A Veterans Oral History

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Narrator

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Interviewer

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SM: Hi, this is Stephanie Manesis, interviewer. I am interviewing Mrs. Ruth Hemm, h-e-m-m, in West Fargo, North Dakota. It is May 10, 2011, and it's approximately eleven o'clock a.m. Mrs. Hemm, can you tell me a little bit about your background growing up?

RH: I was born in June 1921, to my parents, Eugene and Emma Kickertz, near Davenport, North Dakota. I'm fifth in a line of six children. I have four older brothers and a younger brother. I went to a country school at Davenport. That's where I started. My parents, being tenants, they moved from Davenport to Wheatland, North Dakota, or it was near Casselton. And they lived there for, I think it was 12 years. Then they moved down to Chaffee, North Dakota, where they purchased their first farm. I was educated in a one-room school. And from there I went to the Lincoln High School in Casselton, and graduated from there in 1939. From high school, I enrolled into nurse's training at the Bismarck Evangelical Hospital in 1939 and graduated there in 1942.

SM: How do you spell your maiden name Kickertz?

RH: K-i-c-k-e-r-t-z.

SM: Did your parents move to Chaffee after you graduated from high school in Casselton?

RH: Yes.

SM: So you graduated from high school in 1939?

RH: Right.

SM: Tell me about the Bismarck Evangelical Nurses' Hospital.

RH: Well it was a Christian hospital owned by the Evangelical Church. And I started there the 4th of September in 1939 and graduated the 7th of September in 1942. We had to complete three years right to the day.

I think there were 29 girls in my class that started. You had three-months' probie period; and if you passed that, then you were accepted into the school the next year. Three of our girls didn't make it. The rest did. And I enjoyed my training.

It was different, my first experience to be away from home. And 200 miles back in 1939-40 was a long ways because you just didn't go back and forth. Being my folks lived on a farm, they didn't have a telephone. So there was no way that I could call home and talk to them. We started in September and my first trip home was in April of the next spring. So I hadn't been home in a long time, although my folks did come out once to see me.

My training was hard for me. I had never been into a hospital other than to visit and that was just once. So I was walking into this blind but I wanted to be a nurse. That was the thing I wanted and that's what my mother wanted me to do. So I did make it. And for most parts, I enjoyed it. I was very shy and very quiet. I kind of took everything that was handed to me and just accepted it. I did very well in book learning, but bedside patient. Bedside nursing was hard for me to get used to, taking care of the people. And well, I guess I just didn't have the personality for it because I was so quiet. Like the other girls would grin and chat, and I'd just kind of sit backwards and let it go.

SM: So did you have to work real hard to be more outgoing was that it?

RH: Yes, in time you just learned to do that. You learned to be more outgoing and joke with them. I was very business-like and that's what I thought nursing was. You know, you take care of your patients. You learn, experience teaches you a lot.

SM: What inspired you to go into nursing, besides the fact that your mother wanted you to be a nurse?

RH: I really can't answer that, other than the fact that she wanted me to be a nurse; and it probably was the cheapest education at that time and the best that you could get for a girl. Like my tuition for three years was $100.

You got your uniforms and, of course, you had your lodging. You lived in the nurses' quarters, and that was very structured, and you got up at six o'clock in the morning and you went to bed at ten o'clock at night because that was lights out. You did your studying and you worked. It was different than what you are at home and what college is nowadays.

That $100 covered your three-years' tuition, got your uniforms. Oh yes and then we got an allowance each month. The first year we got $2 a month; the second year you got $3 a month; and the third year you got $5 a month. And you had the privilege of leaving it in. You could take it and use it, or you could leave it in and that would pay for your books. So that's what most of us did because 1939, the economics was bad. And so there were a lot of things that you couldn't afford and you made do with what you had.

SM: So your $100 included your tuition and your uniform, plus they took an allowance out of there?

RH: We got an allowance from the hospital, yes. Then you had your living quarters. You lived in the nurses' home. It was all there. You got your meals.

SM: And you paid extra for that?

RH: No, that was included. People don't believe that.

SM: That is absolutely unbelievable and then what about your books? You had to pay extra for your books?

RH: No, if you left your allowance in, by the end of your three years, you probably got the allowance from about the last four months of your training. That would have paid for your books, but you could buy a book for $7 or $5. Now my daughter-in-law, who is a nurse, said you couldn't even buy a book for $100 now. So it was different.

SM: I'm curious growing up. Do you remember wanting to be a nurse when you were younger or did your mother talk about it or at what age did you sort of think about being a nurse?

RH: I think in high school. Yes, because two years of Latin was required at that point in time. You had to take geometry. I did chemistry and all those classes. That was just part of the curriculum, but I could never figure out why I needed Latin. Never did me any good or anyone else, but other than that, I don't know. I just wanted to be a nurse and that was it.

I don't think I even knew what the girls wore or what they did. When we started our probie period, we wore blue uniforms with white collar and cuffs. After three months, we got our caps and we started wearing white uniforms. The caps were our "dignity." So you were instructed to wear those caps and you treasured them, boy. You worked hard to get them and we were always told, "You don't ever drop your cap on the floor because that's dropping your dignity." If you can tell me why, I don't know, but that's what it was.

SM: When did you start having hands-on care with the patients during your training period?

RH: We started in September. I think we went on duty and workedtwo-and-half hours a day the end of October. We weren't there for very long. But the two-and-half hours a day, we'd either work 7:00 to 9:30 or 4:30 to 6:00, would that be right? It was two-and-half hours, anyway. You had classes in there. So you were busy from when you got up in the morning, six o'clock. We had to be at breakfast at 6:30. Then we had chapel and you either went to your classes or you went on duty for just those two-and-half hours.

After you got your cap and your probie period was done, then you worked longer, like 7:00 to 10:30 or 4:30 to 7:00, or something like that. And weekends sometimes you would work – not sometimes; it depended on your schedule. You would work maybe eight hours.

By the time you were a senior, you worked eight hours a day plus your classes that you had. So you were busy. Just talk to these old gals, they'll tell you how different it was then. I know Mary used to say, "I just can't believe that this is what you did." Ours was a three-year hospital plan. The only four-year plans in those days were at the University of Minnesota and the University of North Dakota.

SM: Otherwise it was three years for an RN?

RH: In the hospital, but at the universities, it was four years.

SM: How would you rate your training, overall, by the time you graduated?

RH: Well when you compare the training now to what we did, we had a lot more bedside nursing. We had to apply our book learning to our bedside nursing. And you just worked hand-in-hand.

SM: So you graduated in September 1942. Tell me what happened next.

RH: The hospitals in those days used their nurses. When you got to be a senior, you were given a lot of responsibility. After our classes were done, that would be in May sometime, I was given the job of being the afternoon supervisor at the hospital. I worked from 3:00 to 11:00, and I was in charge. We had just three floors at the hospital. That was in everything, but the obstetrics was separate and that wasn't included in this. Several of the girls were asked to be charge nurses on the floors. We learned how to be responsible.

After I finished training in September, I started doing the afternoon supervisor. Here you were in charge of these kids that you had been working side-by-side with, and then you were in charge of them. Each year they picked a different senior to do it, and why I got it I have no idea, but I did. After I graduated, I stayed on with the same job, and I worked there for it was six or eight months, something like that.

I had brothers that were living up on the Iron Range near Hibbing; and so I worked up there in the hospital at Grand Rapids. And that was general duty and I worked there for a year. During that time, I had enlisted in the Army. So from there, Grand Rapids, I came back home for a while, and then I went into the Army in October of 1940.

SM: Forty-four or forty-three?

RH: That was 1944.

SM: So, tell me where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

RH: I can tell you exactly where I was. We had been on duty. There were no televisions in those days, of course, and we had a living room on the main floor of the nurses' quarters; and in that was this big radio. We had been at supper, and there were several of us. We were on duty and we had been at supper, and we had time, so we went into the living room just to relax and chat for a little bit. President Roosevelt was speaking, and he gave this address about, "and this day shall live in infamy," and I've never forgotten that. You stopped and you thought, "What's ahead?" We all had brothers. Anyway, that's when we heard about what had happened at Pearl Harbor. I can still hear Roosevelt saying, "and this day shall live in infamy."

SM: Did you have brothers that serve in World War II?

RH: Three.

SM: Did any of them make it back?

RH: Two.

SM: So what was your brother's name?

RH: My brother's name was Vern, and he was in infantry. He was killed in France. My oldest brother, Ervin, was in the Navy, and he was stationed in San Diego. He only went overseas once and that was on a ship that took troops over and brought them back. And my other brother was Roger. He was in the Engineer Corps and he was stationed in the European Theater. I think he was over there about a year but he came back.

There were a lot of families where there were four children in … with some people there were a lot more. And I was criticized for going in. They said, "Wasn't it hard enough for your parents that the boys were in and you had to go, too?" I saw no reason why I shouldn't go and most of the girls felt that way. And we certainly didn't go in for the glory of it. You went in to serve your country and do what you had to do.

SM: When you heard about Pearl Harbor did you have a notion at that moment that you might want to join the military?

RH: I don't think right then but by the time that we finished training, I think so. Most of us had brothers that were in and it was just something to do. Of course, it had a good build-up. It was led to be an interesting life and it was. It was different, something that you'll never see again, and hope we don't.

I don't think I thought about it right away, but some of the other girls were going in. And girls that were older than and had graduated, a lot of them were going in, too. I don't think anybody went in for the glory of it because you didn't know what was going to happen. Probably if you have known you wouldn't have gone in. I don't know what else to tell you. It was just one of those things.

SM: When you were in Minnesota, were you in Hibbing or were you in Grand Rapids?

RH: I was at Grand Rapids.

SM: How long were you in Grand Rapids before you decided to join the Army?

RH: Oh, I think right after I got there, but it took a while. You didn't enlist and– to begin with I was 10 pounds overweight. I had to lose that and I lost it.

SM: So they told you that when you actually went to go enlist?

RH: When I went to go for a physical, I had to lose 10 pounds and I did in three months. It wasn't hard. I had worked up there a year and then I quit and came home. I had to wait about three months before I was accepted in.

SM: Did you go to the Army office in Duluth or was there one in Grand Rapids?

RH: No, I went to Fort Snelling. That's where I was.

SM: Do you remember where you enlisted? Was it in Grand Rapids or was it back home?

RH: I think it was back home that I filled out all the papers and then I went to Fort Snelling where I started.

SM: So you started in October of 1944 at Fort Snelling and you had boot camp?

RH: We had to enlist at Fort Snelling and then we were sent to Camp Carson, Colorado, for our basic training.

SM: How long were you at Fort Snelling then, just for a few days?

RH: No, for a couple of months, three months, I think.

SM: And then your basic training was in Camp Carson?

RH: Camp Carson.

SM: Colorado?

RH: Colorado, yes, that's right outside of Colorado Springs.

SM: During that three months in Fort Snelling, what were you doing there?

RH: We didn't stay at Fort Snelling. We just were sent there and then we were sent on to Camp Carson.

SM: How long was your basic training?

RH: Three months.

SM: And it was just women together in basic training, right?

RH: Army nurses.

SM: While you were in basic training, were you doing any hands on at a nearby hospital?

RH: Not basic. no.

SM: How rigorous was your basic training?

RH: We did a lot of marching and a lot of exercising. We thought it was vigorous but II really don't know what to say. To be truthful with you, I can't remember a lot of things we did but we did a lot of exercise. We did a lot of self-defense and we did a lot of marching. And we attended classes but we did no nursing at all. From Camp Carson we were sent to Fitzsimons General in Denver.

SM: How many women were with you in basic training about?

RH: I have no idea.

SM: At that point where you keeping in contact with any of your nurses back home from the Bismarck Hospital?

RH: Not then. no.

SM: Do you know if any of your other nurses in your class that ended up joining the military?

RH: Yes, there was 11 that were in the Army and in the Navy. I don't know that any of them were in the Air Force, but I know that they were in the Army and the Navy. Some of them had married and had families; and several of them worked in the West Coast in the defense plants. They had emergency rooms, and I don't know if they had hospitals at these defense plants, but that's where several of them worked.

SM: When you were back home and you were waiting to enlist, and you said some people gave you a hard time about choosing to enlist because you had brothers in the military, was it people in town that would say something to you or was it relatives, or who said something to you?

RH: It would be different friends that would say, "Why are you doing that?" I know that a lot people thought that but they didn't say anything out to me.

A lot of it came to you second-hand. Which if they were going to say it, why didn't they tell you outright?

SM: Yes, not really small town America though is it? Directness is not always their forte. How did your parents feel about your enlisting?

RH: They didn't object. It was hard, of course, but they wished me well.

SM: And your two brothers that were back home?

RH: Alfred, my younger brother, was home and Vern was the older of the two so he was the one that was drafted. I think Alfred was still in high school.

And my other two brothers they were already working up on the Iron Range. They were working in the mines up there. They went from Minnesota, where Vern went from North Dakota.

SM: So Vern went from North Dakota and then you had two brothers that were in the Iron Range that went ahead and enlisted, is that it?

RH: No, well they either enlisted or were drafted.

SM: And you had one other brother, didn't you have five brothers, all total?

RH: Yes, but he was married and had a child, and he didn't pass the physical. They found a heart murmur and he died two years ago … he was 93 years old. They never found the heart murmur after that.

SM: He had a full life, thankfully.

RH: He never could figure that out. When he had this physical, he didn't have it that he knew of. And he went to Fort Snelling for his physical and they found a heart murmur there.

So in one way he was glad and in another way he felt like, "I should have gone, too; the rest of them went." But he already had a wife and son with her. My older brother was married but they didn't have any children so that made a difference, too.

SM: Did any of your high school friends enlist in the military or were they working in a manufacturing plants or . . .

RH: You mean the women?

SM: Yes, the women.

RH: I know there was three of them that went in as Army nurses. About the rest of them, I just don't know.

SM: And those three also went to the same Bismarck Hospital? They went somewhere else for training?

RH: Yes.

SM: So you were at Fitzsimons for how long?

RH: We got there in December, I suppose; and we left the end of March, so we were there about three months.

SM: Tell me about Fitzsimons.

RH: Well it was a big place. At that point in time, it was a main hospital and that had been a permanent place; and then they apparently built all these outlying wards. A lot of the GIs were there on a temporary basis. And most of them that were there were recuperating and ready to be discharged. And it was busy. As for its locale, it was a beautiful place. We were treated real well and I enjoyed it there. I worked on a medical ward where they had been injured and some of them it was physical injuries, some mental. They were kept there until they were ready to go home.

I'll never forget one man. The wards were big. They were like 24 beds in these wards and separated with curtains. You'd come in there and I worked nights. We worked 7:00 to 7:00 at nights, and I remember coming into this ward, and he was just a young man in his early 30s, I suppose, maybe he wasn't that old, and he said, "Now when you come in at night, don't you touch me." His medications were 8:00, 12:00, 4:00 and 8:00, so there was a midnight, twice at night that you had to wake them. They had bedside lamps but they were hooked at the head of the bed so there was no way you could turn them on without disrupting. And he said you weren't supposed to turn that ward light on, so you put a flashlight in your pocket and turn that on so that gave you a light. Anyway he said, "Don't you touch me."

He had been over in Italy and he had spent a lot of time at the front and he had spent a lot of time in foxholes. And when you're in a foxhole, you're always on the alert. And sometimes these fellows would come sliding in; and if they didn't have the password, or whatever they were supposed to do, you'd probably think they were the enemy, and do the best thing. He said,

"I'm just afraid if you nurses come in at night and touch me, I'm just liable to do something to you." And the sad part of this, this young man was going home to a wife and three small children. And he said, "This is what worries me. You know," he said, "I've got two little boys; and you know what they're like." And he said, "What if I hurt one of them?" I've often wondered about that man, how he ever came out. And he wasn't alone. There was so many of them that were in the same shape. But this was one fellow that I really remembered because he was so afraid he was going to hurt one of the nurses or one of the attendants there, if they just touched him because he'd wake up out of a sound sleep. So that was one of my first experiences where I learned what the war is really like.

SM: And how would you give him his meds at midnight without touching him?

RH: You'd call.

SM: You'd call his name.

RH: Yes, I would and you didn't dare bump the bed, because that would be the same thing, you know? Yes, as I remember, he was a very light sleeper and all you had to do is call him. But the other guys you could go in and shake them and they didn't always respond. This one man, I don't know why I remember him, but he was so afraid he was going to hurt somebody and what am I going to do about that?

SM: So it really hit home the magnitude of what these men would be living with?

RH: Yes and you don't forget that overnight. And these men lived with it for a long time. When you read about it in the papers, you could just picture what these men now that come back from Afghanistan and places like that, what it must be like. It's hard.

SM: The tremendous trauma it's hard to imagine them even being able to come back and live in society.

RH: Yes.

SM: Any other stories that stick out when you were there in Colorado?

RH: It was pretty much routine. When you're off duty, there were different organizations that always had sponsors for something and they had tickets for this. If you were free, there were so many activities in the city of Denver that you could go to like I remember seeing Marian Anderson, this Negro

singer. That was one of her first concerts that she had given alone because of being that she was black. And so that was kind of interesting. But there were a lot of things that you could do and the public was very supportive of all the nurses.

SM: Did you live in some sort of dormitories at the hospital in nurses' quarters?

RH: Yes, we lived in nurses' quarters there. I don't know what they did before but we had a private room.

SM: Did you have a curfew as nurses or at that point was there no curfew?

RH: I can't remember that there was a curfew. It's just that you had to be on duty on time and it was really a nice place to be. When we were free, there were a lot of places that you could go sightseeing and do different things.

SM: So the men that came there were they on a longer-term rehab, is that it?

RH: It just depended on the person and what they had done. Yes.

SM: And were some of them sent back to the front?

RH: I don't think from there. I think they were discharged.

SM: What kind of injuries did you see?

RH: Ours was mostly a medical ward, mostly ours was nerves and stuff like that … mental. We didn't have any patients that were – but they were recuperative. Maybe they had fractures and things like that that. We really didn't have any people that had a lot of injuries that weren't going to – ours was mostly medical.

SM: Now medical did that include things like recovering from malaria or dysentery had that?

RH: Yes, we had that stuff.

SM: What about were using just sulfa or did you have penicillin at your hospital at that time?

RH: Oh, I don't think there was penicillin. I think sulfa was all.

SM: Then in March of 1945, you shipped out and tell me where you went to.

RH: We went to San Francisco. We went out there by train. I think we were on that train for two days, something like that. We were parked in some station for overnight – no, that was on the way home. I think it took us two days, we were on a separate car and they hooked you on the back of the train and that's how you got hauled out there. And we were taken to San Francisco to Pier 17, I think it was, and that's the way we loaded aboard ship to go to the South Pacific.

SM: Did you know, before you got on the train, that you were going to the South Pacific?

RH: Yes, we knew we were going to the Pacific Theater. Our unit was told that we were supposed to go to Europe, but the war was coming to an end over there so they sent us to the Pacific.

SM: And did you know you were going to Manila?

RH: No, not right away.

SM: Not until you were on the ship and you found out later on the ship?

RH: We all had a pretty good idea where we were going. After all you just had summer clothing and that's what you took with you. Yes. Well let's see, the 1st of March we got onboard ship. And we spent 32 days on that ship going overseas.

SM: Thirty-two days?

RH: Yes, ma'am.

SM: Tell me about the ship trip.

RH: It was a beautiful ship. It was a luxury liner that had been converted into a troop ship. It was the USS Monterey and it was a sister ship to the (USS) Queen Mary and the (USS) Queen Elizabeth. And there were, I guess, 3,000 troops onboard ship. They took troops over and brought troops back.

SM: So, obviously, it wasn't just nurses. It was men as well.

RH: There were 311, 312, and 313 General Hospital on there and then there was a bunch of GIs that were . . .

SM: So what does that mean, 311, 312, 313?

RH: That was the name of the hospital. I was with the 312s and we were all sent to Manila and, as I remember, we were on the north side of Manila. The three hospital units were all in one group. I've got to get this straight now. I think the 311 was general surgery, 312 was medical and surgery, and 313 was mental – it was more psychiatry.

SM: Those were all from Fitzsimons, or they were from different hospitals?

RH: They came from different places. There was three different hospital units.

SM: So what were the conditions like? A luxury liner was the conditions really good on the ship?

RH: Well, it would have been, but they had a section 8 which is psychiatry part, that's what our nurses were in. The psychiatric ward was where they had all these – well, the portholes weren't barred but you – there were bars – the doors were that you could lock.

SM: Was that to keep the women safe on the ship from the men?

RH: Well no. When they brought the soldiers back from the foreign service most of the people psychiatric patients and so that's what they were in. And our nurses' quarters were in that section.

There were ten bunks. We had three beds, yes, three, six, and then twelve. There were twelve bunks in that room that we were in and there was a bathroom for that. Of course, all the doors were open and they were locked so they weren't shut but after when they got the patients to come back, they had to use those. But . . .

SM: So your actual living quarters were where they normally kept the psychiatric patients?

RH: Yes, that's where we were in that section.

SM: And was it for security reasons to protect you from the men on the ship, or was it just where they had you stay?

RH: No, it was just where we had to stay. The ships were in sections. I can't explain how it was but, anyway, they could close off that section. If there was a bomb scare or anything like that, they could close off those sections – like there was doors between the units. I don't know if you understand what I'm talking about.

SM: Yes, that makes sense.

RH: They weren't closed as long as we were there.

SM: Did they have any kind of supervisors to keep an eye on the women because there was a lot of men on ship? Did you have to worry about the men at all?

RH: Well the GIs were on – now this was a big ship, you have to understand, and it seemed like that you never saw the GIs. In fact, you never saw the others unless you were out on the deck or even to chapel, then you saw a lot. But otherwise you were kind of isolated as to where you could go and what you could do.

There wasn't very much to do. You had two meals a day, which was definitely sufficient; and then you had chapel every day and that was always nice. Otherwise, there just wasn't much to do. It got to be long, I learned how to play bridge and I hated it and I still do. But this is what you did. You could go out on the deck and you could walk around but there was so much of it was off limits to where you could go. You could go down to the PX which was down into the hold of the ship, I don't know if that's what they called it but, anyway, it was down there. Otherwise, you were pretty much confined to your deck that you were on.

SM: Was there any fraternization between the GIs and the nurses, or were you discouraged?

RH: No, we never saw them. We saw them in chapel and places like that. That was the only place that you ever saw or got close to the GIs. The officers ate in what had been the VIP dining area when the ship was a luxury liner and led into the dining room for the officers. I don't know where the GIs ate.

SM: What kind of a rank did you have as a nurse?

RH: Second lieutenant.

SM: All nurses were second lieutenant?

RH: You started at that, yes.

SM: Then you could be moved up from there?

RH: Yes, but I didn't move up. In our group we weren't in long enough and if you [unclear] and re-enlisted, then you would have gotten a promotion.

SM: What day did you arrive, approximately, in Manila?

RH: The 2nd of May, so it was 32 days on there.

SM: So President Roosevelt died when you were on the ship?

RH: Yes, we heard it over the intercom the 6th of April. I'm pretty sure that's when it was.

SM: Tell me how did you feel that day?

RH: I think everybody was pretty shocked, you know. But you're out there in the middle of the ocean, what can you do? You wondered what was next … now who's going to be – Truman took over, and I mean it was a very … They had a period of quiet; and I don't remember that anything else was done. It was just – you kind of wondered what's going to happen next and I think now if that kind of thing would happen, we'd worry a little bit more.

SM: Despite his death, were you still pretty confident at that point that the United States was going to win the war? The Allied would win the war?

RH: Oh, I think so.

SM: So you arrived on the 2nd of May, tell me about your experience in Manila.

RH: We were unloaded and hauled in the back of a truck to the north side of Manila where our hospital was supposed to be. As we were driving through Manila, the people were waving and shouting and telling us how glad they were. I don't know if they were glad or if they were hoping that this was the end of everything. We stayed in the quarter – our hospitals weren't set up completely at that time. Two weeks that we lived in what, at one time, had been a boys' school; and so we had quarters in there. We were pretty much confined to quarters, could go out sightseeing if you had some way to get around.

SM: When you first came in, you were greeted by the Filipinos. Were you with the GIs or were the nurses separate?

RH: We were all in this truck and that was all nurses. It was American. It was a troop truck. I guess that's what they called it.

SM: Amongst the GIs? You had the nurses all in one truck is that it?

RH: Yes, it was the nurses. There weren't that many. I don't remember there being any GIs on our truck, I don't think. But we were all headed to this boys' school and I can't even tell you what part of town that was in. But it was a nice place but Manila, itself, was a mess. I think we were there about two weeks before our hospital was ready. And then we were busy. We worked 12-hour shifts. On your free time, you could go sightseeing if you had the way to get around and you did a lot of walking; and once in a while, some kind soul from the motor pool would pick you up and take you where you wanted going to go. And our quarters, there were – I don't know how many people were in our quarters, but it was comfortable. No air conditioning and it got hot over there.

SM: And was it brutally humid, too?

RH: Yes, it was humid.

SM: And when you say, "Manila was a mess," tell me more what you mean by that.

RH: It was in the areas that had been bombed. There was a lot of rubble and, you know, homes were smashed downtown. I remember walking downtown Manila and you walked on one side of the street and then you could look over to the other side and in the middle was all this rubble piled up. One day there were about four or five us. You always went in a group, or at least two or three. You never went alone, but usually it was more. And we were walking along and we were on one side of the rubble and there were a bunch of GIs on the other and all of a sudden I heard somebody say, "Hi Ruth." Here it was a young man from Casselton.

SM: That you knew?

RH: We had gone to high school together.

SM: Oh, my gosh. What was his name?

RH: It was Bing Ries, his name was. He had been stationed in Australia and they were on their way home. And he was a friend of my brother's.

SM: Of Vern, or . . .

RH: Yes, it was Vern. They weren't real close friends but they were friends and knew each other and all this. And I couldn't believe my eyes and he couldn't either. Here we were walking down the street. But he didn't have very long.

We talked about 10-15 minutes and then he had to go because they had been in Manila a couple days and they were on their way home.

SM: Did you say Ries?

RH: I think his name was Irvin Ries, but they called him Bing.

SM: He was shipping out, so you just spoke to him for a few minutes?

RH: Yes and when he got home he said to his mother, "I've never been so glad to see anyone in my life." He hadn't seen anyone from home for so long and there we were. After we got back, he was working in the Cities and had his family down there. Casselton, as so many other places do, has this memorial service every year and Bing's brother and my brother, Vern, were both killed in Europe. I remember that they were the first ones killed from that Casselton area. So the VFW out there is named in their honor. For years we made it a point to go to that memorial service that they have in Casselton. Bing always made it a point, too, brought his wife and family home, and so we usually saw him. And so that was last year.

SM: What did they call the VFW there?

RH: Ries-Kickertz. R-i-e-s. Kickertz.

SM: I bet your mother was thrilled to hear about your news when he got home.

RH: Yes and my mother found out through the Ries'. That's how the folks found out that we had met over there, and it was such a surprise. When I heard somebody yell, "Hey Ruth," what is this?

SM: So tell me about the hospital.

RH: Well, it was I don't even know how many wards it had, but it was pretty well-equipped. I worked on the genital unit, urinary ward with usually just one nurse and then you had attendants that worked with you, and you had your ward officer. I don't know too much about the other wards. I was on this same ward all the while that we were there.

The patients were all good, I mean, they were all very respectful and appreciated that we were all waiting to get out and go home or back to duty again.

SM: So you were at a general hospital, it was not a field hospital?

RH: Yes. The field hospital and then there was the station hospital and the general hospital. That's all [unclear].

SM: And what's the difference between the station hospital and a field hospital?

RH: The field hospital were the ones to see the men right as they came from the battlefield. And then they were transferred to the station hospital and that was for further treatment. When they had recuperated to the point where they didn't need all the special treatment – I mean, they still needed treatment and care, but then they were sent to the general hospital. And from there they usually either went back to the front lines or were sent home.

SM: From the general hospital?

RH: The general hospital, yes.

SM: If you were in the urinary section, you had people who had wounds of the genitals, is that primarily what you were seeing?

RH: Yes, when they had bladder and kidney trouble and stuff like that.

SM: Did many of them get sent back to the front line?

RH: Yes, quite a few. I couldn't say the percentage on it, but a lot of them were anxious to get back to their unit. But others, you know, they wanted to go home.

SM: So you were the only nurse who was working there at one time?

RH: Yes, on our ward. That's how it worked. It was a nurse and I think I had 3-10 nurses, I believe.

SM: How many patients would you have, approximately, in your ward?

RH: Oh, I'd say 25, something like that.

SM: That's a lot.

RH: Yes, but most of them were ambulatory and were able to be up and around. There were no critically ill ones on our patient [unclear]. I don't think we had any that were really bedridden. But they needed medication and they needed attention, and you had to see that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing.

SM: My research showed that penicillin was available in ’43 in some parts of World War II. Was there any penicillin available to you at the time?

RH: I don’t know. I can’t say.

SM: And what did a ward officer do?

RH: He was in charge of the ward.

SM: But he had medical training, he was a physician, doctor?

RH: Oh yes, he was a doctor. They were all physicians.

SM: There was you and the ward officer and then, typically, about three attendants.

RH: Yes, ward-boys they called them.

SM: The attendants were all boys?

RH: Well, yes, but they called them ward-boys. Well they were soldiers. They were GIs.

SM: They were helping out in the hospital?

RH: Yes, they were medics.

SM: So it wasn’t like here where you have a female nursing assistant, typically? It was actually a medic that was there at the hospital?

RH: Yes.

SM: Versus working in the field.

RH: Yes.

SM: So outside of Manila, how many field hospitals were there?

RH: I have no idea. I don’t think there were any field hospitals right close to Manila. But see, they were where the war was – where the battles were going on. There probably were, I don’t know [unclear].

SM: My understanding is that in April, by the time you got there, things were already looking pretty good in the Philippines. Is that correct?

RH: Yes, the war was coming to an end over there.

SM: Any memorable stories at all? Either in the hospital or outside of the hospital, something that you'd like to share that stuck out?

RH: Oh, I don't know. We went to the trial of a Japanese general, General Yamashita. And we did a lot of hitchhiking.

There was about six of us that went. We heard about this trial and they said it was open to the American GIs if you wanted to attend. So somebody got a pass or something, and so we had no way to get there. We started walking and there were the six of us, and here comes this old man. He was an old Filipino. He was an old gentleman, in an old beat-up truck with a box on the back of it and no windows on the cab, and he stopped and he said, "Going this way?" And we say, "Yeah, we're going this way."

SM: You pointed?

RH: And we got on and he took us right to where we wanted to go. So we got right in. This trial was in an old building, and we had to sign in and if you had a camera you were supposed to leave it. I didn't have a camera along and a couple of other girls didn't. But there was one gal and why she did it, I don't know, but she got her camera in there. And was very brave and started taking pictures and she lost her camera.

SM: They took it from her?

RH: They took it from her.

SM: Did you go just the one day?

RH: Yes, that was the only day we could. I guess you could go other days if you were free to go. We couldn't understand anything. You know, they were talking Japanese.

SM: I was going to ask you. Did they have a translator or not?

RH: Well, we heard some of the American officers that would talk, but we never understood. They always had an interpreter sitting there. And so it was just a lot of Japanese talk. This guy was so stoic and I remember his expression never changed and I don't think, as far as we could tell, he never answered to anything.

SM: Really, was he found guilty?

RH: I think he was.

SM: And he was executed wasn't he?

RH: I don't know if he was executed.

SM: Okay.

RH: Anyway, that was kind of interesting. We got there just because somebody heard about this, "Come on let's go," and away we went. And that's the way you toured everything. We we had laundry girls. They were Filipino girls and they would come and they would do your laundry, like your personal laundry and stuff. And they washed them in the water. I suppose it was a lake or a river, and they took them down there. And they had the whitest wash you ever saw. They'd beat the daylights out of it on this rock. And I had a little gal, her name was Deli Vet (sp?). Those lampshades there were made by her uncle. And I brought those back. It was a gift from her.

SM: And she was one of the laundry people, Deli was?

RH: She was one of the laundry girls. I have pictures of that if you want to see them.

SM: I would love to. When we are done here, I would love to see the pictures. So she would come and do your laundry every day or once a week, or . . .

RH: As often as you needed her. She had several girls that she did laundry for.

SM: And did the hospital pay her or did you pay her?

RH: You paid her.

SM: What kind of pay did you get in those days? Do you remember?

RH: It was very little. I had most of mine sent home. I can't remember how much we got over there. You didn't need very much. So after I got home and saw my bank account, I was happy that I did what I did.

SM: Good for you, so you had saved quite a bit?

RH: Yes, I did. But you just didn't need a lot of money over there. In the Philippines you had pesos and I can't remember what their value was, either. But you didn't do a lot of shopping for stuff. There was nothing. To begin with you didn't have any place to put it. And if you sent it home, it didn't always get there. I bought my mother a beautiful mantilla and a few other things. I didn't want to keep them over there because it was so damp. If you had it packed away it would probably get moldy, so I shipped it home and she never got it.

SM: Is a mantilla like a scarf?

RH: It's a scarf. They were handmade and they were just beautiful.

SM: Oh, how sad and she never got it?

RH: She never got it. I know she would have worn it [unclear]. And several of the girls got them and they had wedding plans ahead and that's what they wanted to wear and [unclear]. I know that one gal mailed them home. I don't know if it got there or not. There was trouble with that. What happened to the stuff, I don't know. Stuff that you didn't care about got there, but what you cared about didn't always get there. But there was so many steps before it finally got to where it was going.

SM: Did you go anywhere else outside of Manila or did you pretty much have your day excursions in Manila?

RH: We went by boat over to Corregidor. One of the officers – I don't know if he was from our unit or another unit, had somehow gotten a boat and he was taking as many people. They would go back and forth from Manila to Corregidor, which wasn't very far. So we got to go over there and we toured. I guess we did tour around the island, but we weren't there too long. I can't remember too much about that. We saw Wainwright's cave but I can't remember where that was either.

SM: And what's Wainwright's cave?

RH: He was a general that had served over there and . . .

SM: Oh, the general. Okay.

RH: Yes.

SM: And he had an actual cave, or . . .

RH: That's where his quarters were.

We toured that. There wasn't anything to see, there was no lights. You just had flashlights that you shown around. I don't know why we even went but everyone else was going. You had to hang onto the person in front of you and the person in back of you, so you wouldn't fall off. It was interesting but as far as history … There was a small walkway this way and a walkway that way, which you didn't go to, you just went right straight through it. Oh, we saw Wainwright's cave. Well, whoopee . . .

SM: It wasn't that exciting, huh?

RH: No.

SM: I have a few more questions for you. You were in a general hospital, so how well-prepared did you feel for your nursing experience over there, given what you had in the United States?

RH: It was pretty much the same.

SM: So you felt very prepared?

RH: Yes and you didn't have the facility – that's about all that was different, I mean, you gave the medications. You did to the patients what they had to be done. Most of them were ambulatory. In fact, they were all ambulatory and could take care of themselves, pretty much. And your ward help showed you a lot of respect.

SM: What were the conditions in hospital like compared to back in the States?

RH: Oh, there was no comparison.

SM: Tell me more.

RH: These open buildings and each one had their own bed and they were covered with mosquito bar. There was no privacy. And I can't remember any trouble on the ward that we had. As far as, equipment that you had a lot of times you just made do with what you had, but it worked. And, of course, ours was a recuperative ward. Like the medical wards or the surgical wards, that was a different story. They had good equipment.

SM: What might be an example of equipment that you didn't have that you would have had back in the States?

RH: Well, for our ward I think we got everything we needed but it wasn't always the best equipment. Yes. And you always had a lot of it. But it's hard to compare unless you see it. Everything was open. I mean the wards weren't closed at all. There were no doors or no windows. Everything was just open, just a hole. This is the main hospital, right here and this is the chapel. This shows the patients walking around. This is the main building and these here are the outlying. Some of these are the outlying wards.

When you worked nights there, if you weren't assigned a certain ward, then sometimes you would have three, four wards that you were in charge of at night and you had attendants that took care of it. All of the patients were ambulatory and you saw to it that they got them in. So then you would walk back and forth. And, of course, it was blackout, so there were no lights.

SM: Because they were conserving energy, you mean?

RH: No, because of the war.

SM: Oh, because they didn't want anybody bombing on them?

RH: Yes.

SM: So this is every single night it was blackout?

RH: Every single, yes.

SM: Oh, wow.

RH: And onboard ship it was all blackout, too. All of a sudden you'd hear, "Soldier, drop that cigarette." They'd watch so close.

SM: Really?

RH: Yes, "Dowse that cigarette," is what they'd say.

SM: So at night they were not allowed to smoke?

RH: Well they could smoke but they didn't dare smoke out on the deck of the ship.

SM: Oh, okay.

RH: Or else they kept it hid.

SM: Were you trained in firearms during your basic training?

RH: No, the only thing we were trained for was gas mask. We had to try and get those put on, or kill yourself in the process.

SM: Okay.

RH: Here's – we had to march.

SM: Let me ask this about the hospital where you were. Did you guys do transfusions very often, or were those mostly done in the field hospitals?

RH: On our ward I don't think we ever had any, but our hospital was more of a recuperative one. I'm sure that the surgical and medical wards did them once in a while, but not on my ward, we didn't.

SM: You said there were field hospitals and station hospitals, correct?

RH: Yeas.

SM: Were any of them ever bombed by the Japanese?

RH: Not that I know of. But each hospital had a big red cross on the top of it. I suppose you know that.

SM: And they weren't supposed to bomb them, right?

RH: They did.

SM: They did, did they?

RH: Yes, some were. But I think they weren't in our area. I never heard of any in Manila. But I think on other islands they had trouble with that.

SM: How many hospitals were in the Manila area, do you know?

RH: Well, as far as I know, it was just the three. They had converted and used as a hospital in downtown Manila – like Santo Tomas boys' school. That was mostly for the GIs that were there. Because I managed to get dengue fever when I was over there. There was three of us, for some reason, and dengue fever is a lot like malaria but it isn't recurring, like malaria is. You know, you can be stuck with that for years. And the temperature outside was 105 and our temperatures were 105, so they hospitalized us down in Santo

Tomas, which had been a kind of a military academy before the war. I don't know what they called it, but that was just what the GIs were there, the personnel and different Americans.

SM: So it was called dengue fever?

RH: "Deng-ee."

SM: It's d-e-n-g-u-e?

RH: I guess so.

SM: Tell me about that. How long did you have that?

RH: I was in the hospital, I guess five days. It never recurred after that. But you were just like a dishrag, you know, you'd run this high temperature for so long. And I can't remember what medication they gave us. I've tried to find the history about it but I couldn't find anything, so I don't know what. For malaria they gave you this Atabrine that you had to take. And so you took that. I don't know where we got this dengue fever from but all of a sudden there were three of us that were sick and that was what we had.

SM: Did you take the medication as a preventative medication for the malaria, or only if you got it?

RH: Yes.

SM: You took it as a preventative?

RH: Preventative.

SM: Everyday?

RH: I think it was every day.

SM: What was the best part of being in Manila?

RH: Well the friends you made while you were there. To meet the Filipino people, and you realized that you're an American; they were Philippine and they stuck up for their country. And you couldn't blame them for that. And they were not a bunch of [unclear]. We visited Deli's home another gal and I, she wanted me to meet her family. So we went and they apparently had lived in a beautiful home at one time, but they were living in well I suppose we'd call

it a shack now. And she had four little brothers, plus Deli and a sister and her mother and dad. And there was a grandmother; I don't know whose mother she was. It was either the father or the mother, but she was there. And they were so hospitable and so nice to us and they'd fed us mang, oh, the fruit they grew.

SM: Not plantains, was it? Plantains where they fried; like the banana-type things, no?

RH: No, it was orange, looked like a muskmelon. I was going to say mango, maybe; I can't remember what they called it. They were so apologetic that they were warm, they should be served cold. The mother said, "It should be cold. It should be cold," she kept saying. We had the nicest afternoon with them and sat on the porch. We got into the house, and it was just meager furnishings that they had. They had lived close to the university before that. I don't know how magnificent their home was but I'm sure it was much nicer than what we saw. So that was quite an experience for us – for them to even accept us was something.

SM: Was that the only Filipino home that you were invited into?

RH: Yes, that was the only one.

SM: And were a lot of the Filipinos living in that state of poverty because of losing their homes to bombs and stuff?

RH: They were gone and they had no place to go. Her father was doing manual labor at that point. I don't know what he was doing but he had been a professor before.

SM: And did the university get bombed, is that why he was no longer a professor?

RH: I think probably it was taken over, and where they had to close the school, or something like that. But she went back. I heard from her for years. And she was going to the university in the Philippines, so I don't know if her father got back in or what the deal was. I always wanted to go back but that was not one of Bert's priorities, so we didn't go.

SM: So you would have gone back, if you had a chance?

RH: I would have liked to have seen it, yes. You know when you look at – it was like before and then to see what it was. A mass of rubble it was and just think of all the other cities that were like that. And Hiroshima, you know, there was nothing left of that.

But people are amazed that they allowed us to go there, because of the radioactivity. But Bert had that thing checked, course that was a couple of years after and there was no any radioactivity in that.

SM: And that was the little nightlight that you got there?

RH: Yes.

SM: So tell me, you were in Manila until was it November of 1945?

RH: Yes, took us three days to fly from Manila to Japan, because the Air Force had to stop in, I think it was Leyte or something, and so we spent Thanksgiving Day and the day after that on this little island. Then the next day they took us up the rest of the way to Kure Bay in Japan.

SM: And what was the name of the island where you spent Thanksgiving?

RH: I think it was Leyte. I'm not sure.

SM: Oh, L-e-y-t-e?

RH: Yes, I think that's right on the northern tip of the Philippines.

SM: So you spent Thanksgiving there and then why did you go to Japan?

RH: Because the war was over. There were hospitals up there. And they were rotating the troops to go home. So they would send this one bunch home and then followed with another one.

Our group happened to go up there and we stayed at Kure Bay because they had no place to put us at that time. We spent a lot of time waiting to get to ... And we were at Kure Bay for I don't know how long.

We spent Christmas at Kure Bay. We lived in some quarters. And right after Christmas, we went to Nagoya and worked there for three months and then we went home. Kure Bay, it was right outside of Hiroshima., it was close to that. We lived in something like the naval academy – that was the quarters that we were living in. And there was no central heat. You heated this big room where I don't know how many people lived. They had these little space heaters and you bathed out of your helmet. And boy, it was a great experience. That was after the war.

SM: So you were just staying in Kure Bay. You weren't actually working there until you got to Nagoya?

RH: We went to Nagoya that's where we worked.

SM: And so it was a great experience in Kure Bay?

RH: Yes, it was different. Here the war was over and we were in a waiting period with nothing to do, and a lot of the places a lot of the area was off limits to the Americans so you really couldn't go around and do sightseeing. You would walk but not very far. So you spent most of your days indoors.

SM: And is that when you went to Hiroshima was when you were at Kure Bay?

RH: Yes.

SM: Did they take like a whole group of you?

RH: They took these trucks where they load you in back and you sit in the back and it was cold. I remember that. I thought we were back in North Dakota. But I suppose they would put about two dozen in a truck and take you around. And when you got out into the area, where they thought you could maybe find a souvenir or something, they'd give you about five minutes to get off and you could look.

SM: So tell me about Hiroshima.

RH: I don't really know too much about it but there was nothing left, you know, and everything was flat.

SM: Did you see anybody out in the streets at all?

RH: Oh, yes, there were people around. I suppose they were officials of some kind, but residents weren't allowed in at that time. There was nothing there. It was all gone. Right out in the middle of one spot there was this – it looked like the front of a church was standing, that's all that was there but nothing around it. But that's the way that atomic bomb worked. It destroyed everything above the ground more than it did under the ground.

SM: Did you see any bodies or they were all incinerated for the most part?

RH: I didn't see any.

SM: No.

RH: The bomb was dropped in August and this was November. And someone said, "Well, that's awful early to be there." But if they had been radioactive, they would have never let the GIs in there.

SM: How did the Japanese treat you when you were in Kure Bay. Did you have an interaction with them?

RH: No, they were scared to death. I think the Japanese people were afraid of the Americans.

SM: You think so?

RH: I don't imagine that the officials were and the people that were involved, but I think that the citizens that you'd see walk, they just kind of look at you like and they'd just hope that you didn't say – now they were waiting for you to say something, I don't know – but how can you speak to someone that you don't know their language?

SM: Yes, exactly.

RH: I don't know that we would have but we just smiled at them and kept going. That's all you can do. Yes, but there was so much off limits that we couldn't. Like people wonder why you didn't do this and why you didn't do that. They didn't realize that the war had just ended and – it was off limits, period. You couldn't go. I'm sure anyone would tell you that. So, now it would be different.

SM: So tell me Mrs. Hemm about Nagoya.

RH: It was 262 Station Hospital; and as far as I know, I worked nights all the while were there. It was a 12-hour shift and mine was a medical ward. And most of these, in fact, all of these GIs that were there, they were just waiting to go home. There was a smallpox epidemic there, that we were not involved in but there was in one area there was smallpox – and several of the GIs lost their life before they got home. I don't know too much about that. I don't know how many there were or anything but there were some that were supposed to go home but didn't make it. Well they went home, but not alive. I don't know the percentage or anything about that. So much of this stuff I've forgotten.

SM: That's natural it was a long time ago.

RH: Yes.

SM: What kind of nursing were you doing in Nagoya?

RH: Most of the patients there were ambulatory and we were in charge of medications and any other treatments that they needed ... just general duty.

SM: Okay.

RH: Yes.

SM: You were just getting the GIs ready to go home then?

RH: Yes, when the doctors decided that they were able to go, they were discharged. I don't know if they had to go to another staging area or not, but [unclear].

SM: How were the hospital conditions in Nagoya compared to Manila?

RH: Well a little different.

SM: In what way?

RH: When we came the building was better. And as far as the medications and all that, I think it was pretty much the same. At Nagoya we were getting a lot of nurses that had just come from the States, now I don't quite understand why that was that way. They were sending some over and sending some back. And these girls couldn't figure out how you could get along with the limited amount of equipment and things you had. But that's just something that you did and you didn't want for anything, it was just it wasn't there in abundance like you have back here.

SM: And were the buildings different? I mean did the windows have actual glass windows on them in Nagoya or were they still open-air kind of hospital?

RH: Oh, no, it was the way it had to be, it was cold there.

SM: Oh, okay.

RH: Yes, it was cold in Japan.

SM: That's right, that time of year it would have been cold, so it was a different set-up than in Manila.

RH: Yes, all together. Manila it was hot all the time and you'd look up and the sun was shining and you'd look the other way and it would be raining.

SM: Okay.

RH: No kidding. It rained so hard that you could stand under the roof. Of course, there were no eaves or anything, so you could stand under there and you could rinse your hair under it. It rained so. It just poured and then, all of the sudden, the sun was shining.

SM: So just for like an hour or two or 15-20 minutes?

RH: It just depended on how big the cloud was.

SM: Wow and when did you leave Nagoya?

RH: We got home in March. It had to be March sometime.

SM: How did you come home?

RH: By boat.

SM: By boat, same ship or . . .

RH: This was the USS General Sturgis. It was a smaller ship. We took off from Yokohama. We went from Nagoya to Yokohama. And, of course, Nagoya was inland and Yokohama was a seaport.

We were supposed to go to Seattle and we got close to Seattle and the weather was so bad and the waves were so high. Instead of us going to Seattle we went down to San Pedro, California. And that's where we docked to go home. And then we went by train to Illinois. I don't remember the name of the town in Illinois. And that was the separation station; and then we were sent by train to Fort Snelling and that was where we were discharged and came home.

SM: How long were you in Illinois and Fort Snelling, all total, before you went home?

RH: Fort Sheridan, it was Fort Sheridan and we were just there for a day or two. It wasn't very long.

SM: And then at Fort Snelling?

RH: Just there long enough to be discharged, about a day, I guess.

SM: And did your parents know you were coming home?

RH: Yes.

SM: And how did you get from Fort Snelling up to home?

RH: You know, I can't remember if it was by bus or train. I think it was by bus. And there was no big to-do or anything. My dad met me at the bus. Yes, it had to be bus because my dad met me at the bus station in Casselton. That was all the fanfare I got.

SM: How did you feel about going home? You were away about a year, then. How did you feel about coming home?

RH: Well I was just coming home. I didn't know what was ahead. I just never thought too much about it. But it was nice to get back into your own routine; and if we had been busier the last months of our time in Japan, or maybe if we had more freedom to see and do things. It got a little long over there. So it was kind of good to be home.

SM: And what did you go do then afterwards, did you continue to be a nurse when you got home?

RH: Yes, I stayed home. My mother wasn't in the best of health, so I stayed home until September, I guess it was. And then a friend of mine who had been in the service, too –she was in the Marianas. She was a classmate of mine.

We hadn't done enough, so we decided we'd take off and we got a job out in West Virginia in a polio center for children. The wages were the best of any that we could find. So we thought that's one place we can go and work and see part of the East Coast, so we worked there. We were gone a little over a year and worked there. And then we went to the VA in Washington, DC, and worked there. And we came back to Fargo afterward, but we saw a lot of the East Coast in our free time, all by bus, no train.

SM: How long were you in West Virginia and out in DC?

RH: We were there about 14 months.

SM: And then you came back to Casselton?

RH: Then we came back to the farm. She, Edie, wanted to go to California. But my mother wasn't very well at that time so I thought I better just – you know, I was the only girl. So I went to work for the VA in Fargo, and I worked there for two-and-half years, and then I went out to the college, and I worked at the Health Center there for a year. I got married and that was the end of my nursing career.

SM: And which college did you go to for the health . . .

RH: NDSU.

SM: Let's see you met your husband where?

RH: I'd known him ever since I was a little kid. But we got together when I was at the Health Center at NDSU.

SM: You got married and then you stopped nursing when you got married?

RH: Yes, he didn't want me to work, but I've often regretted that I didn't stay working until the children came. He said right away, "I'll make the living and you take care of the house and stuff like that." He was kind of from the old school. And when the children came, he said, "I'll make the living and you take care of the kids." And that's what happened.

SM: Mrs. Hemm, how would you say the war shaped your life and your views on things?

RH: Well I have to think about that a moment. I think it made me appreciate my freedom. And I don't think that everything the United States does is the best but you still have your freedom. You can dopretty much as you please and there are laws that you have to obey. But if there aren't laws, this world would be a mess [unclear]. And you can raise your children pretty much like you want. They have a chance for education.

[Unclear] my mother had family in Europe. They were in Germany and I remember her reading the letters that came from there and they were under the Hitler regime. If you have that, you have nothing. Where here, in the United States you have everything, and it's your responsibility. If you have the talent, the time and the ambition, you can do just about anything. That's how I feel. And if you don't, and you make a mess of your life, that's your own fault. Maybe that's wrong but [unclear]. The schools offer so much here. And yet people feel they have to go off to some foreign country to study and, of course, there's an advantage to that, too.

SM: What do you wish the younger generations knew about World War II?

RH: I have always felt and I've heard so many people say World War II they were fighting for a reason. They were fighting to defend their country. Now the war that they're fighting now, do they know what they're fighting for? I think that they should know that the soldiers that went in those days, they knew why they were there because if they hadn't gone in, Hitler would have come from one direction and the Japanese from the other [unclear].

I think we should know that war isn't the answer to everything. I don't know, it's hard to say. But when Bert died, the pastor that did the sermon had known him since a little boy, so he knew us as a family. He gave the sermon on the book that Tom Brokow wrote, <u>The Greatest Generation</u>. And he said that the soldiers that fought World War II, after the war they came home and they rebuilt their life to what it was before the war, and he kind of felt that a lot of the guys that go now, have a different attitude about the war completely. But . . . Have you read that book?

SM: Yes, I've read parts of it. I haven't read the whole thing. In what way do you think their attitude is different?

RH: A lot of it's different. Very bluntly, I can say a lot of them just don't give a damn.

SM: About our country or about their lives?

RH: About their lives, they come back and expect everything from the government for nothing – not for nothing, but I mean to support them. And I suppose that would be normal, too, but I don't know. When you think back to the guys that were in World War II, they came back, and they went on and rebuilt their lives, and there was not a lot of fanfare when they came home. But they continued with what they were doing and served their country and were proud of it.

SM: And your two brothers when did they come back from World War II?

RH: Boy, I don't even know. I think they were discharged right after the war was over.

SM: In Europe?

RH: Well Ervin was at sea. Erving served out in San Diego. I think they came home pretty much about the same time, because Roger came home the war ended there. I suppose it was about '46 when he got out.

SM: Okay.

RH: Forty-five.

SM: Mrs. Hemm, did you have any contact with the enemies besides those three Japanese prisoner-of-wars?

RH: No, we saw them in the chow line, once in a while, at the ward.

SM: At the hospital in Denver?

RH: In Manila.

SM: In Manila, you did?

RH: Yes, I think they called them guerillas and they would kind of – well, apparently, there were some Filipinos that were allowed in the chow line and then all of a sudden these guerillas would. But we didn't know who they were. We didn't have any contact.

SM: Any contact with them? Did you, while you were in Manila, ever hear about any unusual if you want to call it "acts of compassion" between the Japanese? I know they were very brutal, on the most part, to the Allied troops, but did you hear about any unusual stories where that wasn't the case?

RH: No, I never did. We had prisoners there that were on on that death march, Bataan Death March. We had some of those patients in our hospital. And to look at them, you know, they were skin and bones and a great big stomach and this gaunt look on their face. We didn't have any on our ward, but the other girls would say that they had been told, "Don't question them. Let them talk." That's one thing that they said.

They had no complaints about them and the men never complained or anything, they said. I imagine some of them did, but the gals I talked to said that they didn't – we didn't question them. If they felt like talking, you let them talk.

SM: Let them talk.

RH: Yes, but I didn't have any direct contact with them. I saw them but I didn't have any contact. And you'd just see them walking down the sidewalk and if you met one of them, you'd just say "hello" and kept going.

SM: With the Japanese, you're talking about or with the people from the Bataan March, the Allied troops?

RH: The men from – no, we didn't have any Japanese.

SM: Okay, anything else about the war that you want to talk about, any other stories or any other things that we didn't talk about?

RH: Haven't I talked enough?

SM: You've done a fabulous job. I've asked lots of questions. Can you just tell me, Mrs. Hemm, what year you were born?

RH: 6/29/21.

SM: Twenty-one, so that would make you how old, right now?

RH: I will be 90 in June.

SM: Ninety in June, happy birthday early.

RH: Thank you.