

Margaret Nash Oral History Interview

FLORENCE TWYMAN: Tape one, tape one of an interview with
Margaret Nash.

[00:00:03 - 00:00:50] (unrelated content over original
recording; not transcribed)

FT: -- September the twenty-eighth. My name is Florence Twyman,
retired commander, Nurse Corps, US Navy. So let's start --
Peg -- let's start at the beginning. Where were you born?

MARGARET NASH: I was born in Edwardsville, Pennsylvania.

FT: Edwardsville, and I think you told me once it was very
[wealthy?] there?

MN: It was very [wealthy there?]. I would say (inaudible).

FT: And that's where you grew up?

MN: I was there until I was ten years old. And then we moved
to (inaudible) and that was another [seven years?].

FT: And then did you go to nursing school right there?

MN: Yes, I went to nursing school. Right there at the Mercy
Hospital in Pennsylvania, about ten minutes from my home.

FT: And was that in Wilkes-Barre.

MN: That was in Wilkes-Barre.

FT: A lot of Navy nurses came out of Wilkes-Barre.

MN: Yes. I have met quite a few of them.

FT: Now, when was that you graduated?

MN: I graduated June eleventh of 1932.

FT: And then -- so then how long after that until you were in the Navy?

MN: I did not go into the Navy until --

[00:01:31 - 00:01:43] (unrelated content over original recording; not transcribed)

MN: -- 1936. But in the Navy, I (inaudible) and I also went up to the Catskill Mountains to a private sanitarium to take a course in Tuberculosis, because the hospital where I trained did not have Tuberculosis, and so I wanted to know more about the disease.

FT: And then how -- now that was a time when we weren't at war or anything so --

MN: No.

FT: -- how was it you managed to get into the Navy at a time like that?

MN: Well, when I returned from the Catskill Mountains after -- my course was supposed to be six months, but I loved it up there, so I stayed 18 months. And there was a flood in Pennsylvania in 1936. And the sisters had called my mother to request that we all come and help out in the flood. And so I think that was my first experience as far as the Navy was concerned. Not exactly with the Navy, but part of it. I worked with the Coast Guard cutters out in the

boats. Taking the people's [mitts?] and the rooms of the houses. And some of them tried to get their cattle in, but -- and I remember that we also delivered a baby in the boat. And on the bridge, we had -- they had all the streetcars parked, and that's where the Salvation Army would stay. And we would just take it to the bridge and they would transfer everything by ambulance into the hospitals. And I was working for three days and nights around the clock -- I never went home, except to get a sandwich from the Salvation Army, occasionally. In the meantime, my uncle that was a congressman in Washington returned to Pennsylvania to survey the flood situation. And he came down the house to visit me and asked me what I planned on doing. And I said, "Well, right now, I'm going to continue doing private duty, until I can get something that I like better." And he said, "How would you like to go in the Navy?" Well, of course I jumped at that. And I said, "Do they have nurses in the Navy Nurse Corps?"

FT: That's what I was going to say, had you ever heard of the Navy --

MN: Right, right. No. And so he said, "As soon as I go back - - when I return to Washington, I'll go up and talk with the superintendent of nurses." And I said, "That would be

wonderful," and he said, "I'll have her send around an application." The only thing I said to my uncle was, "Please don't tell my mother, because she'd be very upset." So, in three weeks my application arrived. I had the necessary physicals and then I had to take care -- and in three weeks I was sent to Portsmouth, Virginia.

FT: That was pretty fast.

MN: Yes. Indeed, it was. I don't know whether they'd do things so fast today as they do --

FT: I don't know now.

MN: -- as we used to do in those days. And that was my first station. I remember signing my oath on April 18, 1936.

FT: Now how did your appointment read? Do you remember? You probably have the same...

MN: I still have my letter appointment, because it was one thing they always told us: "Always carry your letter appointment with you."

FT: And what did it say?

MN: I cannot remember --

FT: Did it --

MN: -- but I have it here today.

FT: -- did it say "Nurse, US Navy"?

MN: It said, "Nurse, US Navy" --

FT: In other words, it was nothing like rank at all.

MN: Oh right -- it was never even mentioned. What they would refer to in those days were relative rank.

FT: Oh they did, even then?

MN: Oh yes. Relative rank.

FT: So you were considered an officer?

MN: Considered an officer. Treated an officer. But did not receive the salary of an officer.

FT: No, indeed. So then you went to Portsmouth -- to the naval hospital at --

MN: To the naval hospital at Portsmouth.

FT: And did you get -- now you said you told them not to tell your mother, what did she say when you finally did? Did you get a lot of opposition?

MN: Well, yes I did. My mother, at dinner, every evening, for three weeks -- there was nothing but tears.

FT: Oh my goodness.

MN: But I thought at that time, If I change my mind now, or if I give in, I'm going to be doing it for the rest of my life. And therefore, I would be in Wilks-Barre, Pennsylvania. I would never have got to the Navy.

FT: Well now, what about the other members of the family? How did they feel about it? Or your friends?

MN: Oh, my friends thought it was wonderful. And my older brother did not like it. But the rest of them were all for it.

FT: But they eventually came around?

MN: Oh yes. Oh yes.

FT: Did it take your mother very long to come around?

MN: Well, not until my second station.

FT: Well she knew you were happy by that time, I guess. So that's how you went about it. So I guess we didn't have recruiting offices or anything for that sort of thing.

MN: Oh no.

FT: So then what happened? Then you went to Portsmouth, and then where?

FT: Up to Newport, Rhode Island. And that must have been about September 1937. I was very happy at Portsmouth, and I met some many friends there. But I was still happy to go onto Newport, Rhode Island, because that would be starting -- that would be a new life again.

FT: Do you have any idea how many -- did you ever get -- how many nurses were in the corps at that time?

MN: Well I think someone told me at one time about three hundred.

FT: Imagine that. Well then, how long were you at Newport?

MN: I was at Newport, Rhode Island, until about July of 1938, when I was transferred to [Mayor Island?], for temporary duty. Getting back to Newport, my mother came out and stayed for a week at Newport, Rhode Island, and therefore was convinced that the Navy was all right for her daughter.

FT: So how long did you stay there then?

MN: At Mayor Island, I was there for about six months.

FT: Now you said temporary du--

MN: Temporary duty. That was awaiting orders for Guam.

FT: Oh for Guam --

MN: At the next available vacancy

FT: But that's the way they did it then.

MN: Right.

FT: You told them that you wanted to go to Guam?

MN: Right.

FT: And so then they put you -- bring you out to the coast and -- I see. So then when did you actually go to Guam?

MN: Well, about September of 1939, I was transferred out to Guam.

FT: And what did the Navy have there then, was it a full-blown hospital, or?

MN: It was a full-blown hospital. We had one ward for the Navy personnel, and we had a small officer's quarters, about six

rooms. And the rest of it was for the Chamorro people on the island.

FT: And did you take care of them too?

MN: Oh yes.

FT: And how long were you on Guam, then?

MN: I was on Guam for about a year and a half. And in September of 1941, I was transferred to the Philippine Islands, to the Cañacao Naval Hospital.

FT: Now was that at your request too? Or did they ask you...

MN: No. You would spend one year on Guam and another year in the Philippine Islands. And that was the tour duty out there.

FT: And so where was it you went in the Philippines?

MN: To the Cañacao Naval Hospital. It was very close to Clark Air Base, and about five kilometers from the Cavite Navy Yard.

FT: Oh, the Cavite, I see. And then it was there -- so by this time it was what, 1940?

MN: By this time it was September 1941.

FT: Forty-one, I see.

MN: September '41, I'm sure that --

FT: So that's where you were when war was declared? When Pearl Harbor was attacked?

FT: Right. We went up to [Baggio?] and stayed for two weeks for R&R and returned to Cañacao, so we could get acquainted with our duties. And it was December the eighth --

FT: Yeah, it was the eighth there.

MN: -- at our hospital, when at six o'clock in the morning, over the loudspeaker, we all heard, "Pearl Harbor was bombed on Sunday. Report to the hospital immediately for immediate orders and to help evacuate patients." So from then on it was a nightmare.

FT: I guess so.

MN: From that very minute.

FT: Well now then -- but they attacked Pearl Harbor and then the Philippines, right?

MN: They attacked Pearl Harbor, and that was on Sunday. We heard it on Monday, of course. And on Tuesday was our first bombing. And that was at Clark Air Base. And I remember that they came over in squadrons. In fact, we could look up and see them, and hear the bombs drop. Although at that time we didn't know where they were dropping, but we knew it was close by to us. And we had -- on Monday, when we went over to the hospital -- what we were doing was -- the patients that were able to go back to duty, they were discharged and send to duty. The ones that were too sick, they were -- we put them all in wards, so we

would have large wards available. In case of an emergency.

FT: Now in the Philippines here at this hospital, were all of your patients strictly military? Or did you have any locals --

MN: They were all strictly military.

FT: And then we evacua-- you said you were evacuating, and where did you evacuate them too?

MN: Well we had a lot of Filipinos.

FT: Oh I see --

MN: Of course. And they were all sent back to duty, or to their homes if possible. And, of course, there were quite a few patients that we couldn't -- we had to keep. And what we had to do is try to get them all on a ward, so they would be taken care of. Especially the polio cases, because we had polio cases that were in iron lungs. And that was very difficult.

FT: I imagine. So then this is the kind of thing that you continued to do until -- did you stay at that spot there?

MN: That was exactly the thing -- on December the 10th of 1941, they bombed the Cavite Navy Yard. And that was a day I'll never forget. Never. And I think all the girls felt the same way. Patients were coming in, helping other patients. Many -- some were dead. They were on the roofs

of the cars, on running boards. Maybe there'd be about ten in one car, just sitting wherever there was space available. And they would help each other -- the ones that were not too injured, would help the seriously injured, to get them into the wards. That continued to come until late that night, I remember. Because the ward that Bertha and I were assigned to -- ordinarily you had 78 beds. But we must have had about four hundred patients in that ward. And they were lying between the beds -- sometimes there were two patients at the top, some patients at the bottom. It just -- it seemed endless. You had to be careful when you were stepping around, because there may be some that were even on the floor. I remember coming over from the store room and dumping the supplies in the nurse's quarters. In fact, I never saw so many supplies coming from the Navy in all my life. And the only doctor that was available said the first thing we must do is trying to help the ones that were suffering, that were just screaming with pain. You never knew where to start, but we had to have a routine. And also to give the tetanus to all the patients.

FT: Tetanus?

MN: Tetanus. Tetanus toxoid. One did not have time to ask when you had your last injection.

FT: Hardly.

MN: It was something that was an impossibility. So one girl would fill out a 20cc syringe with tetanus toxoid and the other girl would follow her with the morphine. And we went from patient to patient to patient. Some beds you'd find a dead body, but you didn't have time to do anything, you just moved on to the next bed. And that went on until -- I remember looking out, about -- it must have been about five o'clock in the evening. And the hospital -- it was as though it was surrounded in fire. And I -- at first I thought, What a blessing. If something would happen here -- I was thinking about the suffering.

FT: But that went on until -- how long did --

MN: It went until far into the night, when our captain evidently had a message from the Japanese commandant, and evidently, he told us that we had to evacuate the hospital because they were going to bomb it. And the Red Cross was on the top, for which our captain also reminded him of the Geneva Treaty. But he said they knew nothing about the Geneva Treaty. They did not sign it. So they did not have to live up to any Geneva Treaty. So the only thing we could do was to take the patients that were possible to transfer in small PT boats, and that was across Manila Bay. And I remember -- believe it or not, I had my letter appointment in my pocket. I don't think I even had a

toothbrush. Someone had put sandwiches in the nurse's station, but we never had time to eat them. And so we started evacuating patients at 12:00 midnight, across Manila Bay in a small PT boat, with whatever protection we could receive. But this time, I don't think we got a protection.

FT: Just getting out of there.

MN: It was just getting out of there and trying to get as many patients as possible out before they arrived to do their bombing.

FT: Now were -- you say across Manila Bay to where?

MN: We went into the Army and Navy dock in Manila. And from there we tried to transfer the patients to Sternberg Army and Hospital. But, of course, we knew that would not be too long before they start bombing in Manila, and Sternberg was a wooden structure. And they were also filling up with patients, and it was very difficult to accommodate our patients. And so our patients were scattered all around, and the only thing [Laura Cobb?] could do was to transfer as many as the girls as she possibly could with our patients.

FT: To Sternberg.

MN: To Sternberg and to different places. And I remember Sternberg, and finally I -- I can't remember what day it

was. But they said, "You girls better have something to eat." And when we sat down in the dining room at lunch that day, the bombers came over again. And I remember we all diving under the table. The Army nurses just seemed to stay put and they couldn't understand what was wrong with us, where --

FT: Well, they hadn't been bombed yet.

MN: No, whereas we had gone through Clark Field and Cavite Navy Yard. We knew just exactly what to expect. And regardless of what we were or what we were doing, the only thing to do was to just get under whatever was available, and we wait until the bombs dropped and then come out to survey the damage.

FT: So then how long were you -- were you one of the ones who went to -- you went to Sternberg, and then...

MN: I went to Sternberg, and what our chief nurse decided to do was to split us up in groups with our patients. And I remember there were four of us, or maybe five of us, that went out to the Philippine Union College. And I don't know how many kilometers outside Manila that was. And we took as many patients as we possibly could. Some of the girls went to [Hai Lai?]. And patients were transferred there -- Hai Lai was a night club that many of us had visited in, in peace time. And I do not know where -- at least there were

two girls -- but we were taking the larger amount of patients, and so that's why there were four of us that were going out to the Philippine Union College. It was run by the Seventh Day Adventists.

FT: Oh yes. And then -- so the -- you got a certain amount of patients out there?

MN: Oh yes. But we had to put up tents for the patients. The Seventh Day Adventists -- of course they were [felt?] and they were really very nice to us and they would do anything to accommodate us, but they couldn't accommodate us with any of their buildings. And so we had to put up tents and put the patients in them. And we slept on cots out in the open. And I remember the mosquitos were just --

FT: They must have been terrible.

MN: -- crawling all over us, and they would come up the cots -- the legs of the cots, and we were nothing. All of us here had the measles, with all the mosquito bites. And of course we never slept all night. But the corpsmen we had with us -- it's amazing how you improvise. They decided to put Vaseline strips around the legs of the cots so the ants weren't able to crawl up, and so in that way the second night, we were able to get some sleep.

FT: So then how many nights were you there?

MN: Well we were there until December the twenty-sixth.

FT: That's quite a while.

MN: Yes, it was quite a long time we were out there. The Seventh Day Adventists would allow us to go in and take a shower occasionally, which was a real treat. Although we didn't have any clothes, and so we were putting the same clothes back on. On Christmas Day, I remember -- I don't know who had the radio, in fact we never asked -- that was one thing we'd never do, was where they'd got it or how -- you'd just accept it. And they [loaned us a?] radio, and we heard President Roosevelt from the States stating that Manila had been declared an open city. And our captain, or whoever was in charge -- I can't remember, we were all so scattered -- said the only thing for us to do was to take our patients and transfer them back into Manila. And as we knew all our bridges were bombed, as the American forces that were pulling out -- so the bridges were [all mined?]. And I remember going with several of our wonderful corpsmen, put our patients in the ambulance and we started evacuating once again into Manila. And --

FT: About how many patients were you transporting in where you were, do you have any idea?

MN: I really have -- I really don't have any idea. I know there more nurses sent out to this Philippine Union -- the other girls were just split up in groups of two. And I

still -- we had no idea. We knew they were around some place -- we never stopped to ask questions, there just wasn't time. But the next day we put a load of patients -- I guess there were ambulances, whatever was available -- and a couple of our corpsmen, and we got into the ambulance with the patients, and when we come to a bridge they said, "You need to pray." (pause in recording) -- literally just one, so why don't you pray? So it ended up that I was always saying a prayer. We finally arrive into Manila and where we were going was [Santa?] Scholastica. It was a college of music, and it was a huge building, and it was run by the German fathers.

FT: It was a German order?

MN: It was a German order. And we arrived about -- must have been about lunch time, I guess, because I remember hearing something ring. And we start unloading the ambulance, when the sirens went off. And that was alerting us that a bombing -- and the Japanese planes came over and start dropping their load of bombs, so the patients that were unable to get off the ambulance -- the rest of them that we had on stretchers, we just lined them up, I remember, alongside the fence of Santa Scholastica. And we just lied down on the ground alongside of them until the bombing was

over. And of course by this time, we're -- one never gets used to bombs, let me put it this way --

FT: As used to it as you could be.

MN: Right. Right. At least we were discovering the time when they were coming doing their bombing. And as soon as that was over, we immediately jumped up and started transferring our patients into Santa Scholastica. And it seemed as though the Army had set up the wards -- and I'm sure it was the Army, but anyway, someone sent up the wards. And we were able to transfer the patients right into the beds. For the first time, which was --

FT: That was a [go?].

MN: Yeah that was a relief, to see -- it looked as though they were great big long wards, and I guess that must have been a hospital --

FT: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MN: -- at one time. Probably.

FT: So then how long were you able to stay there at Santa Scholastica?

MN: Well we stayed at Santa Scholastica --

FT: We're getting onto the first of the year now aren't we?

MN: Right we are. It was -- must have been about four days, I guess -- the longest we ever stayed in one place. And the

-- on January the first of 1942, the Japanese arrived in Manila.

FT: And you were still at Santa Scholastica?

MN: We were still at Santa Scholastica. And we were -- we knew from that time on that all of our forces that could be possibly get out, and all the patients that they could get on the ships that were in the bay, had been evacuated. They had done a magnificent job. And because -- but the Army could not take the pilots from Clark Field, and so all those pilots -- the ones that were not killed were at Santa Scholastica. In fact, there were quite a few patients left there. And we moved our patients in and then just took care -- but the Army weren't able. Because the Army had pulled out to Corregidor by this time. And we were the only ones left in the city -- that is, of the service group. Our chief nurse said to us one time, "I talked with the Army chief nurse, and they would be able to take the nurses -- the Navy nurses" -- because there was only one boat, just a small boat. And they could take the Navy nurses to Corregidor, but they really could not accommodate the patients. And so we decided we would stay with our patients.

FT: Then it was the next day that you -- on the second of January?

MN: On the second of January. But I also remember there were a lot of people that were strand-- there were civilians in Manila that were on their way to India and Singapore and Hong Kong, and all those different places. And so they were all caught in Manila. And for some reason there were so many of them that had joined up with the Navy group, for which we were very happy to have them. One young priest, I'll never forget him. He was on his way to India, and he was caught in Manila, and he was a Father John [Doherty?].

FT: (beeping) It'll click. You were saying about the priest?

MN: He had joined our group. And he was really a godsend. He tried to keep us all cheerful, which was almost impossible. So he decided, "Well while those people are marching into the city, let's have a spelling bee."

FT: Oh my goodness! And then did he actually do it?

MN: And we had a spelling bee. And I remember that we could hear the marching in to the city on every type of conveyance that was available. And there we are having a spelling bee. But every once in a while, we'd glance through the window, because we knew what was going on outside. And Father Doherty, with his marvelous sense of humor, at least tried to keep us busy. I often said to Father, "Father, I don't know whether you ever succeeded in

keeping us busy that day or not. Or maybe you [wanted us why?] we misspelled so many words." But he really was a godsend. In the meantime, there was also a [Marie Adams?], a Red Cross worker, that had joined with us, and also some civilian nurses.

FT: You must have a quite a heterogeneous collection of people, actually.

MN: Right. Right. A very wonderful group.

FT: You just kind of picked them up along the road --

MN: Right, and we were still with our Navy people, the ones that had also survived. I often wondered how many. But I remember some our warrant officers and our petty officers, and how wonderful they were. And they were trying to hide our supplies -- in fact, we were doing everything, because we knew it would not be a matter of hours or days or -- when the Japanese would come in.

FT: Now we're still on the -- what the -- is this New Year's Day?

MN: No, we're sort of moving along now, the month of January. And the days flow -- it's a little bit hard for me to think of dates or days from now on, I guess. I just -- but it seemed every day was alike. It was the same routine.

FT: Well then what day were you actually taken prisoner?

MN: The day when the Japanese commandant came in was -- that I remember, was January the fifth -- and told us we were under the Imperial Japanese Army. And gave our captain the instructions -- what they expected. And then he would give us the messages. And so it went on like that day after day -- by this time, we had also accumulated a lot of Filipino people that were injured, and they did not have any place to go. Their homes -- their little Nipa huts, I should say -- had all been bombed. And so it seemed as though we ended up with about -- it seemed to me about four, five hundred patients. I remember the ward that I worked in was this big -- if not bigger -- than the ones that we had at Cañacao Naval Hospital.

FT: Well now, you said they came in and gave you instructions, but then did you leave Santa Scholastica? Or did --

MN: No.

FT: -- you stay there?

MN: No.

FT: But you were --

MN: They walked through the ward. And they said -- told us -- that they would let us know. And we would be allowed to stay with our patients, but they'd -- even they could see that there were so many. [Really busy?].

FT: But did they allow you to stay then with your patients?

MN: Yes, they allowed us to stay there. They told our captain, for which he told us later on, that we could stay there. And they would tell us what their next move was. But in the meantime, we really had many things happen. Of course, we had no idea how long we were going to stay there, so we as usual lived day by day and night by night.

[00:41:15 - 00:41:20] (audio cuts out)

MN: -- on about, but anyway they did -- well they had guards that came of course. And a few days after, the higher command of the Japanese Imperial Army came by and told our captain that if any more patients escaped, the captain, the doctor and the ward corpsmen on the ward, and the nurse on the ward -- which of course happened to be me -- would be shot. But, of course, I couldn't understand the interpreter. But I went over and told Laura and the girls what the Japanese had informed Captain Davis. And it wasn't until several days after that Laura said to me -- I did not tell her they included the nurse, and when -- so several days after that Laura learned [from?] me that it was also the nurse, that I too was in that lineup. It seemed as though we were just going one day at a time. Of course, that wouldn't shock me at all. But then the Filipinos were more cooperative with this, and they

realized what they were putting us through. And we were trying to help them. But they too wanted to get back to see whether their families were still there. And we could understand their side of it. But we stayed at Santa Scholastica until about March -- about the middle of March I guess -- in 1942. And we were transferred over there, and they allowed us to take our beds, which we were quite surprised.

FT: You were transferred to where?

MN: To Santo Tomas -- civilian internment camp. And, of course, I remember the Japanese officer lining us all up and telling us that we were going to be transferred over to civilian camp. They told us all the corpsmen that were in Santa Scholastica could take care of the remaining patients. Because many of them were Filipinos, and they were being discharged to their homes. And it must have been about the middle of March that we were transferred over to the civilian internment camp. When we arrived over at Santo Tomas -- I remember being on the [Esculeta?] many, many times, but I did not know anything about Santo Tomas. There were people all over the place -- it seemed as though all the civilians had been put in there. It seemed like thousands to me. And --

FT: And your corpsmen did not go with you?

MN: No, our corpsmen did not go with us. Our corpsmen that were -- they were left over at Santa Scholastica until they discharged the rest of the patients.

FT: And none of the patients went with you?

MN: No -- none of the patients. This is all civilian internees that were already at Santo Tomas. We finally -- of course everyone came down to look at the remaining nurses. They knew we were Navy nurses, and Captain Davis also told us -- we had to be very careful, and that we should try to stay together, and not spend any time with the civilian internees, because we had to be careful. Because being military, you never know if the Japanese had planted in Santo Tomas, and whether they would try to get information out of us. And, of course, we couldn't tell them any -- give them any information that --

FT: They didn't know that though --

MN: No, right, that they didn't already know.

FT: Now what about Captain Davis?

MN: Our first couple nights in Santo Tomas, we slept on the floor because they didn't have a room available for us -- until they could find one that was big enough that they could put us in with other civilian internees. And they finally found one and -- I don't remember how many nights we were without a room -- but we inquired about a hospital

and if we could help in any way. And they said the civilian nurses from Manila had set up a small hospital in one of the buildings, and that they'd be very happy for our help.

FT: But this must have been a huge place, this camp.

MN: Oh, it was just huge. It was -- there must have been seven thousand people in there --

FT: Oh my goo--

MN: Must be six or seven thousand. I may be wrong about the number.

FT: And how -- to go back a little bit -- how had the 11 of you gotten back together? Because you had been scattered? Had you gotten back together at Santa Scholastica?

MN: Well what Laura told every one of us, "Regardless of how we're separated or where we go, we're always trying to get back to be together." And we were never to forget that. Of course, not any of us would. I remember Mary Chapman had been one that went out to Sternberg -- oh with [Ann Burt?] and [Titus?]. And Mary had finally got back with Suzy -- [Suzy Cutcher?]. And I think they were at the highline in [Nan Klen?]. And so the girls -- I don't know how they got the message. Messages got through that I was -- it was amazing what one could do in those days.

FT: But did the 11 of you then -- when you eventually met up all together you were at Santa Tomas?

MN: Yes --

FT: That's where (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MN: Yes, we all got back together. And I'm trying to think -- we probably all got back together during the time we were in Santa Scholastica.

FT: I see.

MN: And I would imagine...

FT: So anyway, that was -- to go back a little bit then, you did eventually did get so that you were working in a hospital at Santo Tomas?

MN: Yes, once we got settled in a room, and everyone was trying to help us in any way they possibly could. We were in a room with 69 other people. They were from all over the world, all different languages, I remember, in that room. It was a good time for a language course, whatever you'd want to take. Our beds were lined up alongside the windows. And they were just -- well you were -- the bed was there, and whatever you had accumulated, you stowed under the bed. And in order to get out in the morning, you had to go over the bottom, because the beds were all so close together, they were trying to get us 11 just to fit

in that row. But -- and then surrounding us were all the civilians. And some of the mothers that were in there --

FT: Now were they all women in this one room?

MN: They were all women in this one room. And seven of -- if the children were under, I think it was five or six years old -- they were allowed to keep them in the room with them. And they shared their cots. So we also had some youngsters in there with their mothers. The older children were put with the fathers in their rooms. And all the rooms were, you know, women and men, in all these rooms. But I think all of them were about the same size, and they held -- probably, because they were the classrooms of Santo Tomas College.

FT: Oh, that's what they--

MN: Yeah. It's a big university run by the Dominican fathers.

FT: But they turned it into a --

MN: They turned it into an internment camp. And so life went on, and then we start working in the civilian hospital --

FT: How long did it take for them to get you so that you could work in the hospital? Just a short time?

MN: Oh, it was just a short time, because they really needed nurses.

FT: I'm sure.

MN: And they were very happy to see us come, so we could help them out. Because there were so many of the internees that had come down with diseases and they too were under quite a hardship. And they were just taken right out of their homes. And the only thing they could possibly pack, as they told us later -- the patients would tell us -- was a suitcase. They were lucky if they were even able to take a suitcase. And there just wasn't too much of -- well by that time, I think they really started to get into a routine, and we had so many executives from all the big companies. And they formed a committee -- the executive committee, they called it. And there were men from GE and Goodrich or Goodyear and from all those companies in the States. And -- but of course then over there was the Japanese commandant that was stationed right in the camp. And we made the rules and regulations, but they had to be approved by him. And I don't know -- in fact, we had very wonderful people in that committee and they were trying to do the best they could under such dreadful circumstances. And of course, with everyone crowded together, you can understand why we had a lot of gastroenteritis. And then some of them absolutely couldn't ingest it -- it was just very difficult. But it seemed to

me as though we had all the diseases that would happen in any hospital, or in any community.

FT: Plus a few more exotic ones.

MN: Very exotic, believe me! And I remember the wards -- there must have been about 35 beds in the wards -- and the civilian nurses must have worked very hard to set that hospital up.

FT: Now they were for the most part Filipinos.

MN: No, they were the civilian internees in Santa Tomas --

FT: The nurses?

MN: Oh, they were the civilian nurses from Manila. And I never had too much time -- I think after we were there for a while, we were able to talk with the girls. And some of them had worked in Philippine [Junior?] Hospital and many of the [mob?] were out there, or with their husbands. And returned to nursing again, to help out. And so they were grateful for any help. And then we start recruiting volunteers, which also helped us out in the hospital. And I remember I worked in the women's ward. And I can't remember the hours. It seems Laura made out the routine, and we were assigned, just like we would -- we tried to carry on our routine as we would in a military hospital.

FT: And then did she assign the civilian nurses as well?

MN: No, she did not assign civilian nurses, she just took care of the Navy nurses. And we were assigned to day duty and evening duty and night duty, and we all had our turns. And then we -- we were truly outgrowing that hospital. Although we did have a small hospital where they put the mothers and babies. And that was in Santo Tomas. And they also had another one that was out in the Holy Ghost College, for mothers and infants -- were out there. And that was filled to capacity.

FT: Now, you -- this must have been kind of a lifesaver for you in a way, because otherwise if you didn't have hospital work to do, what would you have done?

MN: Our profession was a godsend.

FT: I would think so. And then what did you do when you like - - did you work 8-hour shifts, or 12-hour shifts, or?

MN: We worked 8-hour shifts.

FT: And then what did you do, when you weren't on duty? What was there to do?

MN: Well, after we started to adjust a little bit to the routine, we decided that we were going to open a library. There were four of us -- Bertha Evans, [Elvyn Page?], [Edwina Todd?], and myself. And we were going to try to collect up all the books that were available in the camp, and put them in our library. And then -- because we

didn't have any money at all, and the rest of the people in there -- they had their servants, and the servants used to bring them food in. And --

FT: Food in from where?

MN: Food in from Manila -- what they could get. And they would have something that they call the line. And the people would move -- would line up in the morning, and then whatever they would allow them to have, they would bring them in the line, which started at about nine o'clock in the morning. And that was a (inaudible) civilian -- and we didn't have anyone that we knew. We had to depend upon trying to get some money for ourselves. And so that's why we decided to set up the library. And we rented the books for five centavos for the first 24 hours, and then --

FT: Well where did people get the money?

MN: Well their servants would bring it in to them. They had --

FT: The servants could come --

MN: And the servants --

FT: -- at will?

MN: -- could come and form the line in the morning, which the Japanese were out there. And by this time, they had civilian guards that would also be down at the line. Regardless of what committee they had formed, we two had formed a committee. And so the civilian internees

would all line up and they would receive many things, you know, in order to get some more clothes to their homes, if that wasn't always also confiscated. So that was really the daily routine. And that continued on until I think it must have been -- I can't remember when Corregidor fell, but...

FT: It wasn't too long after [that?].

MN: About April -- maybe the end of April, or some -- and so it must have been in May that they brought in the 64 Army nurses.

FT: From Corregidor.

MN: From Corregidor -- and, also, the ones that had been on Baton. Of course, before Baton had fallen, from what the Army nurses told me, the nurses for Baton was [sic] transferred over to The Rock -- that's what we call Corregidor, we always call it The Rock. And I guess that wasn't any picnic either. Living in there day after day and listening to the bombs, just -- and they really bombed them. Because we could hear the bombs dropping on Corregidor. And we'd say "Oh, they're bombing Corregidor, our last stand." But it must have been about the middle of May, or something like that, when they brought in the 64 Army nurses. And, of course, they put them in a separate building for -- until they could find places available for

them. And they were put in -- it was a building, just near Santo Tomas, just on same compound. It was called Santa Catalina. And so they stayed there for about a month or so. And then they transferred them out into the rooms, like we were in. I don't know if they were separated or not, or kept together. The Army nurses were going to go on strike, and I think they did go on strike for a few days -- we got the biggest kick out of that. We thought it was amusing. But we didn't have a strike in the prison camp.

FT: Nothing like trying I guess.

MN: Right, it's just -- so... Of course there are always funny things that happen, and by this time I think the civilian internees were also pulling themselves together and they thought, "If we're going to be there, we might as well make it into as much of a small city as we really possibly can." And so that's what they started doing. And believe me, they did a wonderful job, because there was so much talent in that camp. We had -- we used to say -- we had from the highest to the lowest: the beach [combers?], and then I guess many had told us they were royalty. But it was very difficult to tell one from the other, because we were all dressed in the same rags, I guess.

FT: Well then, the camp had a certain amount of autonomy -- in other words, the Japanese that were there just kind of were overseeing it --

MN: Overseeing it.

FT: -- from the top, so to speak.

MN: Yes, they were always --

FT: So you were still governing, more or less.

MN: Right and we were able to -- then later on, when they moved the Army nurses back into the regular camp -- Santa Catalina was a very nice -- it was a small building, but it was adequate. And so we moved the hospital over to Santa Catalina. And there we had a dispensary. And we had a waiting room -- in fact, maybe that's what they used at the fort one time. And we had wards upstairs that we set up. The wards were always huge. And we had all kinds of diseases; you didn't have time to (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

FT: But you didn't have much in the way -- if anything, in the way of drugs either, did you?

MN: No. I don't know. It's amazing what can happen. I don't know how -- in fact, I never bothered to inquire, but it seems as though we did have some vitamin B -- everything that's very limited. And we had the necessities of life, I guess. And then --

FT: Bare necessities.

MN: And then I really think that was through the executive committee, you know, going to the Japanese and trying to get whatever medicines they could from them. I worked in the dispensary. And I always loved the operating room, or dispense work, and I remember I worked with [Ethel Thor?], one of the Army nurses. And Ethel was such a wonderful person. We got along very well together. And also, I know there was a physio-therapist. Her name was Beth or Bess, but I don't know her last name. And -- in fact Ethel and I still correspond today, if you can believe it.

FT: So then --

MN: Well.

FT: -- by this time you were sort of integrated.

MN: Yeah. The time -- as time marched on -- we never knew what day and it really didn't matter.

FT: I was going to say, how did you keep track of time?

MN: They all -- they were all alike -- it was just one day after the other.

FT: Did you make an effort to keep track of time?

MN: Well, I remember -- we also had in one of the buildings, and I don't know which one -- it was a small chapel. And of course, our good friend Father Doherty had moved right along with us. In fact, it seemed as though he joined us,

and so he not only joined the (inaudible), but he joined the Navy nurse crew! [Very fatherly to?] the Navy nurses. And he'd go around the camp in the morning, and if the people were making something, he'd say "Would you mind letting me have some?" And he'd always bring it up to the Navy nurses, whatever they were making. Because they were -- they had had shanties, they call them. And they had little stoves out there, like hibachis. And it was amazing what they could do in that little hibachi. And it's amazing how much talent can come out of a few pieces of -- well anything you could pick up. Nothing was thrown away.

FT: I'm sure.

MN: Everything was used for something. And so it went on like that, day after day, and they were forming an orchestra. And they were allowed to hold some concerts, out on the grounds. We never really attended too many of them, although we could hear the music from our rooms. And from the room that we were in -- it was room on the third floor, room 69. And there were balconies of this huge room, and we would stand out there in the evening. And we could see everything that was going in the camp, because we were on the third floor, so...

FT: Well did they keep bringing in more people? Did the camp enlarge? Or was it --

MN: They kept bringing people in from different places, like Baguio, and all the surrounding areas --

FT: So -- well the place was -- the population was growing.

MN: Right. Right. It was really going up. And so with our chapel -- that we could attend church services. And of course, Father Doherty was always there with his marvelous sense of humor, trying to keep us cheerful. But by this time, we're so busy standing in line to get our mail -- everything was one huge line. And standing in line to wash out the few clothes that you had accumulated as we went along. Everything was standing in line and --

FT: Well that pretty well took up your day then.

MN: Right. And when we went down to eat -- and of course, in the morning, of course Bertha said -- and Father Doherty -- he also said I was never going to make it. He said, "Peg was dead up to the ankle, but we were already dead to their little toe." And -- but we knew about this -- they called it [lugow?] in the morning for breakfast, and it was like wallpaper paste. And if there was a banana available, they would give you a banana and then they'd give us some coconut milk that we'd put on the cereal. And when you'd

eat the cereal, sometimes there were weevils in it. And as our girls used to say, "That's your protein."

FT: I was going to say, that's your protein.

MN: Yeah, don't to pass it up! But -- me, that never had -- that always was rather fussy about my food. I remember when we were allowed to write one card home, I remember saying to my mother, "I'm not so fussy about food anymore."

FT: Did your mail get out, and did it get home?

MN: Well, you know what, I can only remember one card that I sent out. And that was the next camp we were in, which I haven't got to yet. And I think that was in 1944.

FT: That's (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

MN: Or something like that. And I can't remember sending anything out in Santo Tomas. But I do remember we received a Red Cross package. And my family -- and I could tell that if they did write to me -- well I know they did, but some of the mail would be cut out. And so we would receive everything -- and of course the packages were all open. And so we never knew what they took out for themselves. Because we knew when -- if we see something at camp, they'd say, "You know, that must have come in my package." There was one thing that was wonderful, was our sense of humor.

FT: Well, yes.

MN: Believe me, if you didn't have it, you were really a goner. Such as one incident -- the Japanese used to come over to the clinic for vitamin B shots. And our supply was very, very low. And we came into the dispensary and they gave me his name, and I looked at it and I looked at his chart -- we kept charts also, and it had that this same Japanese officer had been in the day before for vitamin B. And so I just said to him through an interpreter, "I'm sorry, I can't give you any vitamin B today, you had a shot yesterday. Our supply is very limited. You Japanese do not give us enough supplies." By this time, they're almost dragging me out of the dispensary, especially the pharmacist mate. He said, "Hey, give him the vitamin B, or you'll all be shot." That's the Japanese commandant. So, needless to say, I ended up --

FT: Giving him the vitamin B.

MN: -- reluctantly giving him the vitamin B. Couldn't even find a dumb needle.

FT: Then how long did you stay in -- you say you went onto another camp eventually?

MN: In May of 1943. I don't know what -- yeah, I'm sure I'm correct about the years. Doctor [Leech?] from the Rockefeller Foundation -- he was in Santo Tomas... Was all these great doctors that we had met from all these big

foundations. And they decided we -- Japanese decided to open another camp. It was up on the tip of Luzon, and it was called Los Baños. It was an agricultural college. And so as -- they had to take nurses and he asked Laura if the Navy nurses would volunteer to go. And, of course, we jumped at the chance. We all voted yes. Because any change -- or just to get outside those gates. I had been outside once, to the Holy Ghost College to take care of the mothers and babies, that also had some type of a food poisoning. And Mary Chapman and I went out -- any time they would ask for a volunteer, I always volunteered, because I always thought maybe some time I could have found an ice cream cone or something from some place. So I said to Mary, "Mary, maybe we'll get more food out there." And so Mary and I just volunteered to go, and we stayed out there for 10 days. And it just ended up that Mary and I were working 12-hour duty, because the mothers also got sick. So we ended up taking care of the babies and the mothers and also comparing the food that they had out there. So that really wasn't any choice duty, believe me.

FT: So really you volunteered for Los Baños simply to get a change of scenery --

MN: Right. Right.

FT: -- and maybe more food.

MN: Something different. But they said they would be sending 800 men to set up the camp. And then some of the nurses to set up the hospital there -- they had a small hospital. And so we volunteered to go, and so we left in May of 1934 for Los Baños in a great big truck. And all the internees out.

FT: All the internees came out to see you off?

MN: Right. And they were singing "Anchors Away."

FT: But they didn't send any of them?

MN: Of the Army nurses?

FT: No, the internees. They didn't --

MN: Oh, they sent eight hundred able-bodied men.

FT: I see.

MN: And it -- they did not want to put any more -- our committee did not want any more, until we got the camp set up, and ready for them to occupy. Of course, we once again didn't know what we were walking into. That was one thing -- everything was a surprise. So when we got down to the railroad station, they had all the cars -- the trains lined up. And, of course, we never bothered looking at the boxcars at the end, not thinking that that was going to be our way of travel. And they put 68 men and 2 of the nurses in each boxcar. And the -- we really didn't have much space in there. And then the air also --

FT: How long a train ride was it?

MN: It seemed an eternity, but --

FT: I'm sure it did.

MN: -- they tell me it was only five hours.

FT: Well that's a long time.

MN: But I remember when we'd pull up to a station -- there were two guards also in each boxcar -- and they'd open the door just a little bit. And the Filipino that -- I don't know, they seemed to get messages about everything. And they really had a way to communicate. They'd be lying at the station with bananas and food for us. But the Japanese wouldn't allow them to give it to us. And when we left Santo Tomas at five o'clock that morning, they gave us a hardboiled duck egg and a piece of bread, and that was our ration for the day. When we finally arrived at our destination -- when we were getting out of the boxcars, most of us were falling on our faces, especially the men -- it was very hard for the men. And -- but they had some trucks there, and we were fortunate that they took us up in the trucks, and we didn't have to hike, like all the men. The eight hundred men had to walk all the way, and I don't know how many kilometers it was from that railway station up to the camp. Well, we finally arrived to our final destination, and as we didn't have anything to eat

all day -- and I can't remember water, I can't remember even seeing water -- they put us in a cottage. And, of course, that too was fake. And so we didn't have anything to eat. And I remember we looked outside the barbed wire fence, and we could see chickens and banana trees surrounding us. It was very difficult, so -- I don't know how, but one of the chickens came close to the fence.

FT: Whoops!

MN: And we grabbed the chicken, and we killed it. And we made chicken stew.

FT: You had something to eat, cook with.

MN: We had one chicken. And we all laughed about that, because I think this was [Elvyn Page?]'s idea. And Elvyn was a good cook, and so we gathered up what we could. And it's amazing what we can do with nothing. But there was another thing that was rather amusing -- if it wouldn't be sad, and we were so hungry that monkeys -- or some type of animal hat was running outside. And - right, it must have been, because they'd run up the banana trees, and they'd get themselves a banana and they'd peel it. And -- but we couldn't get to the bananas.

FT: You couldn't get them up just to bring you the bananas?

MN: No, but at least it was something to laugh about.

FT: Well then you had a -- did you set up a hospital up there then?

MN: Well then we set up a hospital up there. And so I was in the infirmary. And Helen Grant, she was the superintendent of nurses in the Hong Kong hospital. And like a lot of the other civilians, they were caught in Manila. And Helen joined our group. And also, [Basila Torres?] -- she was one of a Navy officer's wife, that also helped us in Manila. And Basila was a great help -- an excellent nurse. And when we went to Santo Tomas, [Marlene?] Davis -- she was one of the Army nurses that was on Baton, Corregidor, Santo Tomas, and Los Baños -- and if anyone [received?] to be decorated, it was certainly Marlene Davis. As far as I'm concerned. And I still feel the same way today, about Marlene -- her father was American, and her mother was Filipino. And --

FT: But she was with your group then -- in Los Baños.

MN: She was with our --

FT: -- in Los Baños?

MN: In Los Baños. She came in with the Army nurses in Santo Tomas --

FT: So how many nurses did you end up with, and do you remember --

MN: Thir-- well, there were 11 Navy nurses and three civilians. I never knew whether Marlene was one of the -- an Army nurse or not. But I know she was with the Army. And I don't know whether she requested to --

FT: Go with you?

MN: -- to go with us, because of -- I think she was being somewhat molested down in Santo Tomas --

FT: (inaudible).

MN: -- and they thought maybe it would be safer for her -- Marlene, she was a very beautiful girl. And -- but they were really a great help, the three of them. And Helen Grant and I became very good friends, and she and I set up the dispensary. And I think Mary Rose Harrington came in and also worked in the dispensary.

FT: Well then you had these 800 men there to start with, and then did they bring a lot more people into Los Baños?

MN: Oh yes --

FT: And then after you got it going...

MN: -- eventually. After we got the hospital set up -- and it was amazing what you can do with nothing, again. But there was also - I'll never forget him -- an Australian man. And his name was [Allen Fumes?], and he's from Sidney, Australia. And he took quite a fancy to the Navy nurses. And there wasn't anything that man couldn't

do. He had been -- he's associated with his brother, and he had left Singapore on his way back to Australia when he got caught in Manila. And believe me, it was a blessing for us. Whatever we would want, we'd always -- we'd call him Chum, everybody in the camp called him Chum -- he sure was a chum to everyone. And he would -- he'd say to me, he'd come to the quarters, because I was walking down there in the dark at 5:30 in the morning. And he did not want me to be walking down with only the sentries and the guards, which we didn't have enough guards around. And so Chum would come up to the cottage every morning and walk with me down to the dispensary. And one day, he came in and he said to me "why do you have to go so early?" And I said, "to boil the instruments." And he said, "well the clinic doesn't open until eight o'clock," and he said, "does it take y--", and I said, "yes, because I only have a little hot plate." And I said, "I have to boil all these instruments that the doctor" -- the instruments really came from the doctors that were in the camp. We had a Polish doctor that had escaped from three different camps.

FT: And they did --

MN: And then --

FT: -- kind of escape with some of their instruments?

MN: Right, and they had some of their instruments. And also a Doctor [Nance?] -- he was with some type of a group, I just can't think off hand -- a marvelous surgeon. And he was on his way from China and was also caught. But this was our good fortune, to have these wonderful doctors with us. And they donated their instruments. And that's what I was doing, was boiling up their instruments to get the clinic ready. And so Chum said, "what did you use in America? [Pie-gee?]" He used to call me Pie-gee. And so -- everybody used to get a big kick out of his accent. And then I -- I drew him a picture of a sterilizer, and about a week after that, Chum came into the clinic one day, and brought in a sterilizer. And I asked him "How did you get the materials to make this?" And he said, "don't ask" --

FT: Don't ask.

MN: Never ask questions.

FT: No.

MN: Just accept. And so from then on, whenever he would make something for me, I'd never ask him questions, because I -- in fact, I would know where it came from. And -- but it went along, day after day, and the clinic is always filled up. We had jungle rot, as we called it, you know? The --

FT: I've heard of it.

MN: -- athlete's -- oh, dear, all those men.

FT: Well, and you must have had various sorts of deficiencies too.

MN: Oh we had so -- by this time, there's a lot of deficiencies. And -- but I wasn't seeing what was going out on the boards. You know? All the cases that were coming in there, because --

FT: Very, very, (inaudible) --

MN: Right. Yeah. Everything. And because they were coming in with all kinds of diseases, and scurvy, and...

FT: Well did all of you manage to stay reasonably healthy and on your feet?

MN: Well I did, up until 19-- September 1944. When I start running this high temperature. And my legs and arms were all swollen, and I had great big welts all over my arms, that were just raised. And they looked like boils. And we did have lab technician, but of course he -- Rube didn't have the necessities to run a full-scale lab (inaudible) with how much they could acquire from some other source. But so, when my temperature got so high, they put me in the hospital. And Doctor Nance said he never saw anything like it before, and neither did Laura Cobb, and no one else. And so by this time, I wasn't caring very much. So Doctor Nance told Laura the only thing they could do for me, they had some typhoid [crude?] vaccine. And

they could give me an injection and in fact, you know, the fever therapy to raise my temperature up to see if they couldn't arrest the infection until I could get back to the States. And so they gave me the one and put my temperature up to 106, and it was very difficult for me. And then they gave me the second shot, and that one almost killed me. And so Laura -- [Dana?] wanted to give me three, but Laura said, "No way -- she could never tolerate any more." And so I stayed in the hospital for at least -- it must have been at least five or six weeks -- and -- but finally, I guess with the rest that I was getting, it seemed to subside. Until -- to the point that I was able to return back to duty. But in the meantime, we also had -- I just want you to know what happened there. An English director -- and he was quite a character -- and he decided to put on some plays. One was "Dover Road." And it was a comedy -- it was a British comedy, and I took the part of Billy. Mary Harrington and I used to take the parts. And I can't remember Mary's part. But I was Billy, and I said to the director, "What is Billy? What is her part?" He said, "She's a comedian." And he said, "One thing, you don't need any coaching. That's why we selected you." But anyway, it was just wonderful. And we put it over the loudspeaker, and the whole camp were out. And it was

really funny; they were always playing jokes on me. And so, one of the ones that was in the casting mixed up my papers one time. And when it came to my part, I had the wrong paper.

FT: The wrong part?

MN: And -- yeah -- and one of the other fellows from -- and they're so funny -- [Sarry Snaith?]. He handed me his script quick-like, you know? Go on the air. And out there they thought, "what's happened to Peg?" And so -- but anyway the play went on, everybody really enjoyed it --

FT: You did this over the radio, more or less? Or the loudspeaker?

MN: Right -- the loudspeaker.

FT: (inaudible) --

[01:33:03 - 01:33:04] (audio cuts out)

MN: And so... And it had the wheels on it. And I couldn't understand -- I was surprised when I saw the wheels. But that's the way the design that I drew for him... And I asked him -- I looked at the wheels and he said, "Don't ask. Just accept."

FT: Well the fact that it had wheels...

MN: Right. I -- and so one day when I was down -- we had -- under the hospital, in the basement -- let me see, I think there must have been two who lived in the barracks, and the

rest of us must have lived down in the basement under the hospital. And one day, when the girls came down, they said to me "Peg, they have Chum on trial." And I said, "why?" And they said, "The commandant's bicycle wheels were missing." So then I knew where they were. But he told me not to ask questions. But he was really a clever man, and he sure got himself out of that also. And so -- but I don't know if the commandant -- I guess he got another bicycle, but I'm sure there were plenty available for --

FT: At least they didn't shoot him.

MN: But -- right, they didn't shoot him. And so -- oh there were so many things that happened in camp that -- no time to even talk about them -- that were quite humorous. And -- but then we went on, day after day, and we tried to make the best of Christmas and -- which was just another day to us. And so finally Chum had built me a small shanty. He probably stole everything he put in the shanty too, I don't know; I never did ask. And it was a side, because he said, "you can't live under -- in that basement, without some privacy now and then." And some of my friends and I used to go out -- he made me two chairs and a table, and it was really a nice little place to go. Just to get away. And so -- but I had walked up to the shanty and -- well in

January, the Japanese evidently -- we could hear all the bombing, and we knew that the Americans were getting closer, because we could hear all the shell and --

FT: This must have been about 1945.

MN: About -- yeah, 1945. Oh, from September on, we could hear this shelling. And this was raising our morale considerably. And in 19-- we just went on month after month and praying, and thank God we had a chapel that we could go. And by this time, a lot of the religious had joined this -- the sisters from all the different orders, and also the priest. And they was also -- they were separated from the camp, but they used to come over to our side of the camp. They had to see a doctor -- sometimes they say they had to see a doctor, so the guard would allow them to come through. And I remember Doctor [Eahearn?] -- Father Eahearn -- coming over one day. And he said, "Peg" -- I said, "We call your part of the camp Vatican City," and he said, "Well, we call yours [Hells Have Favors?]." (pause in recording) Well we just -- we just went on day after day with our routine, and our spirits were getting up because we could hear the shelling and bombing, and there were all kinds of rumors going through the camp -- of course that was always going through -- there was always a rumor. Which of course -- I don't know, I guess every

little thing that would lift our morale... But we were so busy with our profession and taking care of people in the camp, that we didn't have time to think about ourselves, or dwell on ourselves, because we were always thinking of someone else.

FT: And time probably went faster maybe for you than it did for some others.

MN: Oh my, yes. Well many of the other civilian-- they would just sit around and say we're going to starve to death. And many of them were dying by this time, with beriberi. And we had a cemetery in the camp. And -- they had a sense of humor with everything. And they'd say -- if they'd see someone and they'd kept losing weight -- and it's all you were seeing, was the bones sticking out -- and they'd say "You know, if you think you're going to die, you better start digging your own grave, because we don't think there's anyone in the camp able to do it, and the Japanese sure aren't going to move from their guard stations!" But it really got to the point -- but as I say, our profession -- we were helping people, we didn't have time to think about ourselves, we didn't even -- I never remember any arguments with the girls. We always were very congenial with each other. And maybe there were times where we got, "We never want to see any of you again", or something like

that. But we would never say anything. But every one of us got on wonderful, together. It couldn't have been a better group, if they were selected for -- should I call it -- a duty like this?

FT: Right. The -- so then you were actually -- when were you actually liberated then?

MN: Well --

FT: And did you --

MN: -- in February. In January, the Japanese had packed up and left the camp. And we thought for sure the Americans were coming in--

FT: Oh, they just packed up and left?

MN: They just left in the middle of the night. We get up in the morning and there were not any guards, and so we said the Americans must be coming in. And so -- but that was a week of reprieve, I guess. And the Filipinos started bringing us food in, and bananas and everything they could possibly bring in to us. And we were finally getting something to eat. And so -- but a week had gone by -- I guess everything was too good to be true -- but the Japanese returned again. So I never did find out what was going on, but they probably thought the forces were coming in, and so they all pulled out. And so it just went on and our routine -- and then one morning, in February, it was

February 23rd in fact, 1945 -- that I walked out to the shanties, and I think that one of the girls was with me, and it was at the stage now that if I [stopped to hear?] steps, I couldn't walk them. So it was better for me to get out on the level ground. And I just had a short incline to walk up, because roll call was every morning at seven o'clock -- to go up for roll call. And just as I was going to walk up the hill, I looked up. And I could hear planes flying and something dropping out. And I don't know who was with me but I said, "Oh there are leaflets, they're probably trying to tell us something." But the planes got low enough that we could see RESCUE.

FT: Oh! They had written that on the side --

MN: They had written that on the planes -- it was RESCUE.

FT: Oh... For heaven's sakes.

MN: And so we didn't even bother with the pamphlets, and I don't think I'd ever run so fast up a hill. As soon as the planes flew over us, we saw something dropping out, and the next thing we knew it was paratroopers. The 11th Airborne.

FT: Oh my goodness. What a sight.

MN: Oh dear... I'll never, never forget it, if I live -- regardless of how long I live. Only the good lord knows how much (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

FT: So did they -- so then the paratroopers came in --

MN: The paratroopers landed, and the amphibian tanks crashed through the gates. They got all the Japanese -- they really had their secret service in one group. And they killed all the Japanese guards. And I think someone told me at one time that there were about 263 guards. So they got them all in one group. And if there were any strays they finally got them. But everything happened so quickly. And as one of the fathers said, "It was like the angels came from heaven." And I ran up to one of the paratroopers, but it was crazy. They were -- the shooting was still going on in the camp. And Laura -- the first thing Laura said was to get the patients under the bed, to protect them. And so when I had time I ran up to one of the paratroopers, and he was taking a shoe off, and I said to him, "Did you bring anything to eat?" And he just looked at me and he said, "Here's half my bar -- my Hershey's bar" --

FT: C-ration. Oh, Hershey's, right.

MN: Right. "Here's half my bar." And I said, "Oh chocolate." I thought, Oh I better hide that, because if anybody sees it... And so -- but yes, I guess he gave me -- in fact, the paratroopers have since let me know -- because they still keep in touch -- and one of them had in one of their POW papers that Peggy Nash must have been the one that ate

half of his chocolate bar. (laughs) And so -- but I said to him, "Well, how long would we be here?" And he said, "Not very long. As soon as we can get all of you people out." And I said, "Our patients?" And he said, "As soon as -- we got to leave here as soon as possible." And I thought to myself -- I didn't say anything to him -- but, What's the hurry? We've been here all these years, and now we have to leave immediately. Anyway, we had two newborn babies. And one was born on St. Valentine's Day, and the other one was only three days old. One was nine. And so Laura -- and the mothers were quite ill, and so Laura said to [Edwynatan?] and I, "I want you two to take the babies, and protect them with your life." And the mothers -- and they were on stretchers -- and [Tanny?] and I were lucky enough to be put in one of the amphibian tanks with many of the patients.

FT: So that's how they took you out, was in those.

MN: Right. And that's how we -- and each one of us carried a baby. And one of the girls had put a small can of sugar in my hand, that I was saving for such a day. And it was brown sugar, but it was gold to us. And I had a great big straw hat. So we got into the amphibian tanks, and I don't know how far it was to the beach, but evidently from what the girls tell me -- because they all had to walk -- it was

miles. And we got down to the beach where they were going to transfer us across the [Laguna de Bay?] --

FT: To the [ships?]

MN: To the -- no. To the trucks. And the jeeps. Jeeps. First jeep I ever saw. And then -- and transfer us up -- the Army had come in and they had brought in to the -- they had set up a hospital, or a makeshift hospital at the New Bilibid Prison. And so they were taking us up there. And so as soon as I got up there, I went to one of the Army doctors, and I told him that the baby that I had was very ill. The other baby was all right. And he took it -- he had someone take the temperature, and it was 106, and he said to me, "You better give her some penicillin." And I said, "Penicillin, what's that?" And it was only then that he recognized the anchors on my collar. And he said, "My god. Are you one of the Navy nurses?" And I said, "We were just rescued from that camp." So he -- first thing he said, "Let us have the baby." And he said, "Could you help us?" And I said, "Sure, if we could have something to eat." It was al-- I was always thinking of something to eat, to get me through the next hour. So he sent Tanny and I down, and we had Army beans and graham crackers, and of course I put some of the graham crackers in my pocket, in case we didn't get any

more food. And so Tanny and I went up and started setting up the wards. The Army men were all over the ground, and their corpsmen were giving them intravenouses and blood transfusions and everything. And what they wanted was to try to get the beds set up to open up a hospital there. And so -- and we worked there for five days, and then they brought in some Army nurses in the trucks. And they wanted us to stay a few days longer, because they were exhausted. But as Laura told their chief nurse, "Your girls may be dusty and exhausted, but my girls are --"

FT: Starving.

MN: -- "starving to death" is right. "And we're going back to the States as soon as our orders arrive."

FT: So then what did you have to wait for? Did they take you out to Navy ships, or what?

MN: No, they took us -- first they took us down to Santo Tomas. And that was a very sorry sight. Manila and all the bodies and everything lying around. But we went to Santo Tomas, and they kept giving us all those vitamins. And every time I would take them, I'd throw up. And so -- and then when they kept giving them to me, I didn't bother telling them, I just put them in my pocket. And there wasn't anything else I could do with them, until I was able to get some place to discard them,

because I knew I couldn't tolerate them. And we were in Santa Tomas for a few more days -- I really don't know the length. And then they transferred us -- they would send out a big plane for us, but we said we'd go with anything that was going back to the States. And so we ended up with the -- the [Nats?]? Is that what they call them? And their bucket seats?

FT: Mm-hmm.

MN: You know, what the troops travel in? We said that was fine for us. And so we went down to Leyte. And we met Admiral Kinkaid down there, and they were really wonderful, but -- how ironic the first night we arrived at Leyte, some stray bombs happened to come -- I can't remember from where. But we only stayed there a short time, and then Admiral Kinkaid flew us in his private plane I guess to Samar. And then from Samar -- and they picked us up. And I know the Battle of Iwo Jima was going on at the time. And so -- and then our next stop was Guam, where I met [Leone Jackson?] again, because I had been stationed with her in Guam, and she had returned. And we only stayed there long enough for pictures. And then we went on from there to Johnston Island, for which, believe it or not, the Japanese were still firing at -- [that's because?] I could hear. And I said to one of the young pilots, "Something's hitting the

plane." And he said, "That's snow." And I said, "Oh," and I always thought I was smart enough to know that I was in the Pacific and it wasn't snowing there. And so we had to stop -- we had to change planes, because they really knocked some of our engines out. We went in on one engine. And so -- but nothing seemed to bother us. The girls were on the tank oxygen who didn't -- and they couldn't breathe -- and we were going home!

FT: That's all that mattered.

MN: Right.

FT: And you went in and then you went in --

MN: And then we went in from there. We went down -- went to all the islands, and then from there on to Hawaii. (pause in recording) And from there we went into Aiea. And that was the first time that I saw the Navy uniforms. And so many of our friends were out there. And -- because we were in Army uniforms.

FT: Oh. Just anything, yeah.

MN: Or anything, you know? Just... And so they tried to outfit us with our Navy uniforms. And that's the first time that we knew that Navy nurses had rank. And we were so pleased at that. But everyone was so kind.

FT: And then you went back, you said?

MN: And then we went right in -- from there we left, and went into Oakland Navy Hospital, I guess it was, in Oakland. And that was when they started our physical examinations. And after five days of very thorough examination, they discovered that I needed further hospitalization. And so --

FT: Well I imagine mo-- did most of you?

MN: Well, they transferred me so quickly to St. Alban's, that I never knew where the rest of the girls were sent. Or what happened to them. Or where -- in fact they sent me to St. Alban's with two nurses, and so -- but then I discovered that I had tuberculosis. They had picked up -- and the beriberi and the [plague?] -- probably that's what I had in '44, was the beriberi. You know, it was starting. So I spent -- I arrived there -- it must have been about in March sometime, because I know they allowed me to go home for my birthday. It was that month. And my family had come down to get me in, and they gave me a few days leave. Just long enough to see my family. And then I returned to St. Alban's, and from then on it was just --

FT: How long were you in St. Alban's?

MN: I was in St. Alban's for a year.

FT: Did you ever actually return to active duty?

MN: No. I wanted to return to active duty, but they told me that if I really wanted to -- they did not advise it -- but they would only put me on limited duty and that I would never be able to travel again. And by that time, [Mary Martha Heck?], that I had known, that was an assistant superintendent of the Navy Nurse Corps came to St. Alban's. And she said, "I think the best thing for you to do is to take the survey." She said it was the best thing, she said, "Maybe you feel all right now, and now that you're rested and have had some food and --" but, she said, "and after a while, it will return." And she said, "I think your health --" and by that time I knew she was right, so I was surveyed out. It was just ten days from the day that I entered the Navy Nurse Guard. It was April the first, and -- or it was early April I remember. And in '46. And I remember I also went in in April '36.

FT: Oh for goodness sakes.

MN: So...

FT: Quite a coincidence.

MN: Quite a coincidence is right.

FT: But then throughout all these years -- and the fact that you've maintained a lot of Navy contacts, and I'm sure you probably keep in contact with most of the other --

MN: Oh yes. In fact, Sylvia [Lavasche?] that was in Portsmouth, Virginia -- we all went in together, and just -- not too long ago I got a beautiful letter from Sylvia. So I quickly -- I misplaced the letter. I couldn't remember her last name, and so I did find [sic] it in the Navy nurses -- the new association I think is absolutely wonderful. And Sylvia and I and -- so I called her and she just couldn't believe it, she kept saying "Peggy! I've followed your life!" And talking to Sylvia was like old times, you know?

FT: Oh I'm sure. Yes. Well --

MN: And then she mentioned the Navy Nurse Corps association, and I said, "Well, that's where I found your name. I just looked and saw Sylvia Lavasche, and your married name -- it's Warrener." But I was able to contact her and talk with her on the phone. And it's -- it will be 50 years. And so... I worked at the University of California after I was well enough, and I love the university, but -- it's always the Navy Nurse Corps.

FT: Always the Navy Nurse Corps.

MN: Yeah. Once a Navy nurse, always a Navy nurse -- so we all say. And I just love the Navy Nurse Corps, and all the wonderful friends that I made.

FT: Well, I think we all feel much the same way. And Peg, I certainly want to thank you for this interview -- it's been

my privilege to hear about your experiences, as unique as they are. And I really wanted to do this interview just for that reason. And it's been my pleasure. Thank you very much.

END OF AUDIO FILE