: Uh-uh. and, um, uh, Tyrone Powell – Power flew our plane from Saipan to
29 Iwo Jima. Then, uh, after the war ended, I came back, um, really right away
30 through Saipan again. And, uh, I was out of the service on January 9, 1946. So
31 I was in 3 years, 2 months, and 7 days. [chuckle]
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33Interviewer: [Inaudible 6:53]...
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