

**Interview of Lilah Ramsay on her 10-year service
in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps**

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3
4
5Interviewer: You are?
6
7Lilah Ramsay: Lilah Cameron Ramsay. I was known, would be known in the service as
8 Cameron.
9
10Interviewer: Just go ahead and talk if you'd like.
11
12Lilah Ramsay: I went in in 1940 in January. I got out in 1950 in January.
13
14Interviewer: [00:26 inaudible] time were you overseas?
15
16Lilah Ramsay: Uh, from the 4th of June '42 until the 10th of October '45. I said I was
17 going home on my birthday.
18
19Interviewer: [00:39] Where did you serve in the states? Where did you...
20
21Lilah Ramsay: Fort [Snelling 00:41], Minnesota for 2 years. And then we, we left there
22 and went to California and joined the 166 Station Unit and sailed with all
23 the hospital units that were sent to the Pacific in '42 of June. On one ship
24 alone. The USS West Point. And that now is stationed in Seattle. Uh, we
25 landed the 4th of June in Melbourne and then we took a train, the
26 [inaudible 01:25] which was an old little town thinking we spoke English
27 but we didn't. And no heat. The only heat you had was a fireplace in
28 some of the rooms. Mine didn't have one. It registered 47 in the
29 bathroom most of the time. The only time you could get warm is if you
30 walked on the sunny side of the street. There was no heat in the stores.
31 The saving grace of the whole thing was a week after we got there the
32 reserve unit from Idaho that had been 9 months at Alice Springs, Australia
33 arrived [inaudible 02:07]. It woke the town up. It was a little sleepy town.
34
35Interviewer: [02:19] How big?
36
37Lilah Ramsay: I don't know. It was little. It was a small town. And why we were there I
38 don't know either excepting this other group came down.
39
40Interviewer: [02:34] Were you billeted in private homes?
41
42Lilah Ramsay: We were billeted in, no, in hotel. In a hotel. And, uh, we didn't know, I
43 knew the 2 girls that I had left Saint, Fort Snelling with and the rest had
44 mostly come from Camp Robinson and we were put in, made a unit out of

1 before we sailed. We didn't know our officers. And then I guess from
2 there we went to; did I say we came in...
3
4Interviewer: To Melbourne.
5
6Lilah Ramsay: I believe we went into Sydney and then we went from [inaudible 03:19] to
7 Melbourne and had a small hospital out of a children's school that had all
8 kinds of paintings on the wall for children and very small, uh, toilet
9 facilities. Everything for children. It was a beautiful school. And, uh,
10 they put us on duty. The chief nurse insisted everybody work so there was
11 oh 7 or 8 of us on night duty for maybe I don't know 20 patients. This was
12 in a building. It was a venereal hospital [chuckle] and all those people in
13 it. We had one appendectomy one night. But these were...
14
15Interviewer: American military.
16
17Lilah Ramsay: American military. Where they come from now I don't know.
18
19Interviewer: They were not battle casualties at that time.
20
21Lilah Ramsay: No, they weren't battle casualties and we would, um, we would take turns
22 [inaudible 04:27] take turns maybe taking a nap at night. [Inaudible
23 04:32] duty was 6 or 8 of you on duty because they didn't want us, the
24 chief nurse didn't want us to go anywhere.
25
26Interviewer: [04:41] Didn't want what?
27
28Lilah Ramsay: Want us to go anywhere in the daytime. I mean she wanted to feel that
29 everybody was working for their \$70 a month. No, I guess we were
30 getting' \$90. We got 10 percent.
31
32Interviewer: We got \$70 and \$75.
33
34Lilah Ramsay: We got \$90. And then from there we were sent up to Adelaide. Can't
35 remember much about Adelaide. I'm like Helen.
36
37Interviewer: Mine is so much longer than yours. [Laughter]
38
39Lilah Ramsay: But anyhow we were divided and I was sent with a group up to an
40 Australian hospital and we took over. Our boys had already taken over
41 and, uh, that was, they had done a beautiful job of taking care of the
42 patients but there were no charts and so when we would ask them what
43 was wrong with this patient they would reach in their pockets and pull out
44 something here and there but they had a record of the patient [inaudible]

1 05:48]. I'll never forget. There was one gas gangrene. It was a miserable
2 thing. Our first sergeant got mumps. Refused to come into the hospital so
3 the boys took care of him down in his tent and, uh, and again I don't know
4 how long we were there. And then some of the other group came. I don't
5 know if the chief nurse ever did get there. That was another time that I was
6 sent up with a group not knowing anything.
7
8 Interviewer: [06:21] Did you have a number to your unit or?
9
10 Lilah Ramsay: 166 Station.
11
12 Interviewer: Oh, you were named that wherever.
13
14 Lilah Ramsay: Wherever we went, we were unit. We got Cholera shots in Melbourne and
15 I got terribly sick and I remember being so afraid I'd get left behind 'cause
16 I'd just gotten acquainted with this unit. But I don't really remember but
17 somehow the next thing I remember we were in Brisbane which is clear
18 the other side...
19
20 Unidentified Speaker: Hi Ladies.
21
22 Interviewer: Hi.
23
24 Lilah Ramsay: But when we got to Brisbane, we were taken to Southport which was a
25 beautiful resort area and there again we had a hospital of, uh, 2 floors of a,
26 uh, episcopal school and church. The church was in front of the school and
27 they used it. And the third floor which was the attic was where the nurses
28 had. We slept up there. And I know we were there Christmas day and it
29 was 104.
30
31 Interviewer: Oh my.
32
33 Lilah Ramsay: And we were in the attic.
34
35 Interviewer: I'm awful glad I wasn't there.
36
37 Lilah Ramsay: And we stepped out on the, the band came. Often a band would come and
38 play. And the United States band came and they played *White Christmas*.
39
40 Interviewer: 104 degrees.
41
42 Lilah Ramsay: [Laughter] A bunch of homesick kids.
43
44 Interviewer: [07:56] What foods did you miss the most?

1
2Lilah Ramsay: Nothing in Australia. The food was delicious. We had steaks and the food
3 was very good and if you want to buy at a restaurant is was very cheap.
4
5Interviewer: [08:10] Did you have milk?
6
7Lilah Ramsay: Yeah.
8
9Interviewer: Ice cream?
10
11Lilah Ramsay: Oh yes.
12
13Interviewer: Eggs?
14
15Lilah Ramsay: Anything. Anything in Australia. Uh, they were very short of manpower
16 because they'd been fighting in the east and so it was all men and boys
17 and women and they did all the work and, uh, but there again this place we
18 were on our own. Some of the girls rented a little, uh, beach cottages and
19 then we'd go down on weekends and cook American food more or less.
20 You know, what we wanted. And then from there we divided again and I
21 took a group to New Guinea and a group from the New Guinea hospital
22 came to our hospital.
23
24Interviewer: [08:59} Were you in charge?
25
26Lilah Ramsay: Yes, the chief nurse had Dengue fever at the time.
27
28Interviewer: [09:04] What's that?
29
30Lilah Ramsay: It's, uh, a fever you get over in Australia that's, it's not malaria but it's a
31 similar thing. It's...
32
33Interviewer: It's an actual fever?
34
35Lilah Ramsay: It's a actual fever. It's a very, um, sick thing apparently. I didn't get it.
36
37Interviewer: [09:26] Did you ever have it?
38
39Lilah Ramsay: No. And I, uh, went then with this group 17 miles into the jungle from
40 Fort [inaudible 09:36] and there we were in tents all the time. And don't
41 ask me how long. We must have been there about a year.
42
43Interviewer: While taking care of patients that were [inaudible 09:47].
44

1 Lilah Ramsay: Uh, in Brisbane we had a lot of first marines and we got them well and
2 sent them back into battle and, uh, got them back in New Guinea again
3 from another operation. I think at least 3 times.
4

5 Interviewer: [10:05] Did you have some of the same?
6

7 Lilah Ramsay: I suppose we did. I can't really remember. And we ended up as groups
8 going home from New Guinea because our time was up and our points
9 was up. This has covered 3 years now. And, uh, our officers took the
10 points. And we didn't have enough, we had plenty points but, uh...
11

12 Interviewer: [10:36] Well you were an officer too weren't you?
13

14 Lilah Ramsay: Didn't count. It didn't count for promotions because they said regular
15 army would get promoted when you got back to the states and they were
16 [inaudible 10:46]. But we were sent to the New York Unit on the Island
17 of [Biak 10:56] which is 12 miles by 6 and there were 3 general hospitals
18 and an [inaudible 11:03]. It's almost the end of the war. I never saw the
19 other hospitals but I saw the [inaudible 11:09]. And, uh, that's where we
20 were when the war ended. Still in tents.
21

22 Interviewer: [11:17] V-E day or V-J day?
23

24 Lilah Ramsay: V-J day. We were V-J day was the most dangerous day I spent during the
25 war because we were just leaving, uh, uh, a party at the air force and they
26 declared the war was over and we had to be in at midnight and this was
27 about 11:30 and they announced it as we were going to our jeeps. And
28 people started shooting the guns and ammunition and a captain and I
29 crawled under a jeep. That was the worst night of the whole war.
30 [Laughter]
31

32 Interviewer: [12:02] What did you do, um, then? Did you come home? Were you sent
33 home soon or?
34

35 Lilah Ramsay: Uh, we must have stayed there till our patients left, uh, it was a large
36 hospital. They had been there. They had opened this. But this Island of
37 [Biak 12:17] most people never heard of. It sits on the equator.
38

39 Interviewer: [12:21] You were regular army too weren't you?
40

41 Lilah Ramsay: I was regular army but we had been over there long past due date to go
42 home. I believe there were 6 of us. [Inaudible 12:30]. And, uh, then
43 we're sent to the Philippines and we, um, staged there for about 3 weeks I
44 think and we also near us they didn't know, we didn't know it then were

1 the prisoners of war from Mangeria and they were on our ship coming
2 home. Uh, Scotch and English and Canadians and Americans.
3
4Interviewer: [12:56] Did you see much of them?
5
6Lilah Ramsay: We didn't see them until we got on board ship.
7
8Interviewer: They had some interesting stories to tell?
9
10Lilah Ramsay: Yes, but they were very quiet about it. Once in a while you'd come in
11 with the group that were talking and if you quietly sat there or something
12 would come up you would hear about it. Otherwise, they didn't make any
13 big issue about this at all. And then set a sail from the Philippines on the
14 10th of October.
15
16Interviewer: Your birthday.
17
18Lilah Ramsay: And got in some time in November I believe.
19
20Interviewer: To San Francisco?
21
22Lilah Ramsay: Mm-hm. To San Francisco. And we set out to [Stonewall 13:35]. They
23 never even bothered to give us sheets at night. We had a pillowcase and a
24 blanket, army blanket. That was our welcome. The next 2 nights...
25
26Interviewer: [13:47] The Red Cross didn't meet you with milk and donuts?
27
28Lilah Ramsay: They met everybody with milk and donuts that got off our ship and by the
29 time they got ready to take the army nurses off the ship the newspaper had
30 left. The Red Cross had left. But we got off the ship. There was a number
31 of nurses, a lot of nurses. Some of us had even worked our way home
32 with these prisoners of war. And, uh, we were herded into an army, uh,
33 bus and as we got in they handed us a sack which was a sandwich and an
34 apple and a bar of candy. And we were starved because we had had one
35 meal that day and had to wait for docking and unloading and everything.
36 And we stood there and watched 'em unload and watched 'em photograph
37 and all this all afternoon. And we were starved. Before we got to eat that
38 the driver came around and collected an order from each one of us for our
39 lunch.
40
41Interviewer: Oh, my goodness. [15:00] Who had provided the lunch? Did you ever
42 find out?
43
44Lilah Ramsay: The army had.

1
2Interviewer: The army had but you paid a quarter for it?
3
4Lilah Ramsay: Mm-hm. [Inaudible 15:05]. We had to have an indoctrination for an hour
5 and then we had a steak dinner that night but not much of a place to sleep.
6 And so the next 2 nights, uh, this other nurse and I went to San Francisco
7 and got a room. I don't know the name of the hotel but it was right across
8 the street from Saint Francis.
9
10Interviewer: [Inaudible 15:31].
11
12Lilah Ramsay: Mm?
13
14Interviewer: [Inaudible 15:33].
15
16Lilah Ramsay: No, it was a small hotel. The nurses, they had allocated Saint Francis [was
17 15:40] officers. Male officers. But, uh, we had a good time then because
18 there were 2 officers that we had met on board ship and they wine and
19 dined us for 2 days in San Francisco.
20
21Interviewer: Mm-hm. That was your, one of your more memorable experiences.
22
23Lilah Ramsay: Well I'll tell you how we got back. We finally got on a train and went to
24 Denver. We had 3 days sitting on the train in Denver waiting. And then
25 we finally got to Des Moines, Iowa and we staged there for a while. Then
26 we took another train and went back to North Dakota. Finally got back to
27 North Dakota. All of this time coming out from San Francisco and Des
28 Moines the WACs had meal tickets and we paid for our meals.
29 Expensive. And to this day we have never been reimbursed. Because it
30 wasn't on our orders.
31
32Interviewer: [16:53] Did you pursue that?
33
34Lilah Ramsay: Oh yeah. There was a whole bunch of us when we pursued it but nothing
35 ever came of it. Our money that we should have gotten per diem going
36 from Fort Snelling to San Francisco we got about 3 months after we were
37 over in Australia. [Inaudible 17:22]
38
39Interviewer: [17:23] What influenced you to volunteer?
40
41Lilah Ramsay: Well an ad in American Nursing Journal telling about army and the
42 opportunities they had and things that you could do and, and the training
43 you could get. And I wanted further education in obstetrics.
44

1Interviewer: [17:45] Did you ever get it or have an opportunity to...
2
3Lilah Ramsay: No, never did because in 2 years the war came.
4
5Interviewer: [17:52] And then you did whatever you had to.
6
7Lilah Ramsay: No, then I went overseas when the war came. I had orders, uh, within 10
8 days after Pearl Harbor but they didn't have ships until June.
9
10Interviewer: [18:07] Do you, uh, feel that this helped you after you got out of service?
11 Did you learn things or see things that you wouldn't in civilian life?
12 Injuries?
13
14Lilah Ramsay: Oh, I saw things I never would have seen. It was a very great education.
15 Never in staying at home would we have had the, the things to do and to
16 see the that we did during the service. [Inaudible 18:34].
17
18Interviewer: [18:35] Um, can you compare your service career then and now?
19
20Lilah Ramsay: Oh, I think it's a great deal different now. Uh, I got married and had to get
21 out because I was pregnant. Now they stay in and have their children and
22 go right along. [Inaudible 19:00] retired, you know, like in 15 years or so.
23 But immediately, I was discharged because I was pregnant. I didn't get, I
24 still don't think I got a regular army discharge.
25
26Interviewer: [19:15] What, uh, what do you mean you don't have a regular army
27 discharge?
28
29Lilah Ramsay: A regular army are supposed to go before a board.
30
31Interviewer: Oh.
32
33Lilah Ramsay: I never did go before a board.
34
35Interviewer: But you were in 10 years.
36
37Lilah Ramsay: Mm-hm. But because I was pregnant, although the baby was delivered at
38 Percy Jones [inaudible 19:39]. No, I was discharged the 27th of January.
39 She was born the 15th of March and the army took care of it.
40
41Interviewer: [19:48] But weren't you at Valley Forge at some point?
42
43Lilah Ramsay: Oh, well I was sent there because I had a liver infection after I come back
44 from overseas.

1
2Interviewer: [19:57] But you were in the service then, or were you?
3
4Lilah Ramsay: I was in the service. I had had, um, 8 or 9 years' service when I had it. I
5 spent 11 months hospitalized at Percy Jones.
6
7Interviewer: You did?
8
9Lilah Ramsay: Mm-hm.
10
11Interviewer: Eleven months at Percy Jones?
12
13Lilah Ramsay: Yeah, I was on duty up there. I was a patient 11 months and then I was
14 married and a year later when I was pregnant they sent me to Valley Forge
15 to do a liver biopsy which almost lost the baby for me. And then I left
16 Valley Forge 'cause I was so homesick to come home and, uh, got my
17 papers from Valley Forge that I had been discharged. [Inaudible 20:50].
18
19Interviewer: Uh, did that make a difference in any of your benefits that you might have
20 received?
21
22Lilah Ramsay: I expect it did. It took me 12 years to even convince the army that I had
23 an infected liver. They, the doctor knew it. The doctor, um, I was treated
24 out here all the time for a residual liver.
25
26Interviewer: [21:15] Did you get a medical discharge?
27
28Lilah Ramsay: From the army? [Inaudible 21:17].
29
30Interviewer: That's why you had so much trouble.
31
32Lilah Ramsay: Twelve years later, when I asked for medication, they said the only way
33 they could give it to me was through, uh, uh, if I had a 10 percent
34 disability. And then the word came back from somewhere, this was
35 through the DAV, that it wasn't service connected. And then I got mad.
36 And I said I had 9 years of service when I got it and they sent me a 10
37 percent disability and that's what I have today. But it took me, and it says
38 non-service connected or something even on my disability. You can't
39 fight the army so you give up.
40
41Interviewer: [22:04] What color uniform did you wear?
42
43Lilah Ramsay: I wore the old blue World War 1 when I sailed.
44

1 Interviewer: [22:11] And then were you issued the...?
2
3 Lilah Ramsay: Then we had to have uniforms made. I, I think we had uniforms made
4 about 6 times the first year we were over in Australia. They kept changing
5 them on us.
6
7 Interviewer: [22:23] Then did you get the brown and white seersucker? [Throat
8 clearing] Excuse me.
9
10 Lilah Ramsay: Yeah. We wore the seersucker. We wore khaki. We wore, came home in
11 the, we had a green, an olive drab green. Uh, we had to wear leggings in
12 New Guinea over the top of our slacks. We wore...
13
14 Interviewer: Why?
15
16 Lilah Ramsay: Uh, mosquitos. Uh, we wore, um, Philippine [scout 22:53] shoes. The
17 most comfortable shoes I ever had during the whole time I was nursing in
18 New Guinea. I suppose we did until we got out.
19
20 Interviewer: Uh, maybe you covered this but in New Guinea [23:07] where did you
21 live? What sort of quarters?
22
23 Lilah Ramsay: Um, they were tents but they had board floors. Board walls.
24
25 Interviewer: Outdoors?
26
27 Lilah Ramsay: Oh no, we had tents. They were semi-nice tents. I mean they were
28 boarded walls and a tent roof. And, uh, all screened in. Everything was
29 screened. And there were 2 of us to a tent.
30
31 Interviewer: Well that was good.
32
33 Lilah Ramsay: Yeah, we had nice tents.
34
35 Interviewer: Real beds.
36
37 Lilah Ramsay: Yeah.
38
39 Interviewer: Cots?
40
41 Lilah Ramsay: Cots of some kind. I don't believe they were army cots and I remember
42 in, uh, Adelaide having army cots. It was so cold.
43

1 Interviewer: [23:55] What demanded the greatest adjustment? Your uniforms or
2 regulations? Language? Living with others?
3
4 Lilah Ramsay: The language was a little difficult [chuckle]. We couldn't understand the
5 Cockney Australian. Made a few mistakes on some of the things. Um,
6 but I don't remember having any problems with discipline.
7
8 Interviewer: [Inaudible 24:19] wearing a tie or didn't you ever have to.
9
10 Lilah Ramsay: Oh yes, we wore a dress tie till New Guinea.
11
12 Interviewer: [Inaudible 24:25].
13
14 Lilah Ramsay: Till New Guinea. No, I really don't, uh, remember having...
15
16 Interviewer: [24:34] Do you recall any regulations that everybody disliked?
17
18 Lilah Ramsay: No. Uh, I suppose there were lots of them. There were lots of regulations
19 but in New Guinea we had to go out. Two nurses with 2 officers with side
20 arms and had to be in at midnight. And, uh, [Biak 24:55] was the same.
21 And we had a fence around our tent in [Biak 25:00].
22
23 Interviewer: Feeling of being...
24
25 Lilah Ramsay: Fenced in. That's when the song came out *Don't Fence Me In*.
26
27 Interviewer: Yeah. Well, thank you very much.
28
29 Lilah Ramsay: Don't fence me in.
30
31
32/la