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Interview with  
Elizabeth Murphy  
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Elizabeth Murphy

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mrs. Elizabeth Murphy for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 30, 1977, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mrs. Murphy in order to get her reminiscences and experiences and impressions while she was an Army nurse at Tripler General Hospital during and after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Now Mrs. Murphy, to begin this interview, would you just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mrs. Murphy: I was born in Boise, Idaho, on April 2, 1917. I went through nurses' training at Saint Luke's Hospital in Boise, Idaho. I joined the Army in 1940 and was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington. In September of 1941, I was sent to the Hawaiian Islands and was stationed at Tripler General Hospital.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the United States Army?

Murphy: (Chuckle) It's kind of an odd little story, but I happened to meet a young Army officer at a dance when I was a student nurse. Then when they asked us if we'd like to join the Red Cross Nurses' Association, I decided that since I had known this young man (chuckle), I'd join the Army.

Marcello: Now how closely were you keeping abreast of current events and things of that nature at the time that you joined the service? In other words, did you give any thought to the possibility of the country eventually getting into war or anything of that sort?

Murphy: Just before I graduated, Germany went to war in Europe, and we felt that there might be a war. But really, I didn't give too much thought to the idea that I'd ever be in it. But just before I went. . . well, I actually had orders to go to the Philippines. I had taken my car back to Idaho to leave it, and my father came and told me that morning that I was leaving that I would probably see war. Mother said that Daddy really didn't want me to go to the Philippines, but he wasn't going to do anything to prevent me if I wanted to go. Still I just thought, "Well, I don't think that I'd ever see a war." By the time I got back to Fort Lewis, the Army orders had been changed; they sent me to Hawaii instead of the Philippines.

Marcello: Now did you have a choice of stations, that is, whether you wanted to go to the Philippines or Hawaiian Islands, or were you simply sent there, period?

Murphy: At first they gave a choice, and they were the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Alaska. I made a choice, but when it came to actually sending me, it didn't mean anything (chuckle).

Marcello: Why did you want to go to the Philippines as opposed to one of the other three stations?

Murphy: I think maybe, to me, that was closer to the Orient. . . farther away (chuckle).

Marcello: Let's talk about the training that you underwent here at Fort Lewis, Washington, after you joined the service. What sort of training would an Army nurse undergo here?

Murphy: Actually, there's no training at all. We were sent right into a hospital situation. I was in a ward with upper respiratory diseases and the measles. Then I opened up a section for . . . Section 8's and people that were being discharged. Then one of the nurses came and asked me if I'd like to go over to Camp Murray and open up a hospital over there; they had built a whole new section. So I went over there, and we started from nothing; we had to set everything up for a hospital.

Marcello: What sort of rank would you have had at that time?

Murphy: I was a second lieutenant.

Marcello: In other words, this was an automatic thing upon your induction into the Army?

Murphy: When I came into the Army, I was a second lieutenant.

Marcello: Okay, what'd you think about the idea of having your orders changed and going to the Hawaiian Islands?

Murphy: Well, first I felt a little disappointed. But then Hawaii was fascinating to me anyhow, so it really didn't bother me that much.

Marcello: Had you ever been to the Hawaiian Islands?

Murphy: No, I never had.

Marcello: Okay, so where did you go after you got to the Hawaiian Islands?

Mruphy: Well, we sailed out of San Francisco, and we landed at Honolulu Harbor, with the boys diving for the quarters or the dimes or whatever money that was thrown overboard. When we got off, there was a nurse, which later I found out she was from Schofield, with an armful of lais. The nurses that were assigned to Schofield--she had the orders--the nurses that were assigned to Schofield all got a lai, but the nurses that were assigned to Tripler General Hospital got nothing. We were just told to pick up our luggage and get into the car (chuckle).

Marcello: Now were your quarters at Schofield Hospital?

Murphy: No, our quarters were at Tripler General Hospital.

Marcello: Oh, pardon me, I meant Tripler General Hospital.

Murphy: Yes. They actually didn't have any quarters fixed for us. It was just the cantonment building that was going to be used for a ward, and they had set up . . . there were about four private rooms and then one large room. I happened to have a private room, and the only piece of furniture was a bed and a built-in cupboard that had one shelf and a pole to hang your clothes on. That's all that was in the room.

Marcello: Was this more or less indicative of the lack of housing available there in the Hawaiian Islands at that time, or was this simply the way it was always done?

Murphy: To me it was a lack of housing for the nurses. They didn't really expect it to happen so sudden. We just arrived and they had no place to put us, so they put us in an empty cantonment building. Later, we did . . . in fact, just before Pearl Harbor, we did move into a nurses' quarters, which was the same type of a building except it had more private rooms, and it had furniture.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do here at Tripler General Hospital?

Murphy: I was assigned to the eye, ear, nose, and throat ward. Incidentally, talking about rooms, there wasn't a dresser, so I put my suitcase on the foot of my bed. I slept for about two months with this suitcase on the foot of the bed (chuckle), and everybody was wondering how in the world I

could sleep because it did take up a lot of the bed. I think I must have rolled up in a ball and slept that way.

Marcello: Now by this time, I do know that there was an influx of servicemen coming into the Hawaiian Islands. Did this mean that Tripler General Hospital was being expanded during this particular period?

Murphy: It was being expanded, yes. The building that we lived in was a new building for a ward, and there were other buildings that they hadn't opened up as yet. It was being expanded; these were all new buildings.

Marcello: How large a hospital was Tripler?

Murphy: That I don't remember; I've lost all account of how large it was before and how large it was after they expanded it. But the old hospital only consisted of one building that was two stories high, and it had open verandas. You see, the wards would extend off the open verandas. All these cantonment buildings added I don't know how many. . . forty or something wards. The exact number has escaped me now.

Marcello: Let me approach it from another angle. How large would Tripler have been in comparison with the other hospital facilities on the Hawaiian Islands, either military or civilian?

Murphy: I would say Tripler probably was second to Schofield Barracks.



Marcello: Was Schofield Barracks probably the largest since it was the largest Army post in the world?

Murphy: I would say, yes; definitely the building was a lot larger. Although, when I went to visit Schofield Barracks, it didn't seem it was doing the amount of extending as far as the cantonment buildings were, because they had a nice permanent hospital building, while Teipler was an old, old building that had (chuckle) been there for ages.

Marcello: Now what was the social life like for a young nurse in the Hawaiian Islands during this period prior to the actual Japanese attack?

Murphy: There was a lot of social life. I had dates waiting for me from the time I got off the ship--some of the fellows that I met on board ship and some of them that heard about the nurses coming. You know, I don't know how word gets around, but they had my name and they called me up. I had a wonderful time. I would go to a formal ball at Hickam Field, and that was wonderful. Everybody was in long dresses, and all the officers were dressed up in their fancy uniforms. And I went to Waikiki swimming. I had a lot of chances to go around. I went to Hickam; I went to Schofield Barracks; I went to Fort DeRussy, Fort Ruger. Those were most of the places I had been to before the war started. . . before the Japs started bombing the harbor.

Marcello: I gather that entertaining during that period was, on a great many occasions, a very formal affair with long dresses and so on and so forth.

Murphy: The Saturday night balls at the Officers' Club was very formal and very lovely.

Marcello: What sort of a workday would you put in here at Tripler General Hospital? Why don't you describe what a typical workday would be like for you from the time you got up until you got off duty and that sort of thing.

Murphy: If I remember correctly, we went to work at seven o'clock in the morning, and we had shifts. Some of us would go off maybe for two or three hours in the afternoon, and then we would come back and work to seven. It depended, also, on how many nurses were assigned to the ward. If there was just two nurses, like many a time there was, one of us would come on for a couple of hours in the morning and then take off and then come back at noon and relieve the other nurse, and she'd go off for the afternoon. I think that was the majority that had two nurses. Otherwise, they could plan it; one could work in the morning and then one taking off a couple of hours or maybe one taking a couple of hours off in the afternoon. But someone always got the afternoon off.

Marcello: How many nurses would there have been here at Tripler? You'd have to estimate this, of course.

Murphy: I would estimate there must have been, oh, about a hundred nurses. Maybe there wasn't even that much, I mean, with the head nurses that worked in the offices that really didn't do actually any bedside nursing at all. That includes the nurses in surgery.

Marcello: Now what sort of . . . I don't know if we can use the term leave or liberty to describe your off-duty hours here at Tripler, but how would your off-duty routine work? In other words, how many weekends out of a month might you get off or anything of this nature?

Murphy: Oh, we never got any weekends, no. That's one thing about . . . when I was stationed at Fort Lewis, there just wasn't any weekends, and there was a lot of nurses there. When we got off night duty, they generally gave us two days. But otherwise, we didn't know anything about weekends. We didn't even have a day off; we just had half-days off. There was an arrangement later on that we would get a three-day leave and be able to go to one of the other islands if we so chose, which I did. That came about . . . well, we had to put in for it, and it was about maybe once every four months that we could do that. Of course, this was after the war started. Otherwise, there was no such thing as a weekend off.

Marcello: In other words, it was just a continual seven days with a certain amount of time off each one of those days?

Murphy: That's right. That's right. That's right. Saturday, Sunday--everything; holidays--we worked them all.

Marcello: Was there ever very much griping about this sort of routine, or was it something you simply accepted as part of your duty?

Murphy: Well, I think I accepted it as part of my duties, because I had worked for a year before I came in the Army at a hospital that I got nothing off, except when I got off night duty, and then I got two days. They would try and allow us to have one day off every . . . it worked out to about every five months. So it really wasn't. . . this seemed wonderful to me. . . at least to have a half-day off (chuckle) every other day.

Marcello: How often would you pull night duty here at Tripler?

Murphy: At Tripler, I pulled night duty about two or three times in the course I was there. I had just been on night duty at Fort Lewis, Washington, when I had orders. In fact, I had just completed. . . the year I was at Fort Lewis, I had pulled night duty twice, and I had just completed one term of night duty, which consists of a month. It was twelve hours long; every night we worked; no time off except at the end, and they'd give us two days. So I didn't pull night duty at Tripler until . . . oh, heavens, it must have been . . . I guess it was the following April that I pulled night duty.

Marcello: Now that would have been after the actual attack?

Murphy: That was after the Japanese attack, yes.

Marcello: Normally, when would night duty begin? What time?

Murphy: Actually, when you come to a hospital, the first nurses that arrive generally get the night duty. It would be at seven o'clock at night until seven o'clock in the morning.

Marcello: And then you would be off until seven o'clock the following evening.

Murphy: That's right, yes. If you wanted to sleep, fine; if you wanted to go out and go swimming, well, you could go swimming. If you could stay awake and go out, you'd have the whole day to play around; then you'd have to stay (chuckle) awake the next night. In fact, I did that at times (chuckle).

Marcello: Now as one gets closer and closer to December 7, 1941, and as conditions between the United States and Japan continued to deteriorate, did your routine as a nurse change any? Could you notice any changes occurring here at Tripler?

Murphy: No, actually I didn't notice any changes at all. The week before we were warned that our leaves might be cancelled on the weekend if anybody was going to be off. But we knew that the Japanese ambassador was passing through Hawaii and going to Washington, but actually nobody seemed to get too excited about anything. In fact, I went out with two or three other nurses for dinner on the . . . and I can't remember if it was the Utah or the Nevada. Which one is sunk there at Pearl Harbor besides the Arizona?

Marcello: It was the Utah, the old target battleship.

Murphy: All right. Well, that's the one that I had dinner on the weekend that the Japanese ambassador was going through Hawaii. I had dinner on . . . we went out there; it was lovely. We had all the officers in their fancy white uniforms; they blew the whistle as we came aboard. It was a very lovely evening.

Marcello: How safe and secure did you feel in the Hawaiian Islands?

Murphy: I wasn't . . . I felt safe! I mean, I didn't think (chuckle) anything would ever happen.

Marcello: Did you ever have very much contact with the Japanese civilians on the islands?

Murphy: Oh, yes. We had Japanese maids, and I had met some Japanese families. They were very pleasant, very courteous.

Marcello: Okay, I think this brings us more or less up to the actual time before the attack itself. What I want you to do at this point, Mrs. Murphy, is to begin by talking about that weekend of December 7, 1941. I want you to go into as much detail as you can remember. Where would it be best to start? On that Friday or Saturday? Do you remember, for example, what your routine was on that Friday? That would have been December 5, 1941.

Murphy: I don't remember the hours I worked, but I know I went on at seven o'clock in the morning. I have no idea if I took the

afternoon off or if I worked until seven in the evening. Actually, the Friday and the Saturday were just the routine days to me. I don't remember a thing of what happened on those days, except I didn't go out that Saturday night; I remember that.

Marcello: Did you say that by this time you had moved into different quarters?

Murphy: Yes. I would think it was about a week before that we moved into quarters, and it was down the hill from the original nurses' quarters. There must have been at least . . . oh, I would imagine about ten rooms on each side of a corridor, and then in the center of building itself was sort of a little meeting room--a little living room type of thing. We did have a bed and a dresser and the same old wood cupboard fixed up to hang our clothes with the one shelf. But I remember we did have a dresser.

Marcello: Where would you take your meals?

Murphy: The meals were taken in the nurses' quarters; that's right, we did. It's a little hazy. We did take our meals in the nurses' quarters, but . . . they opened up a mess hall before Pearl Harbor, because on the day of Pearl Harbor, I remember going down to a mess hall and eating. Then I think we went back to the nurses' quarters again. But that time at Pearl Harbor, we did have a big mess hall in one of the buildings.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how would you describe the morale among the nurses and the personnel at Tripler Hospital during that pre-Pearl Harbor period?

Murphy: Well, I thought it was pretty good. The nurses that had come on recently were full of enthusiasm. You know, they were swimming and going around the islands. . . in fact, I did get around the island, too, incidentally. One of my half-days off on a Sunday, I did get a chance to go around the island. So I had seen the Island of Oahu before the attack arrived. But the only people who were a little disgruntled were the older nurses that had already fulfilled two years of foreign duty, and they were wanting to go back to the States.

Marcello: I've heard it said that the Hawaiian Islands can be rather confining after having been there for a certain amount of time. Is that probably true?

Murphy: Yes. Yes, I would say so if you've been there awhile and you've done everything, because they didn't have actually any opera or anything like that to come. See, there wasn't . . . in the way of entertainment, it was just what they had to offer in the dances, local theaters, swimming, playing tennis.

Marcello: Okay, well, let's get back to the weekend, then, of December 7, 1941. I kind of got off the track a little bit. Let's talk



about that Saturday of December 6th. Do you remember what your routine was on the Saturday of December 6th?

Murphy: I don't remember much of what I did on this Saturday, except I didn't go out that night. Why, I don't know; but I didn't (chuckle).

Marcello: Did you notice anything out of the ordinary happening that night around the nurses' quarters or anything?

Murphy: Nothing. Nothing. It was another routine night; some of the girls had dates and some didn't.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. It's kind of an important question, and I want to get your opinion on it. A lot of people say that if the Japanese or anybody were going to attack the military installations on the Hawaiian Islands, the best time to have done so would have been on a Sunday morning. What many people imply is that Saturday nights were times of a great deal of partying, rowdiness, drinking, and things of this nature among the military personnel. How would you reply to an assertion of that sort?

Murphy: I would say around any post, when there's any off-duty, there's a lot of drinking; there's a lot of merry-making. Of course, on the Hawaiian Islands there were so many places to go to. The officers generally had a dance on Saturday night. The enlisted men, I have no idea where they went.

But there was always. . . you could go down to the City of Honolulu, and you'd always see a lot of Army and Navy. . . a lot of rowdiness.

Marcello: I'm sure that on weekends downtown Honolulu was wall-to-wall bodies with the tremendous influx of service personnel that was coming into the Hawaiian Islands.

Murphy: Yes, there was. Especially the Navy (chuckle). I think the Army would change their uniforms, but the Navy would always appear as the Navy.

Marcello: I've heard it said that a lot of the Army personnel would actually wait until the middle of the week to go into Honolulu rather than on the weekend because there were so many Navy personnel there.

Murphy: Well, as I say, you never knew when you were meeting the Army, because before the war they would always come in civilian clothes. You would very seldom see an Army uniform. But the Navy--I don't know; maybe there were regulations that you had to wear your Navy uniform. But the Army didn't require it until after Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Now you as an officer, would you have had to have been back in your quarters at any certain time or particular time or anything of this nature?

Murphy: No. There was no regulation as to time. We could come and go at night after we were off-duty. If we wanted to come in at one minute until seven, we could.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk then about Sunday, December 7, 1941. I'll let you pick up the story from the time you woke up until all sorts of activity began to occur.

Murphy: Well, I got up just like any other morning. I knew that I was going to be working the morning by myself on the ear, nose, and throat ward, because the other nurse, Miss Kristofferson, was taking the morning off, and I was going to have the afternoon off. So I went to work, and the first thing I had to do was to take the morning temperatures. That's just following the lists and that, but the morning temperatures was the first thing to do. That's what I was doing when some of my patients. . . I was in the ear, nose, and throat ward; they were up and about; they weren't confined to bed at all. They came running and saying, "Miss Elmer!". . . because that was my maiden name, Miss Elmer. "Miss Elmer! Miss Elmer! There's planes flying, and they're shooting at them!" There had been target shooting previously, so I said, "Well, maybe they're just practicing shooting at targets." "These planes are not pulling any targets!"

So I remember going out on the open veranda and having a nice view of the planes flying around, and then we could see bursts of smoke and a loud noise. So I stood there unbelieving.

In fact, no thought really came to my head that it was anybody, that these were enemy planes, until the radio started. They announced something like, "The Island of Oahu is under Japanese attack!" Then they kept repeating, "The Island of Oahu is under Japanese attack! Take cover! All civilians stay under cover!" or in your homes or something like that. "All Army and Navy personnel report immediately to your post!" Then they kept repeating this and repeating it--that the Japanese was bombing the Island of Oahu; that the Island of Oahu was under attack.

That's when I first. . . when they started announcing it, that's when I first realized that these were Japanese planes. I got a funny little feeling, "My goodness, I guess this is war!" That's the first time it ever entered my head that this would be war.

Marcello: Now what time of the morning was this, that is, when you heard this announcement over the radio?

Murphy: They started about five minutes to eight. I would imagine within the next five to ten minutes, it was being announced what the planes were.

Marcello: Now in the meantime, are you still out on the veranda watching what was going on?

Murphy: Still on the veranda; still watching on the veranda. In fact, I stayed on the veranda watching until the first patient arrived.

I just looked down, and an ambulance came in with the first patient to the emergency room.

Marcello: Let's locate Tripler General Hospital. Now where was it in connection to the military installations that were to come under attack?

Murphy: Tripler General Hospital at that time was located across from Fort Shafter. Fort Shafter was the headquarters of the Army division of the Hawaiian Islands. So we were across the street from them.

Marcello: Okay, now what sort of a view would you have had of Pearl Harbor itself?

Murphy: Pearl Harbor was off at a . . . we could see the outline of the land, but as far as the installations, I couldn't make out installations. We just knew they were over in that direction, because we could see the . . . if you got high enough, you could really see it. From where I was I could not actually see the harbor itself; I just knew that Hickam and Pearl Harbor was over in that direction.

Marcello: Now where were these planes located that you were looking at from the veranda?

Murphy: I was watching approximately over toward Sand Island. Sand Island was between Honolulu harbor and Pearl Harbor; it was approximately over that area where I saw it.

Marcello: About how far away were they?

Murphy: I imagine Sand Island, which was along the coast, was probably about maybe four miles--I'm not sure--maybe not even that much. There wasn't any buildings, so it was wide open.

Marcello: Oh, you did have a clear view of what was going on?

Murphy: Oh, yes, I had a clear view. In fact, when they got over the Hickam and Pearl Harbor area, when they went over there, I had a clear view of the sky; there was never any obstruction of the sky.

Marcello: You could see the planes and so on, but you actually couldn't see the installations.

Murphy: Oh, yes. Yes, that's right.

Marcello: What sort of a day was this in terms of climate and weather?

Murphy: Oh, it was beautiful. It was a beautiful Sunday morning--a beautiful blue sky. It would be a nice day to go swimming (chuckle).

Marcello: And it was also a nice day for an air attack.

Murphy: Oh, my Lord (chuckle)!

Marcello: Okay, so you mention that you were watching these airplanes attacking the installations. How long did you watch these planes?

Murphy: I would imagine about fifteen to twenty minutes.

Marcello: And what was your general feeling or reactions or emotions when you were seeing what was going on? By this time, of course, you'd probably heard that they were Japanese planes.

Murphy: Well, I knew there would be casualties; I knew there would be a lot of destruction. In fact, I think I made the comment or somebody else made it to me, "Well, I guess we're in war." So we knew that we were heading into something unknown.

Marcello: Were there any preparations that you as a nurse could make to get ready for the patients that probably would be coming in?

Murphy: I really didn't have time to make any preparations. Kristofferson arrived about that time back on duty, and I remember she said we'd sort of have to tag the patients or something. Actually, there wasn't too much preparation . . . we hadn't made too much preparation, because within the next few minutes I was sent to surgery. I got a call from the head nurse telling me to go to surgery. I remember getting those feelings that "Heavens, I haven't been in a surgery since I was out of student nurse! And that's been two years!"

Marcello: Okay, so around this time now, that is, around the time that you got the call that you were to report to surgery, how were the personnel at the hospital reacting? In other words, were they acting in a professional manner? Was there panic? Confusion?

Murphy: I saw no panic at all. There was only one other nurse with me, and she came on duty as soon as she could. I was sent to the surgery, and everybody was getting ready for anything that came along. Everybody was very calm. I didn't see any panic or anything of that nature.

Marcello: How shortly did the casualties begin arriving?

Murphy: Well, it was in twenty minutes, because I saw the first ambulance draw up and the first patient being taken into the emergency room. That was before I was sent to surgery. Then when I went to surgery, I saw nothing else.

Marcello: Now when we say that you went to surgery, what sort of a facility are we talking about? How large was it, what was going on there, and so on and so forth?

Murphy: The surgical wing was. . . well, it was a pretty good average size. Of course, it isn't anything like the surgeries we have in our modern hospitals now, but there was little rooms where they did the surgery. Actually, they assigned me to one, and the only thing I saw of that surgery was the room that I was working in and the room where they kept supplies. Then it opened out into the open veranda. That's the only part I ever saw of that surgery, was the little surgery that I was assigned to and the supply room.

Marcello: What sort of casualties were coming into your particular area where you were working?



Murphy: Amputees. They started coming in, and they had arms and legs just shot off--a terrible mass of tissues, bones, blood. When I was there, they had a visiting doctor from somewhere; I think he was from Boston. He was lecturing at Queens Hospital about the use of sulfanilamide powder. He came out immediately, and he was in the surgery that I was in. He poured this powder--gobs of it--into wounds. Then he had me also irrigating it out or getting debris out of the wounds and clearing the sand and whatnot, pieces of material, with salt water. Actually, that's about all I did that day, was to pour normal saline in the wounds and pick up the limb that had been cut off and take it out into a sort of a little storage area out on the veranda.

Marcello: Now was this the first time that you had ever as a nurse been engaged in this sort of activity and work?

Murphy: Oh, heavens! I had never seen anything like this! Because the doctor was in the sterile cap and gown; they didn't have a sterile nurse. . . a surgical nurse working there. They just had me (chuckle); I wasn't a surgical nurse at all. I had a cap and gown and mask and gloves on; but I was the pourer, and I had to go out and get new supplies, see. When he ran out of supplies, I had to go out and get more sheets and more normal saline and boil sterile pitchers. That's what my job was. The doctor had to do his surgery by himself; he had no help whatsoever.

Marcello: And they called you a pourer?

Murphy: Well, they wouldn't call me that (chuckle), but that's about what I did. I was more like a circulating nurse. I was able to go out and get supplies in and do jobs that the doctor needed, like taking off his gown. I was not a sterile instrument nurse that helped him with the surgery at all.

Marcello: And you mentioned the powder awhile ago that he was using to sterilize these amputations. What was it called?

Murphy: Sulfanilamide. In fact, sulfanilamide was the pill that they gave for GC, you know, back in the '40's and the '30's.

Marcello: Okay, and you mentioned that in this one particular are where you were working there was just this one surgeon?

Murphy: No, there were others that came and went; I don't know. I tell you, I wasn't keeping track of the surgeons. There was three or four of them in there, but maybe one would go, and then there might be just one or two; they kind of drifted around. I think they came in to see whatever was going on, because probably the other surgeries may not have had so much. But I don't see how they couldn't, because when I went out and after I picked up an armful of arms and legs and carried them out trying to clear, you see. . . in fact, they were amputating legs on stretchers. . . so I was trying to clear. . . as soon as one was finished, I'd try and clear it up for another one, and I went out taking an armful of arms

and legs, and I was amazed to see patients lying on stretchers on both sides of the veranda. As far as I could see, there were patients who were waiting to get into surgery. So I imagine all the surgeries were kept busy. I don't think any of them had any rest period. One would be . . .the doctor would tend to him; he was taken away; another one would come and take his place.

Marcello: How long were you working here in this particular surgery where you were?

Murphy: I lost all track of time. I remember going out to get some supplies, and at that time the Japanese were machine-gunning the hospital, because I could hear the bullets hitting the pavement. In fact, it sounded like when I was a kid and we used to get up in the tree and shake walnuts down and the nut would hit the cement; and it reminded me of that. That's the only time of the whole time that my knees felt weak, because they were flying above the hospital very low at that time; I could hear the motors just roaring. I had a feeling that these bullets were going to come through the roof, but they didn't come. I felt like I was going to sit down; my knees just began to give way. But I grabbed ahold of something and steadied myself and picked up my bundles of equipment and went back into surgery again.

Marcello: I also know that a great deal of shrapnel fell on Honolulu from the anti-aircraft weapons at Pearl Harbor and so on and so forth. I was wondering if you could hear any of this hitting the hospital roof and so on.

Murphy: Oh, yes, yes. Some of the patients got shrapnel. They went out to look, and they got hit by shrapnel. Because I remember we had a patient that was in the hospital, and they had to take shrapnel out of him. We not only got the casualties from Hickam, but we did get a few of our own patients that got too curious.

Marcello: What time were you able to secure that evening?

Murphy: I remember somebody coming and telling me to go down and eat because I hadn't eaten anything all day. In fact, I had missed breakfast. I many times would miss breakfast. I like to sleep in bed a little longer, and I'd get up just in time to get dressed and get on duty. This must have been at least three o'clock or 3:30 or even four o'clock in the afternoon. I remember them telling me to go down and eat. I took one look . . . I had white shoes and white stockings on, and they were covered with blood, my uniform was covered with blood. The only thing I had washed was my hands. I thought, "Well, I couldn't go and eat like this!" But I had second thoughts. . . washed my hands and went down to eat.

Marcello: Now I guess it's really hard to point out specific acts of heroism and so on in a situation like this, because obviously there are so many heroic things being done. But are there any particular acts of heroism that stand out in your mind that occurred during that actual period when you were at Tripler?

Murphy: Actually, no, because I think everybody was pitching in and doing their best. I wouldn't say anybody was any better than anybody else. The cooperation was very good. Everybody knew we had a job to do, and they did it. Of course, some of them had jobs they weren't really trained to do. Like me, I was not a surgical nurse, but I think I kept things moving. I got the surgeon the supplies; and I cleaned up the mess; and we went to another patient. So I thought everybody was doing their work.

Marcello: I assume that with that tremendous influx of casualties hitting Tripler all of the sudden that all sorts of improvising had to be undertaken. You mentioned, for example, that some of the amputations were occurring while the patients were actually still on the stretchers and things of this nature.

Murphy: Yes, yes.

Marcello: This obviously is not normal surgical procedure. . .

Murphy: No. Oh, heavens (chuckle)!

Marcello: . . . but it's the sort of thing you have to do under situations like that.

Murphy: In an emergency, you have to, yes. In fact, I think some of the doctors had started doing the patients when they were lying on field stretchers out on the floor; they started attending to them until they could get them onto some kind of a stretcher or operating table.

When you asked me of anything that was outstanding. . . I think Miss Kristofferson did an outstanding job. She was left in the eye, ear, nose, and throat ward by herself. In the meantime, when I did get back that evening to my ward, she had cleared all of the ear, nose, and throat patients out; she had started getting casualties; and she, for one person, had everybody tagged. She made tags out and tied them on, because a lot of the boys did not have any identification on. Some of them were able to tell who they were; some of them she hunted among their belongings; or somebody knew who they were. She had everybody tagged. She had a record on everybody. I think she was one of the few nurses that took time to do that. When I got there, everybody had a tag on their bed--who they were--and they had a chart for them.

Marcello: Obviously, this sort of thing is very, very important.

Murphy: Yes. Yes, she was very efficient. She had come from Queens Hospital where she was a head nurse before she came in the Army.

Marcello: Now was Queens Hospital a civilian hospital there in Honolulu?

Murphy: Queens is a large civilian hospital, yes. But she had everybody tagged, and it really made it nice for me.

Marcello: What did you do that evening?

Murphy: Oh, well (chuckle), that's what I was going to add. We had to give medicines to the patients. They tried to get people that were involved with ear, nose, and throat injuries. . . any damage to the head area. . . they tried to get them into our ward. So there were a few changes made, because we did get a few that were others. I remember we had a civilian that was head of the fire department at Pearl Harbor, and he had burns. But the majority of them were confined to the head and maybe a few shoulders. Well, that evening we had to feed the patients. . . some we had to feed. We had to pass any medications; we had to change dressings. It got dark and we had flashlights. We were doing it in flashlights, because we couldn't have any lights on. Later I was told that some of the nurses had been sent off in the afternoon to get a few hours sleep so they could be the night nurses, because we had to have a lot more night nurses. I wasn't sent off;

neither was Kristofferson. I remember the ward was dark, and there was a stretcher in the middle of the floor. I was thinking that I would have a nice, clear way to walk if I walked down the center of the ward. And I fell over the stretcher. Of course, I didn't . . . I fell onto the stretcher, I should say. So then I realized that I'd have to be a little bit more careful of where I'm walking.

Marcello: I assume there was no patient on the stretcher.

Murphy: No patient on the stretcher, no. But at seven o'clock, the nurse that was assigned as the night nurse came on, and Krostofferson and I left. We had no flashlight, but we had to feel our way along these open verandas and down the steps. When we finally made it down onto ground floor and onto the ground itself, where I was staying was down another flight of steps, and that was quite narrow steps. I remember finding those and hanging onto the bannisters and getting down into the cantonment building. We got in there; it was pitch dark. I remember just pulling off my uniform and falling into my bed. But that night, everybody was jittery. We had discussions; we sat around in the dark and talked.

Marcello: I was going to ask you. You had been working all day, I suppose, to the point of exhaustion, and one would assume that you would simply go to your quarters and literally pass out from exhaustion. But you didn't under these circumstances?



Murphy: No, no. We flopped down on the beds, and then we got up and we got around and started talking--discussing, telling each other what happened, what we had seen. Then it was terribly hot, and we had to have our windows open. Finally, when we did go to bed. . . I don't know who was outside guarding, but the Army was outside. . . and my goodness, a gun would go off. Then we'd think, "Oh, the Japs are coming again!" We'd settle down, and another gun would go off. It went on like that most of the night. We really didn't get too much sleep. Also, I never saw a bunch of girls who had to go to the bathroom! Every few minutes somebody . . . and the bathroom and out again. Then somebody else would go in, and then I'd hear the toilet flush and out again. I think it was just nervousness.

Marcello: Now did you all live in individual rooms here in this cantonment?

Murphy: We had individual rooms. There were about four or five of these buildings that all the new nurses went into. Mine was closest to the old nursing home, which was up the hill.

Marcello: But nevertheless, despite the fact that you all had separate rooms, you found a room to get together to recount the day's activities.

Murphy: Yes. In the center of the building, there was a little waiting room. You see, the front door of the place was half-way in

the middle; then on each end there were doors. So the front room where you came into was a waiting room; that was our little living room. We didn't have much furniture in there. In fact, we had a New Year's Eve party in there, I remember that. We still had no lights; the windows weren't fixed up. Later they fixed the windows up and sort of boarded them in, and then we suffocated. They also tried fixing lamps up. . . making them black with just a little area on the bottom which was painted blue. In fact, that's how most of the flashlights were painted--blue. So we'd just get a kind of eerie-looking light out. I remember a lot of experience with that eerie-looking light, too (chuckle).

Marcello: I'm sure that there were a lot of trigger-happy servicemen around that evening of December 7, like you mention.

Murphy: In fact, we heard--of course, I don't know whether it's true or not--but we heard that over in one of the fields behind . . . because there were fields behind Tripler Hospital down to the water, and then the closer it got to the coast there were sugar cane fields. . . but we heard that somebody had seen a horse move, and they shot the horse.

Marcello: Well, that sort of thing, I do know, happened more than once that particular evening. What sort of an appetite did you have? You mentioned that you had gone to eat that one time.

Murphy: I think I must have eaten good. I remember it wasn't anything fancy, because the cooks were probably serving all day long; everybody was coming in whenever they could come in. But there was nothing fancy about it at all. But I remember eating. But I don't remember an evening meal; I think I just had that one meal (chuckle).

Marcello: What sort of rumors did you hear that particular evening?

Murphy: Oh, heavens! The Japanese had landed over at Kaneohe; the Japanese had landed someplace else. We heard a lot of rumors like that. Of course, we did find out later that there was one-man submarines or two-men submarines that had come into Pearl Harbor. But it was mostly that they had parachuted on the outer islands; we heard an awful lot of that.

Marcello: Did you believe all those rumors?

Murphy: Well, at that time I was ready to believe anything, and yet I was kind of skeptical about it. They might have landed; I thought if they had landed, "Well, so what? We'd meet them!" (chuckle).

Marcello: So what was the routine the next day?

Murphy: The routine was coming out at seven o'clock. To my surprise, Miss Kristofferson came on with a big toe broken. That night she had dropped an iron on her toe and broke her toe, so she came in in a stocking foot limping, and she couldn't walk.

So she did all the record-keeping, and I did all the work. We fed them breakfast, and I remember I had a little Filipino kitchen help. Kris said about it afterward that she heard me in there telling them to just put small helpings on the plates because we shouldn't waste food. We might never see another orange for months; and we may not see anymore of this or that, whatever we had. So I was telling them to give just small helpings. She said she laughed (chuckle), because I was really giving them the "riot act." Those little Filipinos, we had to kind of watch them, because they just. . . they just piled up the plates way too high. We had to count the soiled linen then with them so they'd get the right count; we had to kind of watch everything they did.

Marcello: Did you ever have any Japanese civilian personnel working in the hospital?

Murphy: As maids. As maids. Actually, I don't remember any male; they were all the females. But the kitchen help on the wards were all Filipino.

Marcello: Did these Japanese personnel ever come under any suspicion or anything of this nature?

Murphy: Not that I know of. But later we did have a Japanese prison ward, because I was on that at one time. These patients were. . . most of them had \_\_\_\_\_. Because they were ill . . .

Marcello: Now had these been military personnel or what?

Murphy: No, none of them were military; they were all civilian. But they had . . . somebody had found something that connected them with the Japanese government. So they were ill, so they were put in a special ward at Tripler Hospital, and they all had \_\_\_\_\_.

Marcello: Well, Mrs. Murphy, is there anything else relative to the Japanese attack that we need to talk about and that we haven't already mentioned?

Murphy: Well, I'd like to say that the next morning, we had been on work probably an hour or two, and I was busy giving baths and changing dressings; I had all that to do, because Miss Krostofferson just couldn't walk around. Then all of a sudden, here came the civilians--Army wives, Navy wives, daughters from Army personnel--all wanting to help, and there was some other young ladies there, too. I remember one of the military . . . one of my patients saying, "I recognize those girls. They are from . . ." (chuckle). . . "They are the local [you know what]" (chuckle).

Marcello: Local prostitutes, yes.

Murphy: So I kind of laughed. So I went out and I said to Miss Kristofferson, "Well, we got some of the local prostitutes here, because one of my patients said he recognized some of

them." I stood there asking the patients what they'd like, and they were saying pencils and candy and things of that nature, and they went out and got these things for them. So Miss Kristofferson said, "Well, they spent enough on them; now it's their turn to spend some money on the boys," which I thought was very amusing.

Marcello: I've heard some other people talk about the fact that the prostitutes did come into the hospitals to volunteer their aid and so on.

Murphy: Yes, they did. But I just know they came the first couple of days, and after that everybody drifted off, and we never saw any more. But I did all the nursing, and she did. . . Miss Kristofferson did all the charting.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you have enough supplies there in your particular surgical area to take care of all of the casualties that were coming in? Did you run . . . there was enough supplies?

Murphy: Yes, we had enough supplies. Yes. Of course, I didn't see this, but I was told that there was somebody down in the emergency room that he would . . . a doctor would look at a patient, and if he decided they could do something for him, he'd point this way (gesture), and if there wasn't anything or if they were already expired, he'd point the other way. This one patient was lying there and he was watching, and the

doctor pointed the wrong way for him and he protested; so the doctor pointed the other way.

But the building behind the hospital was a new building that was made for sort of a recreation building, and that became our morgue. I tell you, everytime you went past there for the next two or three weeks, you held your nose. Because it really was obnoxious--the odor from that building. But they got it cleaned up, because they had to identify all these bodies. Some of them were without identification; dog tags were gone. . . nothing. Finger-printing; they did teeth . . . I don't know what they did, but they had a lot of bodies they couldn't identify . . . just like any war. But within a week, all the bodies were gone from there, and the building was fumigated out. We later used that again as a recreation building, because I remember working in there and making Hawaiian block printing with Hawaiian flowers.

Marcello: Now did you have very many corpsmen and so on working at the hospital, too, as the casualties came in?

Murphy: We had corpsmen, yes. Really, I don't remember how many corpsmen we had on the ward I was on; there must have been at least two of them. But somehow, I remember the Filipino workers more. I remember my corpsmen later in months afterwards; I had some very good ones.

But our social life became very cramped. Of course, they told us then we'd have to wear a uniform. The only uniform the nurses had issued to them were white uniforms. So we had to . . . within two months afterward, we tried to get back to our normal routine again--having so many hours off. If we went anyplace, we had to wear our white uniform. Well, I remember we got a little Japanese dressmaker downtown, and she . . . because we were going into a blue uniform, so they made us a blue skirt, and we bought white blouses, and we wore those as our uniform with black shoes. Then they put us into brown. So that was the first time. . . that was sometime in the following year that we went into brown, and that was the first time they actually issued us a uniform. But they expected us, if we went anywhere, to wear our white uniforms.

Marcello: How long did you stay in the Hawaiian Islands?

Murphy: I was in the Hawaiian Islands up until 19 . . . well, let me put it this way. I was married on August 20, 1944, and the following. . . I guess it was in November that I was sent back to the States on temporary duty because I had been overseas so long. So I came back to . . . I remember I landed at Hamilton Field, and then I went to Salt Lake City because that was the post I was to report to. They gave me orders to go off for a month--wherever I wanted to go--so I came to



Cincinnati, Ohio, to visit my husband's sister Billie. Then I went back to Boise and spent Christmas with my mother. I had to report back to Fort Douglas, Utah, on New Year's Eve.

Then I had to . . . then they gave me my orders there, and I passed through Boise on the train, because I remember telephoning my mother and telling her I was passing through Boise. She met me at the . . . she was up at the station, and she saw me for a few minutes. I went up to Fort Lewis . . . pardon me. I went to Fort Lawton in Seattle and was there for about a week.

Then I got orders. . . of course, there was a group of nurses; there must have been about twenty of us. We went back on a liberty ship out of Seattle back to Hawaii.

Then when I got to Hawaii, I . . . because my husband had gone to the Marianas, so I applied to the Marianas. So I tried to go anywhere, and finally I got orders to go to Iwo Jima. Really, I didn't particularly want to go to Iwo Jima, because he was on Guam. But I said, "Well, I'm going to Iwo Jima," and then all of a sudden my orders were changed, and they sent me to Saipan. By the time I got to Saipan, they told me I was going to be stationed on Guam. So I don't know who worked it out, but somebody arranged it so I'd be on the same island as my husband.

Marcello: Well, that's probably a good place to end this interview.  
I want to thank you very much for having taken time to come up to Denton to talk to me about your experiences at Pearl Harbor. You've said a lot of very interesting things and, I think, important things.

Murphy: May I add that . . . you know, we had the privilege after we got out of the Army to go back to college under the GI Bill, and I took advantage of that. My husband went back to college and got his degree. We went to Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio; we both got our degrees there. Then I went into physical therapy, and that's what I'm doing now. I'm a physical therapist at Tuscaloosa VA Hospital.

Marcello: Well, again, thank you very much for participating. I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments very valuable someday when they use this information to write about Pearl Harbor.