

**Interview of Hildegarde Abbott
on her service in the U.S. Signal Corps During WWI**

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4
5Interviewer: We'll see if I can do this. I'm Chairman of the, uh, Oral History Project in
6 the Women's Overseas Service League. I'm here in Milwaukee on this
7 slightly overcast day, the 13 of May, 1983 to help the unit celebrate their
8 60 anniversary. But first, this morning, we're gonna get the story of one
9 of their members, uh, uh, Hilda Abbot, who is about 86 years old and...
10
11Hildegarde Abbott: That's right.
12
13Interviewer: And who served in World War I as a, uh, Hello Girl. The Hello women
14 were women that were specially recruited to go over to France and work
15 on the telephone switchboards. Uh, according to Hilda, they had about,
16 uh, she had about a two weeks training in a special school in, um...
17
18Hildegarde Abbott: San Francisco.
19
20Interviewer: In San Francisco. And, uh, after her training, then she was sent overseas.
21 Go ahead.
22
23Hildegarde Abbott: Okay.
24
25Interviewer: [00:58] Hilda, uh, that, what was the [inaudible 01:00] of service called
26 that you were asked to serve in?
27
28Hildegarde Abbott: Um, our address was the U.S. Signal Corps and, uh, we were subject to,
29 uh, the [throat clearing] rules and regulations that the, um, Signal Corps
30 set up for us. Um, the Signal Corps, uh, had, uh, taken hotels in various
31 cities of France where the action was.
32
33Interviewer: Stop.
34
35Hildegarde Abbott: And, um, they, they had, uh, sent for, uh, hostesses...
36
37Interviewer: [Inaudible 02:00] ways.
38
39Hildegarde Abbott: To, um, see that we were comfortable and that we, uh, got in on time.
40 [laughter]
41
42Interviewer: [laughter]
43

1 Hildegarde Abbott: Um, our first, uh, hostess was Elizabeth Fox, who had been Dean of
2 Women at the University of Oregon and she was young and, uh, very
3 [inaudible 02:41]. She [laughter], we all, uh, were very glad to have her
4 there. And she made a home for us and, uh, this was Tours. And, we had,
5 they had, the Signal Corps had taken over a small hotel and, uh, [throat
6 clearing] I was there six months. And during that time, uh, it was home.
7 Uh, we had, um, people walking in, uh, boys, homesick boys would come
8 in and sit down and play the piano and make themselves at home.
9

10 Interviewer: [03:37] This was in the hotel?
11

12 Hildegarde Abbott: In the hotel. There was, so glad to see American girls.
13

14 Interviewer: [03:45] This was in Paris?
15

16 Hildegarde Abbott: Yeah. Well, uh, each, um, hotel [throat clearing] they took over, uh, had a
17 YWCA hostess and, uh, those I met were fun and, uh, very good with,
18 with girls and, uh, made us [inaudible 04:20] at, uh, adhere to the rules of
19 the house. Um...
20

21 Interviewer: [04:34] How long were there?
22

23 Hildegarde Abbott: Also, I was in Tours six months and, um, [throat clearing], um, the, um,
24 second Aviation Instruction Center of the United States was located in
25 Tours and all of these young men, uh, uh, gave dances and had us up for
26 dinner and, uh, uh, also we had them and, um, oh my God.
27

28 Interviewer: That's okay. Don't, don't feel tense about it, just like... Six months of
29 Tours and I went to Brest.
30

31 Hildegarde Abbott: We girls, uh, very often made candy and took it to the hospitals because,
32 uh, the, uh, French people didn't have any sugar. And, uh, those boys
33 appreciated it. There were French boys and American boys in the hospital
34 and we wrote letters home for the American boys and, um, did all the
35 things that the nurses didn't have time to do. And, uh, took flowers over
36 there and, um, just sat and talked to them on our days off, which, uh, were
37 not, uh, often enough really. [laughter]
38

39 Interviewer: [06:30] Did you work a certain number of hours a week?
40

41 Hildegarde Abbott: We worked eight, eight hours a day and, uh, had one day off a week. And,
42 uh, that was usually the day that we saved for the hospital.
43

1 Interviewer: I, I would leave it on. [06:49] When you, uh, worked at the, uh,
2 switchboard, did you have some interesting experiences?
3

4 Hildegard Abbott: [laughter] Yes we did. Uh, when I worked the switch, switchboard, we
5 were told, uh, not to discuss anything we heard on the, uh, on, uh, on the
6 telephone. We were at, um, at the headquarters of the Service of Supplies
7 so, uh, we always knew when the, there was a good push coming, uh,
8 because the, uh, [throat clearing], uh, we'd, uh, have to call the, um,
9 munit, from munitions and, uh, for, um, doctors and hospitals and, uh,
10 railroads and, oh, we, uh, did, they did all of the planning from Tours.
11 The heads of all those departments were stationed there.
12

13 Interviewer: We'd forgotten to talk about what, don't turn it off, leave it on. We'd
14 forgotten to talk about what the qualifications were for you to go over
15 there, about you speaking French.
16

17 Hildegard Abbott: Oh. And the, the reason we, uh, we American girls were over there was
18 that the, uh, [throat clearing], uh, French telephones were, uh, not up to the
19 American telephones. So the Americans put in their own system and, uh,
20 there were times when we had to deal with the French operators to get out
21 of the way places. And, uh, so the boys who were [laughter] running the
22 telephones [inaudible 09:09] up to it and, um, the... We also were asked to
23 [throat clearing] interpret, uh, um, when, um, an officer was, uh, going to
24 speak to a, a Frenchman and wasn't sure of whether the Frenchman spoke
25 English or not because he didn't speak French. And, [laughter] so they'd
26 call ahead of time and ask us to stay on the line.
27

28 Interviewer: [10:03] Do you have it on? [10:04] Is it on?
29

30 Hildegard Abbott: Yes.
31

32 Interviewer: Yes. Go ahead. That's close enough. [10:14] Did you ever have any
33 problems. [10:17] I mean, uh, did you, you know, have arguments with
34 the operator?
35

36 Hildegard Abbott: Well, we were also told, [laughter] uh, to report anything unusual. So one
37 day, I, uh, [throat clearing] listened in to a conversation, which went
38 something like this: Two, three, four, five, seven, six, eight and so on and,
39 uh, I, uh, assumed it was a code and that I had better notify the, the, um...
40

41 Interviewer: Headquarters.
42

43 Hildegard Abbott: The headquarters. So later, I saw the man who took the call and he says it
44 was somebody [laughter] giving out, uh, it was the railroad transportation

1 office giving out the numbers of the cars. But, uh, for a while, I felt very
2 pleased that [laughter] I'd been instrumental in catching a spy. [laughter]
3
4Interviewer: [11:35] What, um, how much were you paid? [11:37] Do you remember
5 anything about your pay?
6
7Hildegard Abbott: Six – \$60 a month and, uh...
8
9Interviewer: [11:47] Did that include your food, your meals?
10
11Hildegard Abbott: That in, included our meals...
12
13Interviewer: Mm-hm.
14
15Hildegard Abbott: And I think that those, that was the only expense that we had to pay for.
16 We would, there, very little for meals because there were so many men
17 and they all wanted to, to take us out for dinner. And we always went in
18 pairs. We, um, my roommate and I, uh, never went anywhere without the
19 other one. So, uh, it made it very comfortable because we didn't know
20 these boys and, uh, the reason we, uh, got to know them was, uh, two
21 Boston women had opened a, an officer's club in home, in Tours. It, uh, it
22 was a large house and lovely garden and, uh, [throat clearing] there was
23 dancing there every night. And, uh, these miss, I can't think, um, the,
24 they, women chaperoned us. [laughter]
25
26Interviewer: [laughter]
27
28Hildegard Abbott: It sounds silly in, in this day and age but, [laughter] in those days; we were
29 pretty well chaperoned, even at, at home. So, [laughter] and it worked out
30 very well because, uh, they were, uh, very alert to, uh, see that everybody
31 had a good time and that we met all of the officers and, uh, the, they made
32 it very comfortable for us. And...
33
34Interviewer: [14:22] What kind of uniform were you wearing at that time?
35
36Hildegard Abbott: Uh, we had, um, blue serge suits, dark blue with the, um, Signal Corps...
37
38Interviewer: Insignia.
39
40Hildegard Abbott: Insignia on the collars and we wore white blouses under it.
41
42Interviewer: [14:45] Did you have any rank, uh, you know?
43

1Hildegarde Abbott: Uh, yes. We had a chief operator of each, uh, each city where we were
2stationed had its own chief operator and, uh, she was the boss of the
3office.
4

5Interviewer: [15:04] And what kind of an insignia was that then that you wore to
6indicate your rank?
7

8Hildegarde Abbott: Uh...
9

10Interviewer: [15:11] Stripes or...
11

12Hildegarde Abbott: No. The stripes came for, uh, years of service or...
13

14Interviewer: Oh.
15

16Hildegarde Abbott: Every six months you got a stripe for service. And, uh, oh yes, there was
17the, uh, chief operator had an emblem with a telephone on it.
18

19Interviewer: Hm. [15:40] Could this been, have been included in the ranks of officers
20or enlisted?
21

22Hildegarde Abbott: Officers.
23

24Interviewer: Officers.
25

26Hildegarde Abbott: I don't know. [laughter] I'm not sure about that. Uh...
27

28Interviewer: [16:00] Were you given pretty good care? [16:01] Did you have good
29medical care?
30

31Hildegarde Abbott: Uh, well, uh, I don't know. Uh, we're, we're a pretty healthy group and,
32um, but from my own experience, I had an attack of flu at the time when it
33was so prevalent and so deadly. And I was unconscious for two days in
34the hotel and, uh, my roommate kept trying to get a doctor but, uh, the
35boys all had it too and were in, in the hospital. In fact, they were lay, later
36when we were stationed in Brest, the boats would come in laden with, um,
37stretchers and the boys were taken to the hospital, which was next to our
38quarters. And, uh, uh, some of them, uh, died on the way, a good many of
39them and that, that was gruesome but, uh, the, they didn't, hadn't
40expected, uh, so much sickness. And, um, there, there just wasn't enough
41doctors.
42

43Interviewer: [17:47] Did any of the women die, uh...
44

1 Hildegarde Abbott: No.
2
3 Interviewer: From it? They didn't.
4
5 Hildegarde Abbott: No.
6
7 Interviewer: [17:50] You're a pretty hearty group?
8
9 Hildegarde Abbott: In fact, uh, I'm the only one who, uh...
10
11 Interviewer: Had it.
12
13 Hildegarde Abbott: Who, uh, was unconscious.
14
15 Interviewer: Oh.
16
17 Hildegarde Abbott: I guess some of them had a slight [bit 18:06]. In fact, uh, my roommate
18 and I slept in the same bed, a big double bed and she never got it.
19 [laughter]
20
21 Interviewer: Well that's good.
22
23 Hildegarde Abbott: So, well, all I can tell you about, uh, Tours is it's a delightful place to be
24 and on our days off after we had been to the hospital, we'd, um, take a, a
25 little lunch and, uh, go off on, on the river and, uh, use, uh, big rain capes
26 for sails and we'd sail down until we found a nice grassy slope with a tree
27 and, uh, we'd go out under the tree and have our lunch and usually, uh,
28 um, we'd have somebody who wanted to read something to us. We'd
29 have, uh, people who wanted to paint and these were men and women and,
30 uh, really a, really relaxed on our days off.
31
32 Interviewer: [19:42] You rented these boats, did you?
33
34 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes.
35
36 Interviewer: Boats...
37
38 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes.
39
40 Interviewer: [19:45] And they were sailboats?
41
42 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. Mm-hm.
43
44 Interviewer: [19:50] Did you have any trouble getting food?

1
2Hildegarde Abbott: No, uh...
3
4Interviewer: [Inaudible 19:55] eat American food.
5
6Hildegarde Abbott: They, uh, well, if we wanted to and if we knew in time, uh, we'd take
7 something from our kitchen, uh, whatever we were having for dessert that
8 day, for instance. And the boys, uh, would get sandwiches probably at, at
9 their camp. We had, always had too much food.
10
11Interviewer: [20:28] Did you, uh, were you ever close to the frontlines there in France?
12
13Hildegarde Abbott: No. But, uh, we did have offices near the, the frontline up in Somme.
14
15Interviewer: Mm-hm.
16
17Hildegarde Abbott: And, uh, [throat clearing] they, well, could hear the guns and so on and
18 then in Paris, when Big Bertha was, uh, shooting at Paris, uh, the Signal
19 Corps girls who were stationed there, uh, went, uh, to work every morning
20 with their suitcases packed and, uh, behind them at the switchboard ready
21 to evacuate any minute. But they, they never had to. The other girls up
22 near the line did eventually evacuate because, uh, things were getting too
23 hot.
24
25Interviewer: [21:40] But there was no sign of, of evidence of the war in Tours or in
26 Brest?
27
28Hildegarde Abbott: No.
29
30Interviewer: [21:46] Destruction?
31
32Hildegarde Abbott: No.
33
34Interviewer: No.
35
36Hildegarde Abbott: No.
37
38Interviewer: [21:50] Where were you when the armistice was signed?
39
40Hildegarde Abbott: Huh. [laughter] I was in Brest, yup. [laughter] Uh, we knew ahead of time
41 that it was going to be signed and that's one, one of the things that we
42 couldn't talk about. We never mentioned it even to each other. We were
43 terribly discrete. Well, they had a false armistice and, uh, we, we went
44 through that that way and then when the armistice was actually signed, uh,

1 we were still on our guard and [laughter] couldn't tell, uh, there were other
2 things...

3

4Interviewer: [22:51] Did you participate in, in the excitement, I mean in the
5 celebration?
6

7Hildegarde Abbott: Oh, oh yes. We went out [laughter] that evening and, uh, everybody was,
8 uh, forming circles and, and getting us in, inside the circle and saying that
9 we'd have to kiss every one of them...

10

11Interviewer: [laughter]
12

13Hildegarde Abbott: Uh, before they'd let us out. However, we didn't and as, so they did the
14 kissing and...

15

16Interviewer: [laughter]
17

18Hildegarde Abbott: [laughter]
19

20Interviewer: [laughter]
21

22Hildegarde Abbott: Uh, my mother, uh, was with the, uh, Rockefeller Institute and she arrived
23 in Paris the day of the armistice and she was just overcome. She had been,
24 uh, born in Paris and grew up there so it, it was a double thrill. But, uh, I
25 didn't even know that she had, uh, come over.
26

27Interviewer: [24:13] Was there, uh, much difficulty in getting letters through? [24:16]
28 Did you have trouble corresponding with your family?
29

30Hildegarde Abbott: No. No. They went right, uh, they were, what do they call it?
31

32Interviewer: Censored.
33

34Hildegarde Abbott: Censored but, uh, they, they all went through.
35

36Interviewer: [24:32] Had you been told that you couldn't write certain things or where
37 you were?
38

39Hildegarde Abbott: Uh, no, uh...

40

41Interviewer: [24:41] They knew you were in Tours?
42

1 Hildegarde Abbott: No. They knew I was in Tours but the girls who were in the other places,
2 um, more strategic places, uh, were not allowed to say, tell where they
3 were.
4

5 Interviewer: [24:58] How many of the telephone operators were there? [25:00] Do you
6 remember or did you know?
7

8 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. I, I used to know. [25:07] How do you turn it over?
9

10 Interviewer: Okay. Turned on.
11

12 Hildegarde Abbott: I think were about 240. It sounds dead. Okay.
13

14 Interviewer: [coughing] 25:25] Um, what did you do after the, uh, armistice was
15 signed?
16

17 Hildegarde Abbott: Um, well, [throat clearing] of course, uh, the offices were closing for the
18 Americans and, um, there was lots of, uh, work to be done...
19

20 Interviewer: [Coughing]
21

22 Hildegarde Abbott: To get things cleared out. The, um, uh, Railroad Transportation, uh,
23 Department was very busy and, uh, then, um, I was stationed in Brest and,
24 um, [throat clearing] they were busy there, uh, getting boats to take the
25 boys home. And, uh...
26

27 Interviewer: Just not so close.
28

29 Hildegarde Abbott: Oh. The, um...
30

31 Interviewer: [26:28] Were you still with the Signal Corps then?
32

33 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. I was, uh, with the Signal Corps and, um, [throat clearing] when I
34 left Brest, when we were through there, uh, I went to Paris and, um, the
35 Peace Commissioner had headquarters at the Hotel Crillon and, uh, [throat
36 clearing] they, uh, had had a big switchboard there, uh, manned by the
37 Signal Corps girls and they, [throat clearing] uh, uh, took over the, uh, the
38 work of the, uh, Peace Commissioner and that was very interesting. When
39 we had time to listen in because, uh, uh, they were, uh, in, uh, telephone
40 correspondence with the, uh, not Fontainebleau. [27:39] What's it...
41

42 Interviewer: Turn it on.
43

44 Hildegarde Abbott: With the Peace Commissioner [in Versailles 27:47]. It doesn't sound...

1
2Interviewer: Yup. It's going.
3
4Hildegarde Abbott: Okay. And, [throat clearing] so, uh, it was, [laughter] our, our first
5 experience with anything, uh, like a, uh, television set, we... [laughter]
6
7Interviewer: [laughter]
8
9Hildegarde Abbott: Had everything described to the people at the [Crillon 28:18] who were
10 meeting there, uh, um, espec-, especially the reporters and, uh, it, it made
11 us feel that we were right there too.
12
13Interviewer: [28:37] How long did you stay with the Peace Commission?
14
15Hildegarde Abbott: Until they left.
16
17Interviewer: [28:42] And what was when?
18
19Hildegarde Abbott: I couldn't tell you.
20
21Interviewer: [28:44] What was it, uh, in 1920?
22
23Hildegarde Abbott: Yes.
24
25Interviewer: Of January, 1920, you said you came back.
26
27Hildegarde Abbott: Uh, that, that would be it.
28
29Interviewer: [28:57] What did you do after you came back to the United, or did you
30 leave... [29:01] Let me ask you this before, you mentioned a little while
31 ago that you met your husband in France, can you tell me about that?
32
33Hildegarde Abbott: [laughter] Well, that, my, uh, uh, a friend from California looked me up in
34 Brest and, uh, uh, he was on his way home and he, uh, wanted me to have
35 dinner with'm and I, I said, uh, that my, my mother was with me. She had
36 come to spend Christmas with me and he said, fine, I'll get an extra man.
37 And, uh, it turned out that the extra man was the man I married. [laughter]
38 And he left the next day. They both, both men went home and I didn't
39 come along for, for about four months later. So...
40
41Interviewer: [30:19] When you got back to the United States, did you marry the man?
42 This is where you say, not right away.
43
44Hildegarde Abbott: Not right away. [laughter]

1
2Interviewer: [30:28] What did you do?
3
4Hildegarde Abbott: I went back to college because, um, I thought I should finish, which I did
5 and, uh, then I went to New York and, uh, had a job there and was with,
6 uh, living in a settlement house and doing volunteer work there besides
7 being secretary to, uh, Dr. Haven Emerson, whom uh, had been in Tours at
8 the time I was there. But I had never met him. [laughter]
9
10Interviewer: [31:17] What was he doing? [31:8] Was he...
11
12Hildegarde Abbott: Uh, he was, uh, uh, with, um, at Columbia College and, um...
13
14Interviewer: So doctor...
15
16Hildegarde Abbott: Uh, Dr. Emerson, uh, was, uh, in public health at, uh, Columbia University
17 and he, uh, went all, well, all over the United States really giving lectures
18 on public health. And I was [along 32:02] with him....
19
20Interviewer: [32:02] How long did you work for him?
21
22Hildegarde Abbott: Um, I was, uh, with him about eight months and then, uh, I went home to
23 be married.
24
25Interviewer: Oh, good. [32:19] And did you have any children in this marriage?
26
27Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. I had a boy and a girl.
28
29Interviewer: Mm-hm.
30
31Hildegarde Abbott: And my boy was in the next war. Fortunately, he, uh, wasn't sent over so
32 he was here.
33
34Interviewer: [32:41] And you have grandchildren?
35
36Hildegarde Abbott: And I have seven grandchildren. [laughter]
37
38Interviewer: Oh that's great. [32:47] Do you get a chance to see them at all?
39
40Hildegarde Abbott: Oh yes. They come and visit me. I have three live in Ohio and they come
41 up and see me at least once a year.
42
43Interviewer: Mm-hm.
44

1 Hildegarde Abbott: And then the, my daughter's four children are, um, not far away. They're
2 about 40 miles away and they come in and I go out there so we, we're in
3 close touch.
4

5 Interviewer: You live in a lovely, uh, condominium here, uh, with it looking out over
6 the Lake Michigan.
7

8 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. [33:38] Isn't it pretty?
9

10 Interviewer: [33:39] How long have you [been 33:40] here?
11

12 Hildegarde Abbott: Fifteen years.
13

14 Interviewer: Fifteen years.
15

16 Hildegarde Abbott: Mm-hm.
17

18 Interviewer: How about that.
19

20 Hildegarde Abbott: Yeah.
21

22 Interviewer: I think that's great.
23

24 Hildegarde Abbott: And I, I love it.
25

26 Interviewer: [33:46] Do you drive your own car?
27

28 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes.
29

30 Interviewer: [33:49] Although you're not housebound are you?
31

32 Hildegarde Abbott: Not at all.
33

34 Interviewer: You go wherever you want to.
35

36 Hildegarde Abbott: Yeah.
37

38 Interviewer: [33:53] Have you had a chance to go back to France at all?
39

40 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. Uh, mother, uh, and, uh, oh, my son, when he graduated from
41 college, um, went to France and got a job as an English teacher in Nimes.
42 And, uh, at the, uh, [inaudible 34:23] school in Nimes. So, uh, mother and
43 I thought we'd go over and, um, uh, take'm around, uh, as, uh, when

1 school closed, which we did. And, uh, we did a, a lot in, in Paris and then
2 went to, uh, Italy and then came home.
3
4Interviewer: Mm-hm.
5
6Hildegarde Abbott: [laughter]
7
8Interviewer: Now I know that, uh WOSL had a convention in, uh, Paris. [35:13] Were
9 you, uh, in the organization then?
10
11Hildegarde Abbott: No.
12
13Interviewer: You weren't.
14
15Hildegarde Abbott: No.
16
17Interviewer: That was too bad 'cause you could've really shown'm around, couldn't
18 you. [35:20] When did you come in to Women's Overseas Service
19 League, do you remember?
20
21Hildegarde Abbott: Um, no I don't. Uh, [throat clearing] I'll tell you, um, I was in this...
22 [35:36] Are we off?
23
24Interviewer: Hold on.
25
26Hildegarde Abbott: Let's....
27
28Interviewer: [35:43] Hilda, you mentioned that you had some interesting experiences in
29 the places which you lived, uh, what was the story about the, the hotel that
30 had been converted to a bawdy house?
31
32Hildegarde Abbott: Oh that. [laughter] We had a sentinel stationed at the door all night, every,
33 every night and, uh, we got to know'm pretty well and, and, uh, [laughter]
34 uh, just expected to see'm there, thought nothing of it. But one night, I
35 woke up and there was a, a big all, altercation going on outside of my
36 window, down at the front door. And it was, [laughter] it seems that the
37 house we were living in had been a bawdy house and that's why we were
38 so well taken care of with the sentry. And the sentry, uh, wouldn't let the
39 man in, this Frenchman in and the Frenchman didn't speak English and
40 they, [laughter] the sentry didn't speak French. [laughter] And they were
41 out there arguing. It seemed to me for hours [laughter] but he never did
42 get in. [laughter]
43

1Interviewer: [37:14] Uh, was your, um, I, in this picture that I'm seeing here, your
2 mother is in the picture and yet it's titled at the top of it, uh, Women's, uh
3 Overseas League. [37:28] Um, that was the beginning of the Overseas
4 Service League, was it?
5

6Hildegarde Abbott: Yes.
7

8Interviewer: And all these women in this picture are all in uniform.
9

10Hildegarde Abbott: Yes.
11

12Interviewer: [37:36] Uh, what, what were the uniforms?
13

14Hildegarde Abbott: Oh, everything. Red Cross, um...
15

16Interviewer: Signal Corps.
17

18Hildegarde Abbott: [37:44] What are the blue, well Signal Corps, of course, and, uh, the, uh,
19 [throat clearing]...
20

21Interviewer: Sal...
22

23Hildegarde Abbott: [37:54] Oh, who was....
24

25Interviewer: [37:56] Salvation Army?
26

27Hildegarde Abbott: No. I'll turn it off a second.
28

29Interviewer: Uh...
30

31Hildegarde Abbott: And the YWCA, uh, they not only sent entertainers over but our hostesses,
32 uh, that I mentioned before, uh, were, uh, YWCA...
33

34Interviewer: Mm-hm.
35

36Hildegarde Abbott: People.
37

38Interviewer: Okay. [38:27] This is the Red Cross?
39

40Hildegarde Abbott: Um, [throat clearing] my mother went over with the Red Cross. Uh, she
41 had been, um, she had had a shop in San Francisco, uh, a volunteer thing,
42 uh, to sell, um, articles made by the French soldiers in the hospitals and,
43 where there were some orphans and so on. And, uh, she, uh, was a
44 Frenchwoman and, of course, uh, welcomed the chance to go to France.

1 And, um, so the Red Cross sent her over and, uh, [throat clearing] when,
2 when she, uh, got to England, um, the, uh, Rockefeller Institute, uh, asked
3 her to, uh, uh, head a, an organization to, uh, eliminate... [laughter]
4

5Interviewer: I'm thinking it seems really funny or they get talking about something...
6

7Hildegarde Abbott: Tuberculosis.
8

9Interviewer: Mm-hm.
10

11Hildegarde Abbott: And [there was 40:07] children there. They were having a, a terrible
12 epidemic of it. So, uh, she was put at the head of a, uh, traveling show.
13 [laughter] They had a big truck and they carried their own, uh, movies
14 and, uh, had speakers and, uh, they had, uh, a doctor and they had, uh, two
15 women who were writers and, uh, good speakers and, uh, my mother
16 headed it. She, uh, had to go and make arrangements in, uh, these small
17 towns to have a hall where they could meet and to meet the mayor and, uh,
18 all the, um, city officials, uh, who, uh, cooperated, uh, in the effort to, uh,
19 get a crowd there.
20

21Interviewer: [41:33] Now this was before we had the inoculation for TB, wasn't it?
22

23Hildegarde Abbott: Yes.
24

25Interviewer: [41:38] So this was just health care?
26

27Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. Mm-hm. To teach them to sleep with their windows open for one
28 thing and, uh, also that they established, uh, the Rockefeller Institute
29 established milk stations so that, uh, uh, they would get free milk for their
30 children.
31

32Interviewer: [42:07] This was the aftermath of World War I in France, wasn't it?
33

34Hildegarde Abbott: I think it was.
35

36Interviewer: Sure.
37

38Hildegarde Abbott: So she went all, all over with this thing. They had two trucks, as a matter-
39 of-fact but, uh, [laughter] 'cause they all rode, rode in the trucks accepting,
40 uh, mother very often took a train to get there early and, uh, make
41 arrangements. She'd get, get there a day, a day early having written a
42 week earlier so she did all of that.
43

1 Interviewer: I don't remember reading anything about this. I mean there, again,
2 America was helping.
3
4 Hildegarde Abbott: Well, it had nothing to do with the war.
5
6 Interviewer: No. No.
7
8 Hildegarde Abbott: But, uh...
9
10 Interviewer: [43:04] But this did make her eligible for Women's Overseas Service
11 League, didn't it?
12
13 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. Mm-hm.
14
15 Interviewer: [43:09] So she must've been in one of the early units in, uh, San
16 Francisco?
17
18 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. Mm-hm. She was, uh, uh, registered as a Red Cross worker.
19
20 Interviewer: [43:22] She came back to, uh, Milwaukee with you, then she joined the
21 Milwaukee Unit?
22
23 Hildegarde Abbott: Yes. Mm-hm. And that was very nice. Everybody spoiled [me 43:35].
24
25 Interviewer: Yeah. The two of you could shares [inaudible 43:38]?
26
27 Hildegarde Abbott: [laughter] Yes.
28
29 Interviewer: Well, that's great. I mean, I'm sure that from the conversations that we've
30 had between interviews here, um, there have been so many things you've
31 told me that should, should be on this tape.
32
33 Hildegarde Abbott: [laughter]
34
35 Interviewer: But, I, uh, I, I know that I've taken a lot of your time now and, uh, we
36 really have only done not even a, well, yes, we've done, we've got pretty
37 close to a, to, three quarters of a tape.
38
39 Hildegarde Abbott: Yeah.
40
41 Interviewer: Uh, and I...
42
43 Hildegarde Abbott: Well, I...
44

1Interviewer: Do appreciate your time.
2
3Hildegarde Abbott: I think we've hit the high spots.
4
5Interviewer: I think we hit'm. I think we have. And I want to thank you very much,
6 Hilda, for the time you've given us as this is really important.
7
8Hildegarde Abbott: Well, I'm so glad to do it but I'm sorry it didn't come 20 minutes, 20 years
9 earlier.
10
11Interviewer: One thing that, um, um, you have not mentioned and that is that in April,
12 the 30 of April, in 1980, the army finally came to its senses and did give
13 you a, made an award to you that made you an actual veteran. Uh, so if
14 you had needed it or do need it, you should have the veteran's benefits.
15 Uh, unfortunately, all of the many, uh, women who served with you, uh, at
16 least a great many of those people are now gone, many of them are in
17 nursing homes or being cared for and, uh, it's just too bad that it took so
18 long for the army to, uh, remember... I notice in these remarks that were
19 made here that it said, uh, that, uh, it was something like 60 years between
20 the time of your service and the time that they finally, uh, did, um, grant
21 you the, uh, title of having, of being a veteran. And, uh, I think that it's
22 great that, that at least they did finally give you, um...
23
24Hildegarde Abbott: Yes.
25
26Interviewer: The credit that you well deserve. Thank you.
27
28
29/lj