

**Interview of Katherine "Katie" Kerr on her
service in the American Red Cross during WWII"**

1
2
3
4
5Interviewer: [Inaudible 00:02] interviewing Katie Kerr from the Lansing Unit of the Women's
6 Overseas Service League. Today is August 14, 1984. Katie Kerr lives at 941 Lilac
7 and may be located by mail at this address. She is in East Lansing; Michigan and
8 the zip code is 48823. The telephone number with the area code given first is
9 (517) 332-6887. Katie, where were you born?
10
11Katie Kerr: I was born – I was born in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, which is about 20 miles from
12 here. Uh, I, I graduated from high school in Eaton Rapids, went to Albion
13 College, and then I went to Detroit to [Gray's 00:55] Hospital where I spent a
14 year learning to be a medical technician and, and received my registration, uh, as
15 a medical technician, registered medical technician.
16
17Interviewer: [01:05] What was your maiden name?
18
19Katie Kerr: My maiden name was Trimble, T-R-I-M-B-L-E.
20
21Interviewer: Mm-hm.
22
23Katie Kerr: Um, after I, I worked in Detroit for several years, and that was [throat clearing] it
24 was during, um, that period of time that I learned that the war, of course, had
25 started, and I, uh, became aware of Red Cross and Red Cross Girls and some of
26 the activities that they were able to participate in. So, from there, I, um, went to
27 Red Cross headquarters in Detroit and asked for an application and sent my
28 application and references to St. Louis, Missouri. Uh, Red Cross, um, Red Cross
29 Girls were hired out of St. Louis, Missouri's office, which was the area
30 headquarters.
31
32 Uh, after – I went there one – and actually went there to St. Louis and was
33 interviewed and, um, came back in the middle of the winter. I remember it was
34 bitterly cold. I was, um, I was told that I – they would be glad to hire me, and I
35 was, um, scheduled to start with them about, um, a month or six weeks before I
36 did because during the war, if you were in an essential job, you had to get a
37 release from that job by proving that you had somebody to pla-, to replace you,
38 and they considered being a medical technician essential. So, I remember the
39 frustration that I experienced trying to find somebody to replace me, and
40 eventually I did. So, I joined Red Cross in Washington, D.C. on March 6, 1944.
41
42Interviewer: Nineteen forty-four, right in the heart of the war.
43

1Katie Kerr: Nineteen forty-four. And, um, I was hired as a hospital staff aide. Uh, there – a
2 hospital unit, uh, was con-, consisted of, um, the gen-, the field director, the
3 secretary, two recreation workers, and a, uh – it's not running. It's just – and a,
4 uh, and a staff aide. So, uh, I trained in Washington D.C. at the American
5 University for, um, I believe it was three weeks, as a staff aide. Uh, it was a, it
6 was an excellent training course. Uh, they had – Red Cross had, um, hired or had,
7 um, rented, whatever it might have been, a part of the American University, and,
8 uh, they had an excellent staff. And so, we – our, our duties as a staff aide were to
9 assist most anybody that you could and also to make out papers for, um, the
10 soldiers who would have, would, um, related disabilities, uh, service-connected
11 disabilities.
12
13 Uh, I was sent from there to Gardiner General Hospital in Chicago, which was
14 down on the beach, I believe, and it was one of the big, old hotels down there, but
15 it was called Gardiner General Hospital. I was sent there for, uh, training before
16 going overseas. While I was there – about three or four weeks after I was there, I
17 received a telegram saying that they wanted me to come back to Washington and
18 learn to be a hospital recreation worker, which was a step up from where I had
19 been.
20
21Interviewer: [04:25] What year is this now?
22
23Katie Kerr: I – pardon?
24
25Interviewer: What year?
26
27Katie Kerr: This is still 1944.
28
29Interviewer: Okay.
30
31Katie Kerr: This would be April 1944. So, I went – left Gardiner General Hospital in Chicago
32 and went down to Washington D.C. again. Coming into the big, uh, station in
33 Washington was really a thrill, and, uh, finding my way around the big city, I felt
34 quite, uh, as if I'd really grown from my [laughter] small-town background.
35
36 Uh, I was at, um, I became a hospital recreation worker, and that was a six-week
37 course, a very intensive course, and we covered everything you could possibly
38 imagine in recreation; from crafts to games to dances to, uh, um, giving parties.
39 And we had a very interesting group and some – again, we had excellent
40 instructors.
41
42Interviewer: [05:16] Where was your building where you did this?
43

1Katie Kerr: It was in the, the American University. This was also – all of Red Cross training
2 was done at the American University, and then we were –
3
4Interviewer: In what city?
5
6Katie Kerr: In Washington, Washington D.C.
7
8Interviewer: D.C.
9
10Katie Kerr: Then we were, uh, housed in various hotels around town. Uh, I remember at one,
11 one period of time, I stayed at the Burlington, Burlington Hotel. And one time I
12 stayed on Eye Street, E-Y-E Street, and I do not remember the name of the hotel.
13 But anyway, um, we – our group in the, um, um, the, um, recreation group
14 became very close, and there probably were fifty in the group, and we'd do square
15 dances, and we had, we'd put on parties and – which was all excellent training for
16 what was coming ahead of us.
17
18 Um, after, um, I had been there for six weeks, we, um, were given our assignment
19 one day. It's a big day because we were to meet the other girls who was – were
20 going to form our unit. And as I said before, uh, I was assigned to 110th General
21 Hospital, which was, at that time, forming in, um, Camp Campbell, Kentucky.
22 Uh, this one day, we were, we were all to meet our people that we later became
23 such extremely close friends with. Uh, the field director was [Janet Leahy 06:35].
24 The secretary was [Jane Hauser 06:37] who has now – has since deceased. The
25 other recreation worker was [Florence Friedman 06:43], and I was a recreation
26 worker, and our hospital staff aide was Helen Andrews.
27
28 The five of us, uh, formed a quick unit, and it's amazing how quickly you can
29 become close friends and feel like family. And probably within a matter of two or
30 three days, we were close as sisters. And we were, uh, given our papers and our
31 tickets and so forth to go to Camp Campbell, Kentucky. So, we took the train, and
32 several other, um, hospital or Red Cross units were also joining their hospital
33 units. And I remember one was in Louisville, Kentucky, which is where we, uh,
34 stayed overnight in Louisville, Kentucky. And I remember that a Jeep came for
35 them from their hospital and picked them up and what – how thrilling it was and
36 hopefully, we were going to experience – have the same experience watching
37 them driving off in the Jeep with the army doctors taking care of them.
38
39 We stayed overnight in Louisville, and we unboarded the train and headed for
40 Camp Campbell, Kentucky. Now, it was June, and, um, needless to say, it gets hot
41 down in that part of the country. Uh, we, uh, got on a train and those – and there
42 was absolutely no place to sit down, and all the seats were filled. Uh, so, we stood
43 up and sat on our suitcases, and it's, it's rather strange to think now that a, a train

1 would be so filled, full that there wouldn't be any place to sit down, but [as you
2 all 08:06] –
3
4Interviewer: This sounds like Tokyo. [laughter]
5
6Katie Kerr: [laughter] As you remem-, well, during the war, it was – all the trains were full. I,
7 I – one experience I remember on the train was that we noticed that – we girls did
8 notice some, some empty seats over – down a ways, and so, we walked down and
9 sure enough, somebody had their belongings on'm, and we sat down there
10 anyway and sat there quite a while and decided well, maybe we better not sit here
11 too long because whoever these seats belonged to we'd better, you know, they'd
12 be coming back and so, we did. We got up and later it developed that the men
13 sitting in these seats were doctors from our unit, so – medical officers from our
14 unit, and one of them even married a real good friend of mine who I lived with.
15 Anyway, it's, it was interesting to think that these men that we saw early on were
16 later to become friends.
17
18 We got to, um, our destination, which at that time was Clarksville, uh, Tennessee.
19 Clarksville and, um, well, Camp Campbell apparently is right on the borderline
20 between Tennessee and, uh, Kentucky. Got off the train in a dirty, dusty, um,
21 depot, and apparently – oh, I remember now. On the train, we had met another
22 officer from our – who said he was from the 110th, and he turned out to be the
23 special services officer, and his name was [George Moorehead 09:25]. Well, he
24 knew his way around because he was just coming back from leave or something,
25 and, uh, got a Jeep for us, and so he got us all into camp. And, I don't – if you're
26 not familiar with Camp Campbell, which is now called Fort Campbell, Kentucky,
27 it's a huge, huge military base.
28
29Interviewer: Is that spelled camp bell?
30
31Katie Kerr: Camp-bell, C-A-M-P-B-E-L-L. And it was a, um, an armored division, an
32 armored training camp where they trained in, uh, tanks and so forth. And they –
33 so, we – I do [not, now at this point 09:56], remember how we got to our billets,
34 but we stayed with nurses – nurses' area.
35
36Interviewer: [10:03] Uh, what was this camp like? Barracks? Or was it...
37
38Katie Kerr: It was barracks.
39
40Interviewer: ...temporary buildings?
41
42Katie Kerr: Uh, yes. Um, well, I think most of – all of it was temporary. I, I [inaudible 10:11].
43
44Interviewer: Plain buildings?

1
2Katie Kerr: Mm-hm, yes. Just with a...
3
4Interviewer: Bathroom, uh, bath facilities were about 8 people?
5
6Katie Kerr: Uh, no. We, we lived in the nursing, uh, with the nurses, and they – I don't
7 remember about the bathrooms, except, uh, it was pretty well – pretty substantial.
8
9Interviewer: I see.
10
11Katie Kerr: I think it was probably much more permanent than, um, some of –
12
13Interviewer: [Inaudible 10:29].
14
15Katie Kerr: Some of the other – some other parts of the hospital were, but it was such a big
16 camp that you rarely walked from one place to the other, and we were –
17
18Interviewer: By big, do you mean several miles?
19
20Katie Kerr: Yes.
21
22Interviewer: As big as Michigan State University campus?
23
24Katie Kerr: Yes, yes. It'd be a good, good comparison. Uh, sometimes we did walk, but
25 usually we were able to get transportation. We'd – I think we – I suppose we
26 called somebody and called the motor pool and asked'm for transportation. We,
27 um, we, we lived two to a room, and as I said, these – this was a nursing area, and
28 I – and I'm sure the nurses weren't all that thrilled to have Red Cross Girls
29 sharing their, um, their...
30
31Interviewer: Facilities?
32
33Katie Kerr: ...facilities, yes. And, uh, but, uh, they were, uh, I, I guess I should mention at
34 this point that there were, uh, we had joined the 110th General Hospital, which
35 was forming and had been at Camp Campbell for quite some time getting, uh, I've
36 forgotten the term that they used when you get through – it's a term they used
37 when you're getting everything together and getting ready to move out, uh, but
38 there were only 10 of us girls. There were five Red Cross Girls, whose names I
39 mentioned, there were two physiotherapists, and there were three dieticians. So,
40 we were the – there were 10 girls with the 110th General hospital, and there
41 must've been 75, uh, officers and probably 500 men, and I'm tellin' you, that was
42 the life. And because we were – became very special to this hospital group. And
43 we went overseas as just the only – we were the only 10 females and went

1 overseas with this medical unit. Uh, when we got over into England, which was
2 our destination –
3

4Interviewer: How did you go, by ship?
5

6Katie Kerr: Yeah, yes. I'll get, uh, that's another interesting story. But when we got there,
7 then we picked up the nurses; that was the point I wanted to make. So, we, we
8 were – we were the originals with that unit. Uh, we were at Camp Campbell for
9 probably 10 days, uh, and did calisthenics. Every morning, we got up and had to
10 do calisthenics, and some of the medical officers were our trainers, and I can tell
11 you, they weren't all that happy about having to do it. Um, then, um –
12

13Interviewer: [12:36] Katie, did you meet any English people, uh, and talk to them for any
14 given length of time?
15

16Katie Kerr: Yes. We had, uh, some, some, uh, opportunity. We had some English women
17 volunteers that would come onto the post, and, um, I think they enjoyed it, uh,
18 because I think they, you know, had an opportunity to eat a little bit better than
19 they were normally, normally had. The food was very strict, tough over there. No,
20 no candy or sugars or anything like that. And, uh, you just felt embarrassed if you
21 wasted a mouthful of food. In fact, I still have trouble seeing people waste food.
22

23 One woman we got to know, her name was [Erica Winterbotham 13:16], and she
24 lived in a rather, rather nice house in, in, um, I think it was Coberley. It was not
25 too far from the hospital. And one time, she had three of us over there to dinner
26 and had some meat, uh, which she said – apparently, she had – knew somebody
27 who knew somebody, and she was able to get some meat, which was a big deal to
28 have some meat like that. She was a very aristocratic woman, and I think, you
29 know, she was probably a little higher class than some of the other people. She
30 tried to – you know, she has indicated as much. However, I think they all enjoyed
31 their association with us and the ability to come out to the hospital and talk with
32 the patients and help the patients, and they would [mend 14:05] for the patients.
33 Of course, we had the English girls, the young English girls who would come out
34 to the dances and, uh...
35

36Interviewer: Dance with the American boys?
37

38Katie Kerr: ...dance with the American boys, yes. Uh, then we had, um...
39

40Interviewer: [14:19] Did they come on their own or were they picked up by [bus 14:21]?
41

42Katie Kerr: Oh, no. We, we picked, we picked'm up by bus, and we wanted –
43

44Interviewer: And took them home by bus?

1
2Katie Kerr: Took them back to the downtown.
3
4Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5
6Katie Kerr: And because we – now, you need to have control over, over, and over –
7
8Interviewer: I understand this. Mm-hm.
9
10Katie Kerr: There was one – I remember one medical officer who got really involved with
11 somebody in town and, you know, nice, married, nice married man, but he
12 became very involved with this older woman downtown and, you know, just took
13 her, made her his, his wife and she made him her husband, and I often wondered
14 what happened to them after that because he would bring her out to the post and
15 to the parties and the officers' parties, and [inaudible 14:55].
16
17Interviewer: [14:56] This is an American [audio cut off 14:56]? You were talking about this
18 man who accepted an English lady as a mistress?
19
20Katie Kerr: Well, yes. Well, well, that was, that was typical, even the, even the, uh,
21 commanding officer, I think, did that. The commanding officer got himself in
22 trouble because he built a hut for himself out of, um...
23
24Interviewer: Army supplies?
25
26Katie Kerr: ...army supplies, and, uh, he was – it was recognized – you could recognize he
27 was an oddball. What I understand later – that he was court-martialed for doing
28 that. He didn't add much to the unit. I mean, the unit was, uh, had to more or less
29 do his good work in spite of him.
30
31Interviewer: Mm-hm.
32
33Katie Kerr: We had an adjutant, and the adjutant was a good friend of ours, Colonel [Gould
34 15:42], who had – and, uh, they had the executive officer, and he also had his
35 nurse girlfriend. Uh, it was, it was impossible, in a way, to not – to form close
36 friendships and pairs and pair off with people.
37
38Interviewer: Mm-hm.
39
40Katie Kerr: I made a, an effort not to go with any married men because I...
41
42Interviewer: [laughter]
43

1Katie Kerr: ...figured, not only did I feel it wasn't right, I didn't want to get my – didn't want
2to get myself hurt. I didn't want to fall in love with somebody that was married
3and discover, you know, I had to separate from him, so I really, uh, made myself
4that, uh, that rule. However, it doesn't mean that I didn't go with married men,
5they just didn't tell you that they...[laughter]
6
7Interviewer: [You often went with them in groups 16:20]. This was very common.
8
9Katie Kerr: Well, uh –
10
11Interviewer: Or even to a dance?
12
13Katie Kerr: Uh, we went – I went with them not knowing they were married, you know.
14
15Interviewer: Mm-hm, right.
16
17Katie Kerr: They didn't know, they didn't know – they didn't tell you they were married.
18
19Interviewer: Mm-hm.
20
21Katie Kerr: They just indicated that they weren't, so, um, that, that's – but it – I can
22understand. Uh, some of these men had been, uh, would transfer into our unit and
23they'd been overseas for two or three years.
24
25Interviewer: Mm-hm.
26
27Katie Kerr: Well, you know, that's a long time and eventually, time erodes a lot of things and
28they would, um, you know, become particular friends. And I had – because I had
29worked for almost, uh, eight years in a hospital before I joined Red Cross –
30
31Interviewer: Mm-hm.
32
33Katie Kerr: I had made – I knew how easy it was to make platonic friendships.
34
35Interviewer: Right.
36
37Katie Kerr: You, you make friendships with people not – because you work with them,
38because you have interests in common.
39
40Interviewer: Mm-hm.
41
42Katie Kerr: So, that was an, uh, interesting...
43

1 Interviewer: [17:13] Uh, you mentioned that this English lady, I mean, meat was a rarity. What
2 do you mean by a rarity there, uh, Katie? Do you think she would have meat once
3 every two weeks?
4

5 Katie Kerr: Oh, heavens no.
6

7 Interviewer: Oh, you mean once a month?
8

9 Katie Kerr: You wouldn't have it, period. [laughter]
10

11 Interviewer: Oh, she wouldn't have meat, period?
12

13 Katie Kerr: I don't think, I don't think the people could get meat more than once, once a
14 month. I think –
15

16 Interviewer: Once a month would've been –
17

18 Katie Kerr: [Things were very 17:33] strict –
19

20 Interviewer: A real treat. And then the meat would've been lamb or something of this nature,
21 or chicken? Or fish?
22

23 Katie Kerr: I think, I think, I think this was beef.
24

25 Interviewer: Oh, beef.
26

27 Katie Kerr: I think this was beef.
28

29 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
30

31 Katie Kerr: Oh, I guess another thing I mentioned with the Red – that we, the recreation
32 workers, did was take ambulatory patients to places like [Stratford-on-Avon
33 17:48]. I took a number of groups to [Stratford-on-Avon 17:50].
34

35 Interviewer: The theater?
36

37 Katie Kerr: Yes, the theater. And around the city.
38

39 Interviewer: [17:54] Did you see a Shakespeare play?
40

41 Katie Kerr: We saw one, one Shakespeare play.
42

43 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
44

1Katie Kerr: Oh, and another wonderful thing I did – it was in June in 1945, after the war was
2 over. I went on what was called a leave – went to a leave course at Oxford
3 University.
4

5Interviewer: Mm-hm.
6

7Katie Kerr: At Balliol College at Oxford they had a leave course for a week, and you went
8 there and, um, you were, you had classes on international relations and all, and I
9 was the only American. And, uh, there were people from Australia and New
10 Zealand and Poland and, uh, England, and I made a particularly good friend of an
11 English man, English boy, I suppose he was. I never did figure out how old he
12 was, and we wrote for a long time after the war. I wrote – uh, his name was
13 [Gordon Kenshaw 18:38], and he was, he went, he was, I think he was teaching at
14 the University of London, a brilliant fellow.
15

16 Um, I went – I was invited to a night – the first night we got there, we had a, um,
17 um, tea at, um, Rhodes House, uh, Rhodes scholars' house, Rhodes House. And,
18 uh, went over there and I met up with a fellow – two men came – two boys came
19 up and, you know, asked if they could – if I'd like to go with them, and I, I went
20 with them, and it developed that they had been prisoners of war in Germany. And
21 this one handsome, young fellow who was – his name was Duncan Black, had
22 only been, uh, been, uh, only been out of the prison camp for about a week. And
23 he was, he was just so delighted to have somebody to talk to and, and, um, was
24 telling about his, um, his experiences in the camp. And, uh, so, I really enjoyed
25 this, this week at Oxford. I always felt that I could say I've been to Oxford
26 [laughter].
27

28Interviewer: [West Virginia University 19:37]
29

30Katie Kerr: [Inaudible 19:38] It was Balliol College, and we lived, I, we lived in the quadrant.
31 We each had our, we had our room. I lived in staircase #10, and we ate – our
32 meals were in the great, in the big hall. They called it The Hall and we sat at long
33 tables just like the – of course, it, it was one of the well-known colleges in, in – at
34 the University.
35

36Interviewer: [20:02] Mm-hm. Uh, Katie, did you notice any particular casualties over there?
37

38Katie Kerr: Uh, I mean...

39

40Interviewer: Tell us about some of the memorable [inaudible 20:08].
41

42Katie Kerr: [Inaudible 20:09] Okay.
43

44Interviewer: People who were sent – they were sent to England, weren't they from, uh...

1
2Katie Kerr: Yes.
3
4Interviewer: Europe?
5
6Katie Kerr: Yes. Yes, we would, we would get, uh, we would get them from, I suppose, the
7 evacuation hospital, and then we would, we would –
8
9Interviewer: [20:22] From what evacuation hospital?
10
11Katie Kerr: From, from any evacuation hospital.
12
13Interviewer: In the European theater?
14
15Katie Kerr: Yes, mm-hm. And they would come – they had all kinds of things wrong with
16 them, and we'd, we referred to them as Fellow with the Leg and Fellow with the
17 Arm, and, and that's the way you kind of identified them if you couldn't
18 remember their name.
19
20Interviewer: Mm-hm.
21
22Katie Kerr: We had – um, I particularly remember the fellas that had frostbite, frostbitten feet.
23 Uh, they put them all in the same ward and they were – you'd look down the ward
24 and you could see – uh, they didn't cover – they just covered their – from the
25 waist to their –
26
27Interviewer: Mm-hm.
28
29Katie Kerr: Maybe their knees. And all these feet sticking up on pillows, you know.
30
31Interviewer: [laughter]
32
33Katie Kerr: All the way down the ward. Uh, and, um, it was really kind of an amazing sight.
34 Um, and they, they, they were frostbitten. They had the frozen feet.
35
36Interviewer: [21:06] What was the big push in Europe in, uh, uh, let's see, this is the second
37 half of 1944?
38
39Katie Kerr: Well, uh, we – uh, of course, in December when they had the Battle of the Bulge
40 – before that, we had had a, a unit come over and was fairly close to us, and I
41 think it was the 26th Infantry [inaudible 21:26], 126 men, I bet, fresh from the
42 States, and they were sent right to the Battle of the Bulge. And undoubtedly, a lot
43 of them never made it, um, you know, to –
44

1Interviewer: [21:36] What was their morale?
2
3Katie Kerr: Oh, fine.
4
5Interviewer: What was their attitude? What did they do?
6
7Katie Kerr: Oh, um, I don't remember too much about the morale. That was your job. You
8 just, uh...
9
10Interviewer: Mm-hm.
11
12Katie Kerr: I don't remember that people – certainly, people weren't malingerers.
13
14Interviewer: They weren't crybabies?
15
16Katie Kerr: No, no. No, they, um – and they just had done – you know, they were in the army.
17
18Interviewer: This was what they had to do, and they did it.
19
20Katie Kerr: Yeah. Mm-hm. Yeah, they were very well disciplined, very highly disciplined.
21 One – I remember one particular patient whose name was [Buhl Dodril 22:01],
22 and he was blind. Handsome, young guy and –
23
24Interviewer: [22:05] He had been blinded in the war?
25
26Katie Kerr: He had been blinded by a concussion in a [inaudible 22:08].
27
28Interviewer: Mm-hm.
29
30Katie Kerr: And, um, I really tried – you know, spent quite a bit of time with him, and, um,
31 even wrote to him after he came back, and he went to, um, I think it was Valley
32 Forge General Hospital where all the blind fellows went.
33
34Interviewer: Mm-hm.
35
36Katie Kerr: And later her wrote and said, well, he got married and so, um, I suppose he's
37 happy. I hope he is. And, um, [loud trilling] then another fellow I remember, um,
38 was a, uh, [throat clearing] [loud trilling] about one of the most, uh, ill patients we
39 had. Uh, he had a, uh, some kind of, um, kidney problem, I think. He had been
40 shot in the kidneys. And everybody was pulling for him and they were working
41 on him so hard to get him well enough to send back to the States because his
42 family was desperately waiting for him, and, um – and he was seemingly getting
43 better, and they thought, well, they'll just wait a little bit longer to send him back
44 so that he'll really be stronger. And low and behold, he started getting worse and

1 died. And he is about the only patient I can remember that died in our hospital. If
2 they were, um, seriously ill, apparently, they were sent back to the – um, sent
3 back to the United States as soon as possible.
4
5Interviewer: [23:22] Katie, how long did you stay overseas?
6
7Katie Kerr: Uh, I was over there almost exactly a year.
8
9Interviewer: One year.
10
11Katie Kerr: One year. We, we, uh, landed on the Fourth of July, and it was the next July when
12 we were to come back.
13
14Interviewer: [23:35] You, uh, were there then during V-E Day, weren't you?
15
16Katie Kerr: Uh, yes, and, uh...
17
18Interviewer: What was that like?
19
20Katie Kerr: Well, it really – I'll have to say I wasn't much – it wasn't very big. [laughter] I –
21 it so happened that I had gone to London to, um, meet a – well, meet Janet who
22 had, who had come back from France and was there for a little [loud trilling]
23 while. And, uh, we, um, we were in London the night of V [loud trilling], uh, V-E
24 Day and expecting great, uh, celebrations, and somehow, we just missed out on
25 everything. We didn't get in with a group that, um, was celebrating, and, uh, we
26 walked around the streets some, and – but it, um, uh, it was one of those situations
27 where we were separated from our usual group, uh, and we were not invited to
28 any particular parties, and it was really not as exciting a part of, uh – part as you
29 would – event as you would expect it to be. I mean, I'm speaking [inaudible
30 24:35]. Um, well, anyway, V-E Day happened, and then, of course, we realized
31 that, uh, our unit was going to be going back to the States and regroup and go to
32 the Pacific because the war in Europe –
33
34Interviewer: [24:46] So, the Europe, the Eng-, people of England didn't really whoop it up, did
35 they?
36
37Katie Kerr: Well, they probably did. It was just that I, myself, was not...
38
39Interviewer: Mm-hm.
40
41Katie Kerr: ...did not [inaudible 24:54].
42
43Interviewer: And you weren't out –
44

1Katie Kerr: I wasn't...
2
3Interviewer: Where you could see the celebration?
4
5Katie Kerr: ...I wasn't, I wasn't where – I wasn't with a group that was celebrating.
6
7Interviewer: Mm-hm.
8
9Katie Kerr: We were in London, and if we'd been back to – back at home, why, of course, we
10 would've – you know, it'd been different. I also – I do remember though that I
11 marched in the victory parade through Cheltenham, and that was exciting. They,
12 they had, uh – a week or two later, they had a parade and –
13
14Interviewer: [25:13] When was this victory parade?
15
16Katie Kerr: Well, it was after V-E Day.
17
18Interviewer: After V-E Day. [Inaudible 25:17].
19
20Katie Kerr: Yes. [Inaudible 25:18] yeah, and before we headed for home. Well, we got it all
21 packed up and um, and um, by this time, uh, Janet and, uh, Helen had gone, our
22 five girls, our five Red Cross Girls had broken up, so I should at that point have,
23 have separated and gone over to the continent too but I didn't. I wanted to stay
24 with this unit, so I came back home. And, uh, of course, we had – um, we were –
25 I've forgotten where we went – somewhere for a week or two and got separated
26 from Red Cross and we separated from the unit and went home. And, um, um,
27 while I was home, they dropped the atomic bomb, and the war was over. So,
28 [laughter] so, the end of my career with Red Cross was kind of, um...
29
30Interviewer: [Inaudible 26:03].
31
32Katie Kerr: ...anticlimactic. Yes, uh, because I never went back. After that, I no longer – I
33 separated from Red Cross and, and –
34
35Interviewer: [26:11] When did you separate? What date approximately?
36
37Katie Kerr: I don't remember.
38
39Interviewer: Do you know [inaudible 26:14].
40
41Katie Kerr: Well, it was probably September.
42
43Interviewer: September after the V-J Day?
44

1Katie Kerr: Mm-hm. And then I, um, I came back, I came back home to my mother and dad's
2 house, home in Eaton Rapids, which – because I didn't have a home other than
3 that and got a job at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing and, uh, and went in the
4 laboratory.
5

6Interviewer: [26:34] Did you find any, um, uh, traumatic change in coming back to the States?
7

8Katie Kerr: Well, I, I could've been. After all, when you're over there, you're an American
9 girl in England, with – uh, you were something pretty, pretty special. Well, when
10 I got back here, I was just a plain, old American girl. And after all, by that time, I
11 was well into my 20s and, and, um, I didn't have a – my boyfriends were all
12 throughout the United States and, uh, so, I more or less I was starting from scratch
13 again. I changed my location, and, and, uh, I got a job at Sparrow Hospital and
14 worked there for a, um, about a year or so and met George Kerr, who was a state
15 policeman.
16

17 And, um, actually, he came – we had – in the laboratory, we always used the state
18 policemen as professional blood donors, and they got \$25 a pint for their blood
19 because that was before the days of the Red Cross blood banks. And George took
20 me out to help me – help him spend part of his \$25 and, and I married him. So,
21 um, that was, that was a good ending, at least. [laughter]
22

23Interviewer: [laughter] Uh...

24

25Katie Kerr: [throat clearing]
26

27Interviewer: [27:40]...V-J Day was a very traumatic experience for me, was it for you?
28

29Katie Kerr: Um, V-J Day, uh, well...

30

31Interviewer: I mean, the dropping of the Hiro-, the dropping of the, uh...

32

33Katie Kerr: ...no, um...

34

35Interviewer: Atom bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Well, you see, I had a concept of the, uh,
36 of the atom.
37

38Katie Kerr: Uh-huh. Mm-hm.
39

40Interviewer: And the power of it because I had been through a cyclotron at the University of
41 Michigan in 1941.
42

43Katie Kerr: Mm-hm.
44

1Interviewer: And I remember my mind really whirling. I listened to every word on the radio,
2 and I was aware of the total power that could be released.
3

4Katie Kerr: Well, I think many of us, uh, were, were not – did not have that concept. Where I
5 learned about it, I had gone to Detroit to, um – it was during my – the time I was
6 home when I – to visit a friend in Detroit, and I was riding down Woodward
7 Avenue in a street care when, either I heard it on the radio or read in the paper,
8 you know, it was rather an odd way to, to learn about it.
9

10 But then, of course, that really changed everything. When they dropped the bomb,
11 it, uh, changed everything. Changed many people's lives. And, of course, if we
12 had – if we had gone, I, I am convinced that if we had tried to invade Japan, the
13 casualties would've just ben absolutely terrible.
14

15Interviewer: Yes. I can imagine that. Every Japanese would have [throat clearing], uh,
16 committed hari-kari before they would have allowed an American to live, I
17 mean...
18

19Katie Kerr: Mm-hm, mm-hm.
20

21Interviewer: Thank you, Katie. Then, is that it?
22

23Katie Kerr: Um, stop it. One thing I would like to say about Red Cross, uh, I feel that I've
24 been fighting a battle with Red Cross ever since I joined in 1944. Red Cross, uh,
25 did a tremendous job over there. And, of course, you probably heard that people
26 sold and bought cigarettes, Red Cross sold cigarettes and so forth and so forth. I
27 will – can categorically say, I never, never sold a pack of cigarettes, but I gave
28 hundreds, perhaps even thousands of them away. I gave away, um, toothpaste and
29 toothbrushes and soap and candy bars and, uh, many, many, many things like that.
30

31 Also, as I mentioned before, we loaned them, loaned the servicemen money. Uh, I
32 – there's one particular, uh, explanation, uh, I – a neighbor of mine said that her
33 husband was with Patton's army, and when they, their child was born, Red Cross
34 did not get the message to her husband that their son was born. And I certainly
35 told her that if the army couldn't keep up with Patton, I certainly didn't see how
36 the Red Cross could. I think many people had a very, uh, strange concept that Red
37 Cross had some way to get messages through that nobody else had and after all,
38 we did use the military service wires.
39

40Interviewer: [I even 30:32] experienced the Red Cross getting a message through when Mother
41 was dying. Of course, this was in 1949, but the only way we could get a message
42 to my brother, who was up in, uh, pulling American supplies out of Shanghai.
43

44Katie Kerr: Mm-hm.

1
2Interviewer: And Red Cross got through to him for us.
3
4Katie Kerr: Yes.
5
6Interviewer: [throat clearing]
7
8Katie Kerr: Well, they, they used, they could use the Army, uh, Telex, uh, but they didn't
9 have any other method [laughter] such as a secret radio signal or something like
10 that. And in signing off, I should sign off with my army – with my Red Cross
11 number, which was 39343, which is the equivalent to the army, um, numbers that
12 everybody learned but never, in all their life, forget. This is Katherine Kerr,
13 Katherine Trimble Kerr, 39343, American Red Cross.
14
15Interviewer: Thank you, Katherine.
16
17
18/tl