

Farley, Grace E. Interview 6-4-90

[Speaker 2]

This is Stan Tinsley speaking. This is Gracie, and she's going to be recounting some of her World War II experiences. I'm going to ask you some questions, and I think they'll lead in pretty good secrets for how we both want this thing to come out.

When did you join the service?

[Speaker 1]

April 1943.

[Speaker 2]

This question is why did you volunteer? Of course, you did. And what branch of the service were you in?

[Speaker 1]

Army Nurse Corps.

[Speaker 2]

Thank you. What do you remember about leaving home?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I was very happy in my job as a school nurse teacher in Mississippi, New York. And I went home over the weekend, about 24 miles home. And my brother was home from Syracuse, and he had been a World War I flyer with the Canadian Air Corps.

And at that time, there was a rumor that they were short of doctors and nurses. And the doctors, the nurses particularly, they were calling for. So I mentioned at home to my brother that I should hate very much to have to be drafted.

And he said, well, why don't you do something about it? And I said, I will. And I did.

So I went back to my work and then interviewed by superintendent of schools relative to leaving and going in the Army. And of course, there was nothing he could do but say yes. So I did.

And I was sworn in at Pine Camp, New York, which is now Camp Drum, New York.

[Speaker 2]

Would they have actually drafted you if you hadn't volunteered?

[Speaker 1]

There were rumors that doctors and nurses might be drafted. Just a rumor.

[Speaker 2]

How old were you?

[Speaker 1]

Pardon me?

[Speaker 2]

How old were you when you were in the service? Just roughly.

[Speaker 1]

Born in 1906 and went in in 43.

[Speaker 2]

OK. That's close. I guess you've answered this, but it could be more than one answer.

Was anyone else in your family in the service?

[Speaker 1]

In the Canadian service in World War I, but not World War II.

[Speaker 2]

OK.

[Speaker 1]

I was the only one.

[Speaker 2]

OK. This question probably needs to be modified a little bit. Describe the places where you trained and where you went from there.

Good. It's all in here.

[Speaker 1]

I was inducted at Pine Camp, now Camp Drum, New York. And from there, I went in as operating room super, well, and worked in the operating room when I first went in. Then I went, we were alerted to go to Camp Atterbury, Indiana for our infiltration course, which was rough.

And so we were there about, oh, maybe four weeks or more. And we were alerted. After all, the personnel came in from all over the country, from New Jersey, the nurses from all around the different states.

They were not all from the east. They were from the west and all over. And we were at Camp Atterbury, as I say.

From there, we went to Camp Shanks, New York. And we were there about a week. And we were then put into formation and were taken on a tender across the Hudson River to be Aquitania.

And that was in the dark at night. And we were there overnight. And the next morning, we felt the ship moving.

And it was moving on out past the Statue of Liberty. And from there, then we went on, oh, maybe, I don't know how far. The blimps followed us anyhow out of New York.

And everything was going along smoothly. Someone came to tell me, one of the officials, that the operating room had not been set up on the Aquitania yet. And would I call my personnel and go down and set it up down the hole in the ship?

So I did. And had it all ready in case an emergency would arise. We, our third last day out of Scotland, in Renwick, where I have it in here, a German folk wolf came out.

They felt the Air Corps on board identified them. And the Aquitania turned all her guns on them. And they got away.

But the Air Corps felt he was trying to get to the smokestacks and drop a bomb in there. And we were alone, no convoy. There wasn't another ship in sight.

So scary. And the storm settled in. And I think you will find this all in here without going into detail.

That the British guard outside our cabin said for us to not worry that if it was a submarine, they could outrun her. But if it happened to be a warship or, you know, whatever, that it would never find us in the fog that it settled in. And a storm came on.

And about 11 o'clock that night, someone came to my cabin or our cabin. There were six of us piled in the cabin for one. And said that our chief of staff was going to operate and do an appendectomy on one of our nurses.

Middle of the night, and would I go on down to the operating room. So down I went. Got scrubbed in.

And the old Aquitania was rolling, but she had a flat bottom and wasn't as rocky as the Queen Mary. So we did the appendectomy. I wrapped my legs around the operating room table in order to stand up there.

And it did take our, one of our trays knocked it off the table across the floor. But we succeeded in finishing it and got back to bed. And then we landed in, oh, I'll have to go back here.

It was near Greenwich, Scotland. And we had to stay on board overnight because, and all the next day, mostly because the Air Corps had to be taken off, several groups, and other hospitals and other engineering groups, you know. And we finally went in to Scotland, to Greenwich, and we were met with a group of bagpipers, and they played for us.

We were entrained there and went from Liverpool, over to Liverpool, up to Edinburgh on the East Coast. From there we entrained and went down to Petersburg, and then from there across to Mellis, a little station where we were loaded onto trucks, half-ton trucks, after dark. And went down the East Coast in the dark.

We had no lights. You knew that you were on the road, but it was narrow. The trees were hitting the sides of the trucks.

And we got to our station in Wyndham, England, and we were tired. And they billeted us in huts about the size of a garage. Cement floor to pot-bellied stoves you have.

And they said we could sleep the rest of the day. Well, about three o'clock in the afternoon, we were called to a meeting in the officers' club, and we were to take over the hospital at once. It was an evacuation hospital at that time.

They went out one door and we came in the other. And we put our personnel on duty that night, and we had... I don't know if it's in the pictures, if you want it in.

But our first night there, we stood and heard all this noise, bombing like, so we got our helmets and our gas masks and went out to see what was going on. And we saw the German planes bombing Ipswich. And they would...

you could just... they lit up the whole sky and you could see them diving in. And that was about ten miles from where we were.

And we were... our hospital was situated in the middle of the airbase, you know, around the general hospitals, and the station in the back and the field hospitals. So that we saw the real thing, and we realized we were in the combat zone.

So we had everything set up, and we serviced the B-17s and the B-24s. And we'd go up to the operating room about 7 o'clock. And in the morning we'd do our elective surgery, meaning about 6 o'clock the mission would come back.

And we'd be going up in the morning about 6 o'clock. You could hear the engines get warming up to go out on the mission. Then, if we weren't busy, we'd watch them get into formation.

And then we would count the planes when they came back to see if they were all there. And some of them would come in dragging their parachutes for breaks. And they would drop flares over our hospital if there were severe cases of war.

Then when they got to the airbase and landed, the flight surgeon would call the operating room and say they had so many abdominal wounds, so many craniotomies too that night. And they never got busy then because they'd bring them in, the ambulances would come in shortly, and they'd be on the shock board. And one of our doctors and a maid and a nurse would go down, and they'd pick out the worst casualties.

And one night, in the middle of the night, we were operating one grand, eight tables at one time, two in those missing huts, you know, the two-end rooms way down at each end, half a mile long. We'd put two tables with screens between them. We had rooms set up for the minor surgery.

And one night, early, maybe early morning, someone came to me and said, There is a boy down in room so-and-so who won't take his anesthetic until he sees Miss Farley. Well, so of course I went right down there, and this little boy said, You remember me, don't you? I'm so-and-so from Messina, New York.

You were my school nurse. And he must have lied about his age. He was only a kid.

And really, I felt sorry for him. But we talked, and of course I didn't remember what I did for him. All I can say is that we worked mighty hard.

We had our staff on at night in the operating room, and they would have everything done, prepare and set up for the elective surgery in the morning.

[Speaker 2]

How old were you? How many months were you there?

[Speaker 1]

Twenty-five.

[Speaker 2]

Twenty-five months there?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I was in the Army twenty-five. I went over in forty-three and came back in November forty-five.

[Speaker 2]

What memories do you have of men and women that served with you? Do you keep in touch with any of them?

[Speaker 1]

I surely do. I have... One of the girls worked with me in the operating room for a while and lives in Missouri.

And she had formerly lived in New Jersey, Morristown, New Jersey. And one night here, out of the clear sky, about four years ago, maybe five, maybe more than that, the phone rang, and this voice said, This is Marge McCarthy from Morristown, New Jersey. And I had to think, Who is she?

And then she said, One of your hut mates. And she said her husband was being transferred to Missouri, and she was having all the girls who were in the hut in England come for the weekend. So she said, I know you're far away and can't come, but I went.

Flew up one day and came back the next, needless to say, and had no sleep but just a few. And then I have another hut mate living in Milford, New York, and I write to her and I hear from her all the time. And two or three others at Christmas we keep in contact.

[Speaker 2]

What do you remember most about your time overseas?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, we were awfully busy. I know that we worked hard, but we played hard. And when we had annual leave, I know another nurse and I went up to Scotland.

We had two or three days off. And went into Inverness, way up at the tip of Scotland, and then back down through the Grampian Mountains and Lake Ness, looking for the monster,

and back to Liverpool and London, back to Cambridge and to our camp about an hour out of Cambridge on the east. And that was nice.

And we would go into London. We'd stay at the Red Cross, but the one time we went down and couldn't get in, it was all bombed out. So we had to go to a hotel.

And that was very interesting. And then we had a POW camp right near, because we were, when we were free, we were practicing rifle practice and with the handguns. And we passed the POW camp.

And I remember so well seeing a poor boy standing on a table out of tension, hot, oh, terribly hot. And we asked our lieutenant, what or why was this? And he said, well, he may have stolen a piece of bread from the ward.

They worked in our dining rooms and cleaned our huts and all that. And his German lieutenant probably found it. And he's being punished ten minutes of every hour he stands there for a period of time.

That was, I thought, cruel. And, of course, we had the planes. You could tell or differentiate between the German planes, the British, and the American by the drone of the engines.

And the Germans flew very high. And then we had the B-1s and the B-2s. The B-1s, you could hear them coming.

You might wake up with your fingernails in the palm of your hands squeezing it tightly because they went right over our huts, two or some of them. And one dropped, I can't recall whether it was a B-1 or a B-2, flew outside our hospital in a field and knocked all our glass out of the missile. But they were aiming for the ammunition dumps, we think, in the airfields.

And the B-2s, you could not hear. They were very—and they came over piggyback to the coast of England and they simply—we did go out even though we weren't supposed to and watch them about going over the top of the trees over the hospital in our huts and aiming right for the air core, you know, and for the airfields. Those were things, I think, that stood out.

[Speaker 2]

What were your relationships with civilians overseas?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, I have pictures in there to prove it. They would invite us to their homes. And we—our hut, four of us were older than the four beds of the little girls across on the other side of the hut.

They were babies just out of training and I was in my thirties, I think. But the colonel, our commanding officer, was a grand man from Coral Gables, Florida. And he would be invited to a home, maybe.

And he'd get in touch with some of the older girls to come. And I know one night we went to Lord Ironside's apartment or whatever he had. He came into this—I forgot what city it was now—and for dinner.

And all I remember now is this—we were at a long table, had a huge fireplace in that dining room with almost a half a tree log in the fireplace. But Lord Ironside had the whole elbow out of his tweed suit. I mean, you know, this is the type of people they were.

Then, of course, he had wondered if our band would come down and put on a show for a festival or something. So Colonel Gable took care of that. And then our—one of the vicars, they called him in the Church of England, Reverend Cotton.

And the pictures are in there, too. And his wife invited us for dinner, two or three of us, to their home with Colonel Gable and Colonel Smith, I guess, and a few of the others. And it was—I'm sure that they—I think it was festive we had that night.

But another time, another nurse and myself went up to Brough on the Humber River for a weekend. And it was interesting because Hilda, the wife, during World War I, knew my brother in England. And he crashed.

He flew the old camels and all those old planes. And he landed in a plowed field. All that happened, he was knocked unconscious and broke his jaw because he knew he was going to crash and was trying to get down.

And so this Greenwood family, head workers here, you know, would call on the soldiers. And they invited Leonard to their home, the mother and the girls. And then one of them came over—two of them came over to this country to visit my brother since the war.

And they invited me then, and Leonard wrote and told them that I was coming over in my APO number. Hilda wrote and asked if I would come up and bring another nurse if I wanted to. So I did.

And, oh, we had a beautiful dinner. But I know that it was their Christmas dinner that they gave us because they couldn't— but Colonel Gable, as I say, was a perfect gentleman. He said, now go to the mess hall.

You've got so much sugar and butter, whatever you want. And we got the PX. We got stockings and clothes.

And I can see Hilda sitting on the living room floor opening that suitcase and saying, oh, John, look at this. Just delighted with what we had brought. But we never went to it when we were invited without bringing a care package.

[Speaker 2]

What was your ride for your overseas?

[Speaker 1]

I went over as, I guess, first or second lieutenant, I've forgotten, and a captain. I was a captain when I came home. Then I stayed in the reserves until I came out a lieutenant colonel.

Every summer when I was with the VA, I went on two weeks' active duty to camp Rutgers or something in Alabama and Jackson in South Carolina, Fort Bragg in North Carolina. And so I kept it up and then retired from the Army. When I was 55, we had to retire, I believe, at that time.

[Speaker 2]

You never got back to the States on leave, did you?

[Speaker 1]

Pardon me?

[Speaker 2]

You never got back to the States at any time on leave, did you?

[Speaker 1]

No, not until we came home. We were supposed to come home on the Queen Elizabeth, but they took her to bring Canadian troops home.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. That first ship, the Mauritania that you came over on, was it a sister ship to? The Aquitania.

Aquitania. Aquitania. Was it a sister ship to one of the Prince's ships?

[Speaker 1]

I'm not sure.

[Speaker 2]

It was a fast ship, wasn't it? Yes, sir.

[Speaker 1]

We were to go over in nine days. But what happened after that scare with the German plane coming out from, they thought, from the coast to France, we turned around and came all the way back by the Azores. It took us nine days to get over instead of five.

[Speaker 2]

I see. Did you ever have any doubts about what you were doing in the service and why you were there and working like you were?

[Speaker 1]

Just that I felt that I owed it to my country and to the boys to look what they were doing. You know, we'd have a party at the base, maybe a 200th mission party, and Colonel Gable would invite some of them to come over. And there might be four fighter pilots lined up along one side of the mess hall, which was the dance hall for the night.

And the next week or two weeks they'd be coming back again. There'd be one or two missing. And we had one come back through the underground, which was very good.

[Speaker 2]

What was your plan to do after the war, and did you do what you planned?

[Speaker 1]

I was on tenure at the high school. I came back to Messina.

[Speaker 2]

I see.

[Speaker 1]

And then the next, oh, that summer I received this letter from one of the doctors in Jackson, Mississippi, telling me that I should get an MBA for the benefits, and wrote to several of the girls that lived in New York. And I was the only one that accepted. And I wrote, and I thought I had the position.

As I say, I took his letter to the superintendent of the schools and just gave it to him, and he had stated the salary and the benefits. And as I say, you couldn't turn it down.

[Speaker 2]

Sure.

[Speaker 1]

You know.

[Speaker 2]

I understand that. How did the war affect you, and how did it change you?

[Speaker 1]

Maybe I could be more military, maybe. I think spirituality. I think I try to get to where I'm supposed to be at the right time, and, you know, that's drilled into you.

And certainly being able to do what I could for our country and for giving their lives.

[Speaker 2]

I think the war changed the United States.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I think when I came back first, I thought they hadn't realized what they went through. You know, they didn't seem too excited about it. I mean, we were so excited to get home and all, and after seeing it.

But I think that it made us feel that we're not all that secure as a country. We're surrounded by water. We have planes that can get here in a day or so.

And I think that we had good presidents at that time. Roosevelt was strong, and I think that he did very well as to the way they divided up the European countries over there. He was criticized a bit for it, I think, but it made us more alert that we were not any longer, I mean, that we were not isolated.

[Speaker 2]

What do you remember most about coming home?

[Speaker 1]

Hitting three terrible storms and walking the length of the Queen Mary to every dispensary. I didn't get seasick. And the dining room was empty, practically.

Those who were down there were green. So I got all these seasick pills and went around to my nurses that we had in our unit. And they were so sick.

And I got, after a while, got a little woozy in one of the storms, and I went up on deck, which was not proper. It was in the middle of the night for some time, but I had to get fresh air. And I went up, and there was a little cubbyhole, like a bench.

I got in there and sat down out of the wind. And soon an officer came along, or a guard, and he said, Don't you think you'd better go down to the dining room and see a movie or do something? And I said, I just have to stay.

Let me stay about ten minutes, and I'll go right on down. He was real nice. But I was afraid I was going to be sick.

It was rough. And it was wonderful being out there, being on the ship and not worried about running into mines or submarines.

[Speaker 2]

What changed and what seemed to be the same when you got back? What did you notice when you got back in the States? What was the biggest change you saw and what stayed the same?

[Speaker 1]

As a woman, I suppose, I couldn't get into any of my clothes. I went to downtown to set up a new wardrobe, and I thought the materials were just no good. They weren't like what we had before the war.

It just seemed they were much cheaper. And I suppose after they had to be rationed here and everything, they went through all that, too, and they were doing the best they could.

[Speaker 2]

When were you discharged?

[Speaker 1]

February something. In February, 46. That was ending up my annual leave and all that.

[Speaker 2]

What do you feel that we could have done better during the war?

[Speaker 1]

I don't know how we could have done any better. Look at the materials that we sent over there to England. I know that they say that Roosevelt was alerted that the Japanese were going to bomb.

We don't know that he ever knew that, but it was rumored that he did. And that he may have hesitated too long, but I think he made the right decision because he had to think about the loss of lives. But I think that really America did its share and more.

I think that we really went all out, and we were very good after the war about the Army of Occupation and the helping out of these countries. I went right to work with Germany, helping them to rebuild. I think most of my career was right in this little country.

But one day we were getting on our 231st train back to Norwich or wherever, over to Sarencester near Bath on the west coast. We were billeted in Missing House again, and I had a little room outside this big ward. And about 11 o'clock, a couple of members came bounding in on the bed, and said, Get up, this is BJ Day.

They'd just surrendered. We're going in to celebrate in Sarencester. Come on, we're getting trucks out.

I was so tired, I said, No, you won't go. And I went to the ward, and I noticed them digging into their foot blockers. I said, Now wait a minute, don't unpack yet, because we may still have to go on wherever we're going.

We didn't know. But they all went in, just a group did, and celebrated. So then all that summer, that was BJ Day, then all the rest of the summer our special services kept us busy.

We went on trips to Stratford-on-Avon. I remember we saw she stooped to court, and took a boat ride up the Thames, went into London, and we managed to keep busy. They managed to keep us busy, our personnel.

In two or three months, we were sent to Southampton, where we got the Queen Mary. But, one of my superiors in the nurse corps I met in Southampton wondered if I'd stay and go with them over to the continent and to Austria. I said, Just let me get my feet on the United States soil.

I wanted to get home so badly.

[Speaker 2]

You live in Oak Ridge.

[Speaker 1]

Well, Irma, my sister, and her husband. Her husband was with the Manhattan district, and he came down in, I guess, 1942 for business. And then, in 1943, he got Irma and a three-year-old daughter down.

They lived down here at the hotel. And she can show you the room up in Alexander Inn, where they lived in one room until they built a house.

[Speaker 4]

The house was locked in overnight. There couldn't be anything there at night. Tomorrow evening, it'll be retired, and she came to Oak Ridge.

[Speaker 1]

We've come to do the same things. We've traveled to Ireland and England again. But also, she happened to come to Oak Ridge.

It's way down at the other. And I walked in, and one of the nurses said, Isn't your sister in Oak Ridge, Tennessee? I said, Yeah.

No, where in Tennessee is your sister? I said, Oak Ridge. She said, Well, look at the stars and stripes.

The Army paper.

[Speaker 2]
Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 1]
Booker dropped the bomb.

[Speaker 2]
Oh, that was a well-kept secret.

[Speaker 1]
Oh, I tell you, it surely was.

[Speaker 2]
It really was. Now, tell me again what hospital this was.

[Speaker 1]
231st Station Hospital.

[Speaker 2]
Where was this located?

[Speaker 1]
It's near Norwich, England.

[Speaker 2]
He and his wife and a bunch of their family are getting ready to go to England. His son is marrying an English girl that he met when he was in service over there.

[Speaker 3]
Oh, I love that. Where is it? It's later in England.

[Speaker 2]
I've forgotten the name of the town. I believe they told me it was about 20 miles west of London.

[Speaker 1]
I've met her.

[Speaker 2]
She's a lovely girl. She was over here this summer. I think as soon as his tour was over.

She was over here this summer, and I met her. She's a lovely girl. I don't think you could get a picture.

[Speaker 1]

That looks faded.

[Speaker 2]

You've heard of Mrs. Kerr, haven't you? She was the head of the hospice program here for about 30 years. Jimmy Kerr's wife.

Kerr, K-E-R-R. Through Fort Sanders, that was the first hospice program here, and she'd headed it up until very, very recently when she retired. Now, she was from England, and her husband was a bomber pilot and met her in World War II, and she came back with him shortly after the war came over.

She hasn't been here ever since. Wow.

[Speaker 3]

You don't know where she lives now, do you?

[Speaker 2]

Pardon?

[Speaker 3]

You don't know where she lives in Oak Ridge?

[Speaker 2]

No, she doesn't live. She lives in Knoxville.

[Speaker 3]

Oh, she lives in Knoxville.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. But I thought since she was a nurse that she might... She and my wife were together in the hospital for their first child.

Oh.

[Speaker 4]

Well, then they became good friends.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, they've known one another a long time. She's still pretty. When she came over here as a young girl, she was gorgeous.

She was breathtaking. Wow. She was one of the prettiest girls I've ever seen in my life.

[Speaker 3]

I remember as a child, Hilda Greenwood coming over from England. Oh, she had the most gorgeous complexion. And the skin.

And her hair was lovely. She was a... I'd like to say she was...

There was something about her that just stood out.

[Speaker 2]

I am in the operating... Where is this now? Have we got this?

[Speaker 1]

On the back. I have the... I'm in the middle.

I just put waist, but it would be me.

[Speaker 2]

I can see. Okay, but where was this?

[Speaker 1]

That's the operating room. Oh, that's the staff room. 231st.

It's all 231st. For 44, this is in my office.

[Speaker 5]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

We had to keep track of everything in this operating room book. All the... Now, what branch of service the boy was in and the patient is in.

Operating room. Yeah, but it's too big. Can you take a picture of it?

Is that it?

[Speaker 2]

They can take it now.

[Speaker 1]

Well, we did a larger one. Welcome to it now. I'm in the middle here, and that's our operating room.

That's our commanding... Our chief of surgery, Colonel Plateau. Gosh, I knew what kind of a chief of surgery I had when we did that appendix on board ship going over.

He was from a Swedish hospital in Brooklyn. Colonel Plateau. And...

...operate with either left or right hand. And quick. And quick.

Oh, my. We were in and out of there in no time.

[Speaker 2]

Now, here we go. Oh, okay, fine. I hope it'll fit.

I don't have to. There we are.

[Speaker 3]

That's fine. Now, this is... Let me get you a little bit more iced tea.

All right.

[Speaker 1]

This is a group of... ...Purple Heart boys. Heart veterans.

And they were sent from the rehab to help us in the operating room. We had to make all our own dressings. All, everything that was used.

And I'm helping them there. Yeah. Okay.

And... I think... Do you think you have enough pictures?

[Speaker 2]

I think so. Did we... Have a group of...

Did we ever get a good one of you in here? He'll get all of me if I don't come back for the dinner.

[Speaker 3]

Give him... Give him that good one of you and put you in the program and send it back to him. That big one I like so much.

[Speaker 1]

Oh. Dr. Barney, that we had at Pine Camp, he was with us at the University Hospital in Syracuse in training. He was one of our chiefs of surgery.

And then we met at Pine Camp. And then, another thing I remember from overseas... There, it's that one.

[Speaker 3]

I love that picture.

[Speaker 1]

One night, I was in the operating room. We were working late. These little things come to mind every once in a while.

And this pipe surgeon came to the door and he couldn't... not come in because he didn't have a cap and gown on. But I recognized him and I said, What are you doing here?

And he said, Well, what are you doing here? He was one of our doctors from Langcove, Long Island when I first finished training. He was one of the flight surgeons, I think.