

Anna Urda Busby #29 December 7, 1984

Q: Ms. Busby, let me start off by asking, where did you go to nursing school?

A: I went to Hackensack Hospital School of Nursing in Hackensack, New Jersey.

Q: When did you finish Nursing School?

A: I graduated in 1939, and I worked at Hackensack Hospital for two years and then I went into the Army Nurse Corps in August, 1939. Wait a minute, I graduated in 1937. That's incorrect.

Q: O.K., well just make the statement.

A: I graduated in '37, worked for two years, and went into the Army Nurse Corps in 1939.

Q: Once you went into the Army Nurse Corps in 1939, did you receive any additional training?

A: No, I did not.

Q: So it was straight in from civilian nurse and civilian life to an army nurse then, was it?

A: Right.

Q: What rank were you given when you went in?

A: 2nd Lieutenant.

Q: You were a commissioned officer then?

A: No, we were not commissioned as officers at that time. That did not come until later on during the war time.

Q: O.K., but you were a 2nd Lieutenant. What was your first assignment as an army nurse?

A: My first assignment was at Governors Island, New York. And I was on the medical and surgical ward for awhile, and because I liked obstetrics very much, I was on obstetrics. And in the short time that I was there, I had transport duty to the Panama Canal Zone in May, 1940... '39?... '40. 1940. And in September, 1940 again, I was a ships nurse. The first time it was on the *Chateau Thierry*, and the second time it was on the *Hunter Liggett*. One time we were transporting the family and the military, and the next time we were just transporting the troops. And the second time, the stewardess and I were the only females aboard ship and I was having a very good time.

Q: Uh huh... was an active social life was it?

A: Oh...very. I enjoyed my seven years very much in the Army Nurse Corps. Then from Ft. Jay, Governors Island, I was transferred to Newport, Rhode Island. I was there from November of '40 to June 1941, when I was transferred to Tripler [General] Hospital, Hawaii.

Q: Was the transfer voluntary? Did you ask for it? Or did they just simply tell you, you were going to Hawaii.

A: No, they just told me it was time to transfer me. But we had three choices at that time of where we wanted to be transferred, and Hawaii was one of them, and I got what I wanted.

Q: Why did you choose Hawaii?

A: Oh, because all the older nurses were telling you about Hawaii and what a wonderful time they had there, and they also talked about the Philippine Islands. And so that was why I chose Hawaii. I wanted to see Hawaii.

Q: Tell me a little bit about what Tripler [General] Hospital was like in those days?

A: What was Tripler.....

Q: What kind of building was it?

A: Oh it was an old, old building. The old building had two stories and then were a lot of barracks types of buildings that were constructed and were there when I got there. So my first assignment at Tripler was..... well, I was on a medical ward, I was on the ear, nose, and throat ward, and I was on the obstetrical ward when I got a facial infection of the right cheek, several weeks before December 7th. And I was a patient on December the 7th because of that infection.

Q: Were you actually hospitalized when the attack began?

A: Oh yes. I was up and around but ...

Q: An ambulatory patient were you?

A: Oh I was ambulatory, but my right cheek was inflamed; the entire cheek. And this began to get worse and then finally they had, before December the 7th, they had sent me to a civilian doctor to see what he might do for me. But I suggested could they do that, because they were trying other treatments and I just felt like we weren't getting anywhere. So I was a patient that day and I had just placed my breakfast tray on the floor, when we heard all these sounds. And the head nurse was....

Q: What kind of sounds?

A: Oh, they sounded horrible! It was the bombing, but I didn't

know it was the bombing, except something was happening out there. And when the head nurse ran down the hall, the nurses didn't run. So I ran after her and when we got to the back porch, you could see all this smoke at Pearl Harbor. And pretty soon, I don't know, we were there one, two, three minutes, but something flashed in front of us and the oil barrel at the pineapple cannery went up into a flame, and that of course scared us more. And we ran back into the corridor, into the nurses office, and she called an officer at Hickam Field, and I heard her say, "My God! The Japanese are bombing Pearl Harbor!" And I said, "Well, we will all be needed on duty."

So I changed my patient garb to my nurses uniform and I picked the little radio that I had with a Victorola combined, and I was coming down the stair way from the second floor, the womens ward, and I looked into the window where another nurse was preparing baby formula (this was the obstetrical ward). And Verla Thompson was on duty (and we called Verla, "Tommie", beautiful nurse from California) and I said, "Tommie, the Japanese are bombing Pearl Harbor!" And she said, "Oh, go away Anna! You're always kidding!" And on I went into the nurses quarters and when I got there I met another nurse and her name was Peggy McKay, and she had a basket on her arm, and she said, "Anna, we're celebrating my boyfriends birthday today. We're going out on a picnic." I said, "No one is going anywhere!" I said, "The Japanese are bombing Pearl Harbor!" and we will all be needed on duty.

With that I... I don't remember whether I went up to my room to put the radio down or whether I walked right into the chief nurses office. I think I went right into the chief nurses office which was maybe about 20 or 30 feet down the hallway. And Edna Rockefeller was the chief nurse and as soon as she looked at me she said, "Where do you think you're going with that red face?" And I said, "On duty where ever you need me." So she said, "You can't go anywhere with that red face. You better take charge of the womens ward." And ...oh I can't think of the nurses name now who was in charge up there at the time, and she sent her elsewhere.

So I changed my garb and I reported on duty, took the report, and now I was in charge of the womens ward, where I was a patient in the last hour. And when the second bombing took place, I was on duty. Now if you ask me about the rest of the day, I cannot remember except that it was a very busy day then and for days after. But I do remember a couple of incidents.

Q: Well, why don't you share them with us.

A: Alright, the couple of incidents are: There was one very very ill patient who had cancer and who required morphine every four hours it seemed. And I remember the patients were scared too, because those who had radios heard what was happening. And she did not seem to require morphine as often for the next few days.

Q: Was she aware of what was going on?

A: Oh, sure. And I can't even tell you now how many patients were on that ward. But the one other patient that I remember

very much is because she was a beautiful elderly woman with white hair, and she was like a China doll...tiny. And I heard somebody yelling uh..."There's a fire across the hall!" and I ran down to the hall and the sweet, elderly, China-like doll, had reached for her cigarettes and was trying to light a cigarette, and the handkerchief was on fire on the bedside table. So I got the pitcher of water and I put the fire out, and I knew I was angry, and I took the cigarette away from her hand and I said, "You cannot smoke unless there's somebody with you, and I don't have time to stay with you!" And I took the cigarettes and the matches and I put them inside the table so she could not get to them, and I went about my business.

And then, I don't remember now whether it was a day or two later, but she was being discharged, and I don't remember now whether she was going out on a litter or whether she was going in a wheel chair, but I... usually you say good-bye to your patients, but I do remember what she said to me, "I know that you are glad that I am going." And I can't remember right now what my reply was but naturally she remembered that incident and she remembered that the nurse was angry, and so that was then.

Q: Were you glad that she was going?

A: No, because I had no more trouble so that didn't matter but you see I didn't need any more trouble. All I needed to do was take care of my patients. I don't even remember who was on with me; whether there was a corps man on or anyone else. I don't remember that at all.

Q: Do you remember, was there any civilian volunteers who came in to help the hospital?

A: Oh, they did in the other parts. Yeah, they did in the other parts. And the reason I know that is because that evening, we were on duty in those days like from 7 to 7 and we'd have a few hours off and then someone else would relieve us, and then we would come back like from 2 to 7. Uh, but this evening at 7:00 the night nurse came on and her name was Alma Aison.

Q: Do you remember how to spell the last name?

A: A-S-S-O-N. And her married name is... is it Russell? DeShane... capital DE, capital SHANE. Uh, so Alma came on duty and I gave her the report. But I was so frightened. I was so terrified to walk 50 yards, or whatever it was, from the hospital over to the nurses quarters, because by now it was dark. It was 7:00. And I had the feeling that if the military police said to me, "Halt! Who goes there!" that I would be speechless; that I would not be able to reply, and he would surely shoot me. So rather than go to the nurses quarters, I remained on the board and slept in the same bed that night.

And sometime during the wee hours of the morning, I don't remember if it was midnight, 1:00, or whatever, but the night supervisor was making rounds and of course she saw that I was in my night gown. I was in the office with Alma, and she said, "Well, since you're up you take charge of the nurses ward and I'll take Miss Asson to another ward to relieve for supper." (or

whatever.) So this is what happened, and when she came back I went back to bed.

And then of course, I was up in time in the morning, to uh....go back to the nurses quarters to get a fresh uniform. And Alma Asson and I were standing on the porch, or lanai, as we called it, just chatting. And she gave me the report and this must have been about 6:00 in the morning, or thereabouts. We were chatting, when an enemy plane flew over Tripler Hospital, fired on the dental clinic, and when we heard that, we both opened the screen door to the hallway, and we threw ourselves on the floor. And there we were on the floor talking to one another, and I remember exactly what she said to me, because this was so important. She said, "Have you heard from your boyfriend in the mainland?" and I said, "Yes." and told her about the letter that he had sent. And I said, "Since you speak Spanish, tell me what does 'Uno te auvilla' (???) mean?" She said, "Oh, that means you will never be forgotten." And then she also said, "Did you have that rosary blessed that he had given you?" and I said, "No." She was Catholic and she was a very devote Catholic. She said, "Let me have it. I'll have it blessed and give it back to you." which she did. So that was our conversation while we were lying down on the corridor floor.

Now I don't know how long we were there, whether 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, I don't know. But I went into the nurses quarters and I changed my uniform again and then I came on duty, back to the womens ward. However, I did see patients on the 7th, all the whole porch lined up with patients. I would say maybe within two hours and later on in the day. All I know it was a busy place, and when we went to the nurses quarters for dinner, then you heard these various stories.

And also, the next night and thereafter, I went back to the nurses quarters. I guess maybe I wasn't that afraid, or maybe I went with someone. I don't remember that. But I do remember that when we were in the nurses quarters, we had to put the dark blankets on the windows to keep the lights out. And any time we opened a door to go out in the corridor, we had to turn the light out. And we had flashlights with blue paper around it.

And I don't remember right now whether it was that night, the second, or when, but up on the hill overlooking any of the windows, we say this great big fire and a cross burning. And as we later learned, it was the Ku Klux Klan that were burning this cross up there. Uh... this is how the story went; the cross was being burned by the Ku Klux Klan. So this was another frightening experience. Uh, what else do you want to ask me?

Q: Oh, just anything you remember about the period.

A: Well, uh, that takes you into...

Q: Let me ask you this. There were I suppose, after the attack, a lot of rumors going around about what was going to happen next, and speculation about ...

A: Invasion.

Q: So, why don't you tell me about some of the rumors that were going around, and how people felt about it, and some of the

preparations that were being made if you can remember any.

A: Right at this moment, I don't believe that I can tell you, except that there were rumors. And I do know that we were expecting the Japanese to return. But when you're with a group of people, and no matter how frightened you are, it just seems the fact that you have all your buddies around you sort of helps. You're not alone. All I know is that I was very very... uh...frightened. I was petrified... but I did my duties. I carried on.

Q: Despite the circumstances.

A: mm hmm.

Q: What one thing more than any other, stands out in your mind about the Pearl Harbor attack. Just any incident at all.

A: About the Pearl Harbor attack...

Q: Or about the day of December 7th, 1941.

A: Now, after all these years, I really don't know. I guess I'd have to give it some more thought. I really don't know, except that we were busy, that there was a job to do, and I did whatever had to be done. And the best thing that happened was that six months later, when we knew we were at Midway that this was the turning point, and I began to feel better. And another thing, the infection on my face was of course getting better all the time, but for a good while there I couldn't wear any makeup outside of lipstick. And after six months or so, dating was resumed, and I was an outdoor girl, which meant that I did a lot of dancing, and swimming, and golfing, and it just seemed like life was made up of not only work but a lot of good times.

Q: What would you say was the ratio of men to women in the service was then?

A: Oh my goodness, you had all the dates you wanted! (laughter) You had many many choices! ... before the War and of course during the War.

Q: Well, it sounds like you've enjoyed life through all of the difficult times as well as the good times.

A: Right.

Q: Okay. Well, thank you very much. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

A: Well thank you. So now we....are you off??