

Celeste Pilvelis Brauer #35
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Q: Would you tell us, Mrs. Brauer, where you went to nursing school?

A: I graduated from Philadelphia General Hospital, Philadelphia, PA, in 1938.

Q: What was your first job after graduation?

A: After I graduated, I went to the Emergency Hospital in Washington, D.C., because I was only about 21 and I couldn't take my State Boards until May. I graduated in February, and I couldn't take my State Boards until May. But the fact that our hospital was recognized and had reciprocity with various... in fact, actually, with all the states...United States, I was permitted to take the position before I took my State Boards. So I was at the emergency room in Washington, D.C., which is only a few blocks, incidently, from the White House, Pennsylvania Avenue...and the White House. And somebody approached me one day and said, "Why don't you go out to Walter Reed and check on nursing there?" And so I did go out to Walter Reed and the fact that I think you had to be 22, at that time, to be a Regular Army Nurse. But I went out and I was a civilian under the Civilian Conservation Corps. I worked as a civilian nurse at Walter Reed. Then I took my physical for the Army shortly after that and became a Regular Army Nurse.

Q: How did you get to Hawaii?

A: After I was there I worked... funny part about it was when I told the girls I was going in the Army, I said, "Well gosh girls, I'm not going to have any more women to take care of." The only funny part of it was they put me in the obstetrical ward at Walter Reed for a short time, and after that I was at the officer's ward, which they called 'The Country Club' at Walter Reed. They do ask you when you're there if you have to put in for several places for overseas duty, and one of my choices was Hawaii. And after I was there about a year... let's see I went over there in '38... uh, I was there about a year and a half and I was sent to Hawaii in June of 1940. In fact we had a wonderful trip over. We sailed from New York on the [USAT] *Republic* and had a day on each side of the Canal... Panama Canal, and had a whole week in San Francisco. Then we had the World's Fair there in 1940, so we just had a ball. There was only two of us, young nurses, and 26 Air [Corps] Officers from Kelly [Field]. So...

Q: Sounds like an interesting social life!

A: Oh we had a wonderful time... wonderful trip to Hawaii.

Q: Where did you first catch sight of Hawaii? Do you know what part of the Islands you saw first?

A: I'm trying to think where the boats.... You know, at that time when you went to Hawaii it was just fantastic because they had the bands out to meet you. They had sent the... everybody knew who was coming over, so there were quite a few people on the docks to meet everybody. In fact, I had a telegram sent over, aboard ship, because I happened to know Father Rhine at Walter Reed quite well, and he sent me a wire saying, "We'll have the band out to meet you Celeste." I can't remember exactly where the ships docked at that time. See, they're not using them too much now...

Q: Where were you first assigned?

A: I was assigned to Tripler General [Hospital].

Q: What were your duties there?

A: Well, the funny part of it is, the fact that I was in OB in at Walter Reed, and apparently had a very good record in obstetrics and gynecology, they assigned me to obstetrics again. Of course, after the War started I had charge of the gas gangrene cases.

Q: Well, tell me a little bit about what life was like before the attack on December 7th.

A: Before the attack? Well, life before the attack was simply wonderful... just fantastic! Uh, things... the Army was a little different than it is today. Everything was quite social. People had to dress for dinner after 6:00, you know, the men... the officers had to wear their white tuxes, and we always wore long dresses for dinner. In fact, you had to wear a long dress just to go to the movies... shows, if you were going on any of the Bases. So we had a very very nice social life.

Q: And what Ward were you assigned to at Tripler?

A: Well, as I told you, I was on obstetrics, but then after the War started, I uh... and all the casualties came in, and we had all the casualties come... we had practically all the casualties from the Pearl Harbor, we got them from Hickam. The fact that we were the General Hospital, see Schofield was a station hospital, so that most of the casualties were sent to Tripler General [Hospital].

Q: Let me ask you, what were doing on the morning of December 7th?

A: Well, the night before the attack, we happened to be at Hickam Field, at a party at Hickam Field. And I was so happy because that morning I was assigned to day duty, Sunday, December the 7th, and I was on duty when we had the attack. And I was quite pleased about that because I ... you know, the fact that I was right there to help with all the casualties coming in. And as I say they were simply terrible because you know, we had people with practically their heads blown off, or their arms... a lot of amputations.

Q: Where did you work.... or... let me back up a little. That morning, what was the first inkling you had that something out of the ordinary was happening?

A: Well, the fact that uh... I mean this came so sudden actually, you know about ten... well, a quarter to eight. We were barely on duty, you know, about 45 minutes when the planes came over and all the casualties came in. So we were just so busy, without thinking we went to work.

Q: But, did you hear any of the bombing?

A: Well then someday said, "The Japs! The Japs are here! The Japs have attacked!" And we did have some shrapnel hit the Hospital. It was on the roof of the Hospital.

Q: Where did you work once the casualties started coming in?

A: Well, we worked for several days... I mean any place we were needed. And as I say, after things settled down after a few days... two or three days later, we were assigned to special duty, and as I said I was the with the gas gangrene cases. Fortunately, we only had eleven. But it was a very busy place because those people had to have deep x-ray therapy twice a day and so... which meant getting them out of bed and onto litters, and into the x-ray department and it was extremely busy. And we only had... one of the lieutenants had an amputation. That was the only amputation, due to the gas gangrene. He had to have his leg amputated.

Q: Can you remember much of what you did on the 7th itself?

A: No, I was so busy! We were extremely busy. In fact, we were on duty practically, well, 24 hours you know continuously. You just think about going off duty, because we were so very, very busy.

Q: How long was before you got a break?

A: Well, our nurses home was very... adjoined the hospital, so we could get over there. But as I say, most people just stayed on duty and worked. And I never wore very much make up, but one thing that I did like was lipstick, and all I could think about, I don't even have a lipstick. I don't think I had a lipstick for three days. So we just kept extremely busy.

Q: How long did you stay at Tripler?

A: I was at Tripler... from the time I went over in 1940?

Q: Yeah.

A: I arrived, I think it was about July of 1940 and I was there until June... I was married June 3rd of 1942, after the attack.

Q: That's just about the time of the Battle of Midway.

A: That was the Battle of Midway. And uh... several of the, as I say, we had a wedding planned and many of our friends could not attend because they were busy... the Battle of Midway, and they were off flying.

Q: So, what was the general atmosphere like among military people in Hawaii between Pearl Harbor and Midway? Were there a lot of rumors going around... uh... was there a lot of tension in the air?

A: Well after... it's surprising how things settled after that sneak attack which uh... I mean I don't know if Washington, or if Roosevelt had any inkling that we were going to have a problem or not. But it was surprising how everybody chipped in and worked hard and settled down. I think that probably everybody was in such a state of shock, they didn't even think about too much except keeping busy and working.

Q: You know, looking back on it, is there any one particular thing, any one particular memory that remains vivid in your mind about the Pearl Harbor attack?

A: Well I... uh... the fact that it was such a sudden attack was very, very surprising. I didn't think it would be possible that such a thing could happen so quickly.

Q: So, do you have anything else that you can add about that period?

A: Oh, of course we had the blackouts. You do know that we had a blackout for about... I don't think they lifted the blackout for about nine months because even after I was married, even our apartment, all the windows were blackened. You know, we couldn't open the windows; there were no lights.

Q: How would you black out your apartment? What would you do?

A: Well, the fact that the windows were all painted black, and you'd have to be very careful opening the doors that there wouldn't be any lights showing. I don't think many people smoked outdoors. People tried to be very cautious for a long time because you never knew whether or not the Japanese were going to return.

Q: What about when you drove around at night, did the headlights on the cars.....?

A: No, we did not have the headlights on the car for a long time; as long as I can remember... while I was there.

Q: What about flashlights at night?

A: Well, if we used any in the hospital we'd have to be very very careful. But I can't even remember using a flashlight myself. I think the lights were probably turned down very, very low and unless you wanted to look at something very carefully, I don't think you'd need your flashlight. And most of our treatments

were all done during the daytime, as far as transporting people to the x-ray departments and so forth. We had... of course so many of the doctors, it was surprising what people did during that attack. We had so many people volunteer. A lot of your very, very famous doctors volunteered from the United States, you know, from New York especially, uh, to come over and help as much as they can. In fact in the gas gangrene cases they were the ones that thought about doing all the debridement. You know, we had to debride all those legs and pack them with sulfadiazine, or one of the sulfa drugs, plus the (?)therapy.

Q: What was one of the words you used, debride?

A: Debridement. They debrided.

Q: How do you spell it?

A: D-E-B-R-I-D-E-M-E-N-T. Debridement.

Q: And what does that entail?

A: Well, cleaning out the wound. And you did that every day, and repacked it with your sulfadiazine, one of your sulfa drugs. And as I say, it was miraculous, the fact we only had the one amputation. It was actually most unusual, you know, you usually lose most of those gas gangrene cases or you would have to have amputations. So, we were extremely lucky. I mean, you think of the dirty wounds, you know the fact that the wounds were so very, very dirty from the shrapnel and so forth.

Q: Well, it sounds like you had an interesting period of your life there.

A: Very interesting. And I was glad that I was there, and happy to help as much as I could. I will add the fact that my family was very disappointed with the fact that I was going to be married in June. They felt that I should have stayed and helped as long as I could. See, at that time, if the nurses were married, they were automatically dependent, became dependents and uh, they had to be evacuated. So I was evacuated to the States in September of 1942, but I barely got home when they asked me to return to the Service. Of course when I wrote to Al and asked him what he thought, he said no he wanted me to stay home and do as much as I could in the States. Because the hospitals were very busy because we lost a lot of the nurses in the States, and he felt that there could have been a possibility that we wouldn't have been stationed together. And shortly after that, you know, they changed the law... well, shortly after I was married, maybe 3 or 4 months, where when the nurses were married they automatically stayed in the Army. They were not discharged because they were losing too many of their Regular Army Nurses through marriage.

Q: O.K. well thank you. I appreciate your coming up here and sharing your memories with us.

A: Yes, I enjoyed it very much and I was happy to meet you.

Q: O.K., well same here.

A: Thank you very very much.