National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Returned by
Elizabeth
Wilson

Interview with

Peter Hammerson

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Floyd Cox: Today is January the 28th year 2004. My name is Floyd Cox and I'm a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War. We're here in Fredericksburg at the Bush Gallery to interview Mr. Peter Hammerson regarding his experiences during World War II. I want to take this time to tell you thanks a lot, Peter, for taking the time to sit down and tell us of your experiences. And I'd like to start out with a little basic information: where you were born, when you were born. a little bit about your schooling your mom and dad... Just give us a little background information.

Peter Hammerson: I was born at the end of WWI In New York City. I was raised in California. My father was from Germany and my mother was from England and so we had World War I to live with on that. I was studying as a premed Student when Hitler came to power and that's when I got involved.

Floyd Cox: What year did you graduate from grade school?

Peter Hammerson: I couldn't even tell you. I can't remember dates and names anymore at my age. I was a premed student in Pasadena. My mentor was Dr Tabor (sp?). He was asked to staff the Medical Regiment. He conned me into coming in. I was a charter member of Company A 115th Medical Regiment. I processed other people in but never went through basic myself. That is the highlight of my whole career: I never went through Basic Training.

Floyd Cox: Did you get your commission [not understood]?

Peter Hammerson: I got it eventually as a direct commission. Worst mistake the Army ever made!

Floyd Cox: Where were you stationed when you first when in?

Peter Hammerson: As I say, I was in the National Guard in Pasadena, CA We then went up to San Luis Obispo. I was on duty 7 December. The Army had sent me up even to Stanford University for training, to Beaumont Army Hospital. I was a surgical Tech in various hospitals.

Fishbein didn't want to take GIs nurses so I never got credit on that but I was a scrub nurse.

Floyd Cox: Who's Fishbein?

Peter Hammerson: He was the head of the AMA. But anyhow, then war came along. I was supposed to have gotten married incidentally on the 21st of December. The war

came along on the 7th. I still got married . They gave me two three-hour passes to get married and to have a honeymoon. My military career was always fascinating.

Floyd Cox: After you had your training, you were a surgical nurse, you say? Did you get your Commission at that time?

Peter Hammerson: No,no. That was much later on.

Floyd Cox: What was your rank then?

Peter Hammerson: As a matter of fact, the first thing I started with, was the First and Fourth. Does any one remember was a First and Fourth was? You had one PFC stripe up above and three rockers down below and you were paid for what you knew, not what you did. So that was fun too.

As I said, I became separated then from the Regiment. I was going along as an individual. At one time I was slated to have gone with the Long Knives up to Kiska in Alaska. Fortunately, I didn't.

Floyd Cox: You said the Long Knives. Now what was that?

Peter Hammerson: That was the name of the group that went into the Aleutians. I don't know, I could give you the book on the darn thing. Very much like these other books: we were going to do great things up there.

I met some of them when they came back from there. All they did was get chilblains. It was a miserable situation. They waded to shore, lay on the beach that night, and found out the Japanese had had sense enough to leave

Floyd Cox: So you weren't fortunate enough to be with that group?

Peter Hammerson: No, at that time I was at Camp Stoneman. I had been down at the dock with my A and B bags ready to go when somebody had a change of heart and pulled me back again. Then I was shipped out as an individual replacement, went to Noumea in New Caledonia where the Americal Division was put together.

Floyd Cox: Let me ask you a question: how did you get to Noumea? Did you get there by ship?

Peter Hammerson: Yeah. Convoy. The Victory ship which we need to make a point about there in the combat zone... Make the end of that building a victory ship with the landing net leaning off it. That was a lovely way to approach on the darn thing. Again, as I say, not the conventional bit.

I found out very quickly after I got to Noumea that as individual replacements, that they would call out the names of people who had gotten assignments and the rest of us they wanted to work.

I went along with the Navy idea, don't you know. One hand for the ship, one for me. So one day for them, one day for me. I had a very interesting experience there in

Noumea. Not worth mentioning. (laugher)

I shipped out from there, ended up having an assignment. Ended up then at the 48th Station Hospital at Vila, Efate in the New Hebrides, which was absolutely delightful. Went from there up to Guadalcanal.

Floyd Cox: Let me back up a little bit. What was your job during this time?

Peter Hammerson: When I got up to Guadalcanal I was the supervisor of surgery and the scrub nurse, whereas when I was in Noumea we still had at Vila, Efate, we still had female nurses. And when we went north, they went south. They didn't really like the Australians. They, don't you know, when they were with the Army, they were the only girls around and that was wonderful. When they got down to Australia they found they had competition and what's more the Australians expected them to pay their own way into the theater. Very independent gals.

Floyd Cox: Did you supervise these women nurses?

Peter Hammerson: No, no, no, no.

Floyd Cox: What did you do? What was your job?

Peter Hammerson: I was a surgical tech in that case. I was a scrub.

Floyd Cox: Surgical Tech. What did that involve?

Peter Hammerson: Frankly we did a lot of things we shouldn't do, later on. I did anesthesia. And I did what a surgical nurse does. As a scrub you'd be offering the surgeon the instruments he needed. You needed to be able to set up the particular surgical case. You had to know what you had on that. And sometimes you'd even do the suturing. It depended on how busy you were. When the casualties came in, you had a fair number of them.

Floyd Cox: That was my next question: were these combat casualties?

Peter Hammerson: The biggest bunch we had originally was malaria and whatnot and accident cases and the rest of it. But yes, you did have casualties coming back

Floyd Cox: Of course they probably already had field dressings.

Peter Hammerson: That's it.

Floyd Cox: And that was basically it? Field dressings before they got to you?

Peter Hammerson: And some of that, unfortunately... again one of my experiences, I shouldn't mention his name. The Colonel in charge of this hospital was a second-rate pediatrician trying to be an orthopedist and there was one poor chap who had had his leg

busted two dozen times and an aid station doctor had cast the thing. And this Colonel decided "hey, the front line shouldn't have put a cast on. That's for us to do."

He took the thing off and of course here is the leg like that and he couldn't put the dang thing back together and had to send forward and get this poor lieutenant doctor to come back to show this colonel doctor how the hell to cast a leg. I didn't like him at all.

Floyd Cox: Sounds like it.

Peter Hammerson: He wanted to court martial me and I wanted to court martial him. We left matter of fact that way. You never went AWOL if you were going North. And we were there at Guadalcanal just below that airfield that is so famous -

Floyd Cox: Henderson Field

Peter Hammerson: Henderson Field. And at Lunga Point

Floyd Cox: And this was when the battle was already over?

Peter Hammerson: Yeah.

Floyd Cox: We had already taken it.

Peter Hammerson: Granted you still had some stuff going.

As a matter of fact there was another hospital there. And I don't know whether the hospital went in first or if the ammo dump went in first. But the ammo dump went up. The patients, don't you know, in these casts were crawling [not understood] trying to get away from it. A lot of it was asinine stuff in the war if you really want my opinion. The rest of it was beastly. Some was fun.

When we came ashore I had the Beach Master tell me he would offer me anything on the island if I would just walk away got a while because I was sitting on these drums - 55 gallon drums of GI ethyl alcohol - with which you could buy anything and everything. And literally I did. I had the Air Force and the Navy - the Navy came in and put tile on the floors and the Air Force came in and put overhead lamps. Everything was fine and I'm paying off of this GI ethyl alcohol.

Floyd Cox: Okay, now tell me what was the value - what did they do with this alcohol?

Peter Hammerson: You gotta be kidding. (laughter) That was sipping whiskey.

Floyd Cox: Did they drink it straight?

Peter Hammerson: Oh no, you did whatever you could with the darn thing. We did find a field one time of pineapples and you'd scoop those out and put in this GI ethyl and you'd put the tap back on. Talk about breakfast fruit. I mean, that was absolutely delectable.

The did have Black Lacquer (sp?) for the officers and whatnot and we had one poor lieutenant... somebody stole his Black Lacquer. And he was determined to find out who is was by sampling everybody's canteen. And of course had a little GI something. And that poor man was getting absolutely stonkered and finally he was lying there on the ground. As people came by they would hold his nose and open his mouth and pour a little more in, don't you know, make him happy.

Floyd Cox: So you're saying he got drunk?

Peter Hammerson: Yeah, he got stoned.

Peter Hammerson: From that airfield they were building a hospital The engineers were supposed to do it, but forget it. I was not an engineer so I bummed a ride up to Bougainville. I had an interesting time on that.

As I say, I was independent. But as I say, this colonel and I did not see eye to eye, He wanted to court martial me and I wanted to court martial him. Then I transferred to the 37th Portable Surgical Hospital. That came before the days of the MASH, hospitals that everybody has seen. And [not understood] this business now where we were realizing with helicopters and whatnot, if we can get a casualty to aid you can save 96 % of them. So the idea was to get as far forward as possible.

So at that 37th Portable Surgical Hospital, we had, at one time we had three doctors. We ended up with two doctors, and we had I think at the top we had 24 Grunts and ended up with about 18. But we worked with the Australians. We did New Guinea and I loved it . I got in with ANGAU, the Australian-New Guinea-Administrative Unit, did a walk-around with them. Kept wandering off ... the only jeep we had with that portable unit, till the Old Man decided hey don;t you know, if you like them better than us, go. And I had a Liklik hospital. A native Liklik hospital for a while which was absolutely wonderful

Floyd Cox: You said a Walk-Around. Now clarify that for me.

Peter Hammerson: The Australians.. New Guinea. The port of New Guinea was a Australian mandate. Then you had New Guinea. Then you had the the Northern portions that came under the Dutch.

The Australians were good administrators. It was used primarily for plantations. If you had the money to set up a plantation you turned to ANGAU. They went out, found the Chiefs of these tribes, said we need so many people to come in and clear the place.

Meanwhile these Australians who were responsible for these natives would do a walk around their area to go to all the tribes.

I think the best example is the one that still provokes me. I got to a Little Numbers Group. Pygmies.

Floyd Cox: Is that's what you call them? Little Numbers?

Peter Hammerson: They were known as the Little Numbers people.

Floyd Cox: Because they're short?

Peter Hammerson: They are the ones in those - not the limp little grass skirts but one after another until it stood up like a little Porcupine. They didn't know they were on an island. Their only contact with the outside world was with some other tribe.

Okay. After the war, the UN came along. These people who wanted to take advantage of the timber they had there, the minerals that they had there. And said "Oh, the people on New Guinea, these natives, need to have self-determination and a a place at the UN."

And one of the people said, "Hey well wait a minute, don't you know they're cannibals still." These people weren't (??), my Little Numbers People.

So the Representative again, Sicano's (sp?) bunch - miserable beast - said "Oh no they're no longer fighting and eating their enemies."

And the doctors got up and said "They still have the same disease which they had when they were cannibals." which is a disease very much like this mad cow disease

And Sicano's people got up and said "oh, no, don't you know, they're no longer eating their enemies, they're only eating their revered ancestors."

This business of self determination. We still need to have,as far as I'm considered, empires. You've got the problem we've got at the present time... that Lawrence of Arabia resolved on the darn thing They were tribes! They're not a nation!

Floyd Cox: Let's go back to where we were. When you were on this island were there any Coast Watchers?

Peter Hammerson: The Coast Watchers were further up. They didn't find any on Guadalcanal. They were up at Bougainville. They were on some of the other islands. They were every bit as interesting. They were mostly Australians too and the Australians were very much like an American cartoon as an American. They had a lovely set of slang. Scared a lot on people. They were good fellows.

Floyd Cox: Did you happen to know any personally?

Peter Hammerson: Yeah, As a matter of fact when I got the Liklik hospital. I loved that.

The British were crazy, quite honestly. So formal and whatnot . So here was this sergeant major - you know, that classic business when they jump up and down (sound of heels feet stomping to attention). No uniforms - they were wearing their rank on a wristlet. They took me in to meet the Colonel and did this business and the colonel thereupon said "I say, isn't it about time for a spot of tai?"

And we forgot about everything else and sat down and had a spot of tai.

The Sergeant-Majors ran the whole operation. I don't know what they used the officers for.

Floyd Cox: You were talking about moving what we now call the MASH unit as close as they could to the front line.

Peter Hammerson: Back beyond the Aid Stations

Floyd Cox: And this is where you were at?

Peter Hammerson: Yeah. Again you have that lovely portable hospital supposedly down there in the combat zone. Ours were normally a case of the coconut (??) loading sheds from the coconut production they had there. You used whatever you happened to have available, because you wanted to be as close as possible. And you didn't stay there long enough. It was always a case of move.

We would attach to any larger unit. I think the classic example was I guess when were at Lae, and we got three different orders from three different Superior Headquarters. One saying "Go North," one saying "Go South" and one saying "Stay where you are."

So we took a vote. Nobody knew what we were doing. But you'd latch onto any bigger hospital in order to get supplies and then scoot out again. Because we took very little equipment with us.

Floyd Cox: Describe if you will - I know you can't get into detail - some of the types of cases that you had. Wounded cases.

Peter Hammerson: I think some of the most tragic are those - not the people that you save, that was good. But those ones when you say: Hey, okay, you're fine, here's your Purple Heart, and you're ready to go back to duty.

To say 50 % of you are going to get killed and everybody looks at his neighbor and figures "that's the person, Not me" But once you've been shot, you figure yeah, I'm vulnerable and they wouldn't want to go back in the line.

I hated that flame-thrower bit. The worst case I saw was a Navy Signalman who had been on a Post and had recharged this fire by throwing gasoline on it. It flashed back and ignited. [not understood] You can't feel it He was out of his head but you could hear him.

Another man didn't count too long on throwing out a hand grenade and it wrecked his hand. And then you had that business: Do we take the time and try to do reconstruction, or do we figure okay; let me get him out and then he's going to have a stiff hand or lose fingers or something like that. And that was when of those cases as I said with this colonel when we fought like mad because I told the guy "Nope, we can save that damned hand."

Floyd Cox: That's a disagreement that you referred to a while ago?

Peter Hammerson: That colonel wanted to court martial me.

Floyd Cox: Who won, by the way?

Peter Hammerson: We saved the man's hand

Floyd Cox: Good.

Peter Hammerson: I think one other that was interesting but one of the worst problems we had and that was shrapnel. Because you'd go in try to find it, soon as you touched it, it would move. It would go charging out.

We got a dental X-Ray machine and converted the thing and actually made it into a little Fluoroscope.

You felt like you were doing something, and you were. We we a stage better than just being an Aid man a stage better than just being a Battalion Aid Station. And we were independent. That was the lovely part. It just fitted my lifestyle perfectly

Floyd Cox: With that we'll continue this interview later on.

Peter Hammerson: You don't want to; my career was miserable!

Floyd Cox: With our time constraints we'll close right now, Peter. But once again, I'll finish this interview with you later on.

Tape 1285
Transcribed by:
EA Wilson
Austin, TX
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A RE-CLAIMER

On two occasions I was selected (dragooned) by two estimable friends to contribute an oral history of my service - despite my assertion that I would not be a good subject for an interview –[which the resulting 'draft' interviews indicate].

Consequently, to 'clarify' those interviews, I will now try to make a compilation of the answer that those two gentlemen deserved and wanted - [with as few asides as possible - but do know that mine was not a 'conventional' life or service]

The National Museum of the Pacific War
Fredericksburg, Texas

Center for Pacific War Studies

Interview with
Peter A. F. F. Hammersen
Army Medical Department

This interview is in support of the Archives of the Center for Pacific War Studies at the National Museum of the Pacific War, and the Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information.

The following represents answers to the questions that were asked at the interviews conducted by **Floyd Cox**, on 28 January 2004, and by **Ed Metzler**, on 29 May 2007.

Q. Where and when were you born, and where did you grow up and go to school?

I was born in New York [at 333 Central Park West], on 27 November 1919. Later the family moved to Pelham Manor [1344 Manor Circle], in Westchester County, New York.

[That was a lovely home - complete with billiard room, bowling alley, swimming pool & stable - adjoining a 1,000 acre forest that ended at the Pelham Bay where I had a boat].

I attended many schools, for we spend many winters in California [eventually moving there]. I attended two private schools and three public schools -[Siwanoy, Prospect Hill and Pelham Memorial]- in Pelham, and two private schools, a public school, and a Preparatory School in California before entering college.

Q. Tell us about your family. What did your father and mother do?

My father was born in Osnabrück, Germany. His family had the largest Textile Firm in Europe, and he was a representative of, and a purchasing agent for, that Firm.

My mother was born in Nottinghamshire, England. She had studied Nursing -[was a Surgical Nurse on Dr. Sir Victor Alexander Haden Horsley's staff]- for she wanted to go to India to treat the women there who, because of their culture -[being behind the Purda]- could not be seen / treated by a male doctor.

My father and mother met in 1912, while both were on a cruise in the Mediterranean - [aboard the Imperial Mail Steamer, *Prinz Eitel Friedrick*]- and they married a year later in London. Their first home [Bremar House] was in Cornwall Gardens, Kensington, London, where my elder sister was born in January 1914.

Q. When, and why, did your family come to New York?

In June 1914, Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated - and Austria declared war on Serbia - and in August, Germany declared war on Russia and France - and Great Britain declared war against Germany -[Thus a Golden Age came to an end].

Although my father had lived in London since 1906, as a German he was forced to leave at the last moment - and to leave his wife and daughter behind.

However arrangements were soon made whereby my mother, sister [and her nurse-maid, Lilly], were able to get to Holland. Reunited there, the family then crossed to Switzerland, where they remained for two years - during which time my father was employed by the *Skandavisha Kreditah Tiebolaget* in Zurich.

In 1916 they left Genoa, aboard the Italian Steamer, *Giuseppi Verdi* -[Cabin D]- and arrived safely in New York - after evading submarines in the Mediterranean that sank another vessel that was carrying part of their house-hold goods.

[The *Guiseppe Verci* was sold to Japan in 1928, renamed the Yamato Maru, and used as a troop ship during WWII. It was torpedoed and sunk in 1943, in the Philippines].

In 1917 the United States declared War against Germany - in 1918 the War ended - and in 1919 I was born at 333 Central Park West - where the family stayed until 1921.

[My father 'Declared his Intention' of become a Citizen in 1917 - the 'Certificate of Naturalization' was received in 1922].

During that time my father was employed by the American Trans Marine Company as Secretary Treasurer and Director of Administrative and Financial Affairs. In 1921 he resigned that position to become the Vice President and Comptroller of the American Agricultural Chemical Company - and the family moved to Pelham. When the family finally moved to California, my father became associated with the investment firm of Dean Witter & Company, in San Francisco, where he remained until his death.

Q. How and when did you come into the Army - and where did you get your training?

In 1939 I was in college in Pasadena, California, planning to pursue a medical career. My Mentor was a very find Doctor and friend [Kenneth W. Taber] - and he was 'tasked', in September of 1939, with organizing Company A of the 115th Medical Regiment, 40th Infantry Division, California National Guard - and he took me in as a Charter Member - [he really 'took me in' - 'dragooned' me - rather like these interviewers].

Recall the world situation at that time - with Hitler, Mussolini, the Spanish Civil war - the Army needed to expand its reserve forces.

Anyhow, I never did go through 'basic training' - other than learning how to drill and salute in the Armory in Pasadena. As Dr. (Capt.) Taber's 'assistant' I did the medical in-processing of the personnel coming into the service - to include their inoculations.

Granted, we did go into the 'field' a few times - with some amusing experiences. On one maneuver, at the Pomona County Fair Grounds, the local citizenry came by to 'see' what was going on - to include 'peeking' into my 'pup-tents' as I was going to bed.

And on that same maneuver - the General's trailer was near an Inn that served alcohol - and so he wanted a Guard to keep order - and for some reason I was selected. As I had a cold and a soar throat - I thought a 'small libation' would help - and that Inn provided what was needed, on a window ledge - so that, as I would pass by on patrol, I could take a sip. [I don't recall much about that patrol - but order was kept].

On another occasion - a 'new' soldier missed a formation, and when he showed up and wanted to know what he had missed - his squad leader thought to teach him a lesson by saying that he had missed getting his 'Muster Button'- and that he couldn't get paid without it. And that started that 'soldier' on the equivalent of a 'Snipe Hunt'.

He went to his Platoon Sergeant - who sent him on to the Supply Sergeant - who said 'Sorry, I already turned them in to the C.O. - and he is with the General.

Undaunted, and without fear, that soldier then went to the General's trailer - told the guard that he had to see his C.O - and he went in - and the meeting stopped - and the General asked 'Yes what?' - to which the soldier replied, 'Please, Sir, can I have my Muster Button'. I believe that was the same soldier who was later promoted to 'Half Sergeant'. Well why not - after all - there was a 1st Sergeant.

And I was in at least one parade - in which I was the Gideon Bearer - and I remember being afraid that I might knock the CO's big brimmed Campaign hat off, when I had to drop the Gideon sharply, in salute, as we passed the reviewing stand. I recall having seen that happen - and that poor officer trying to pick up his Campaign hat as it rolled ahead of him, on it's big brim, past the reviewing stand.

Our biggest maneuver was at Grand Mound, in Washington. The Convoy going up there, and our experience on that maneuvers showed us that we (the reserve Army) were not well prepared or trained. But it was all interesting - different - and fun.

The National Guard was 'federalized' - called to active duty - in March of 1941 -[there is an amusing picture of me in my Army Great Coat - which was 'bulging' - for I was carrying all of the Regiment's Drugs.

The Division was assigned to Camp San Luis Obispo, part way up the California coast. The 115th Medical Regiment was on one side of the Station Hospital, which was on the top of a little hill, while the fighting elements of the Division -[including Co. H, 149th Infantry, which had shared the Armory with us in Pasadena]- were on the other side.

The Station Hospital consisted of many separate ward and administrative buildings made of plywood - all connected by long covered hall-ways.

The rest of the camp - aside from the Headquarters building - consisted of pyramidal tents, with iron cots and 'Sibly stoves -[a funnel shaped metal stove that - if started with paper - could send a bit of that paper up the flu - and catch the tent on fire].

And of course - it was raining – had been raining for days - and the company street, between the rows of tents, was a foot deep in mud. And a truck came down that street and threw a bale of hay into each tent, to fill the mattress covers that were to be our mattresses. The remaining amenities consisted of a shower house and an 'out-house' - at the bottom of the area. The Orderly Room tent, at the head of the street, was the only one that had an electric light when we first arrived. However there was a Regimental Mess Hall and a Dispensary in our area.

But now - a couple of 'funnies' from that time. In one case - there was a 'soldier' who slept so soundly that it was hard to wake him up - so his tent mates decided to have a bit of fun at his expense. So they picked him up on his cot and took him up to the flag poll - and when the fog lifted - there he was - to be view by all.

And one time I was the Charge of Quarters - and as such I was expected to get up in time to get everyone else up for Revile. I woke in time - but then I closed my eyes and

'dozed' off - not to wake again until a few minutes before Revile. In desperation, which I am sure was heard in my voice, I raced down the tent line, urging the unit to 'move it' - and they did -[Bless them]. And so - when the Regimental Commander came by - on his horse - the Unit was standing tall - all 'dressed' in Rain Coats. I don't know what that Colonel thought - but he was wise enough not to ask.

Once again, while everyone else was learning whatever it was that the Army was teaching, I was at the Dispensary assisting with the medical processing of the men who were coming into the Division. [One can learn a lot during the processing of a thousand naked bodies - and one can learn a lot from practical experience - and I was encouraged to learn - and to 'do'.

When the majority of that 'in-processing' was complete, my real training began - up at the Station Hospital. Again, Captain Taber arranged that assignment / training for me.

I was assigned / detailed to the Surgery where I spent 12-hours, and more, every night, in the 'work room' - learning how to sterilize instruments, drapes and gloves - how to fold gowns and drapes - how to make up dressings, and the drums and packs for different operations - and finally the names of the instruments and the difference between them.

Then one day I was told to 'scrub-up' -(the 10-minute scrub that is done before being 'gowned, masked and gloved' to go into an operating room). Granted, that first time, I was just there to see how things were done - a sort of 'Right of Passage' to the next part of my training. My training was under the tutelage of 'Keecham and Kest' - a 'scrub team' Surgical Nurse and Tech - who were the best instructors I have ever had.

They trained me first in the duties of a 'circulating nurse' who assures that the correct 'packs' and equipment are there - helps gown and glove the surgeons and 'scrub nurse' - keeps the 'sponge' count - and does anything else that is needed - - during which, and as a consequence of 'observing' - one begins to learn the next step - the 'duties' of a 'scrub nurse'. Skill as a 'scrub nurse' comes later - after much practical experience. So much of the skill in Nursing comes from practical experience rather than from text books..

The next step, as I have mentioned, was in the duties - and skill - required of a 'scrub nurse'- and that ability and skill grows with every case. The arrangement of instruments on the Mayo stand - helping the surgeon drape the patient - anticipate the next instrument needed - how to 'pass' instruments and sponges - how to prepare sutures and ties – how to help the surgeon with swabbing, retracting and dressings.

I must admit that I was rather proud of my ability - however to put some 'validity' on what I had been doing - I was then sent to William Beaumont General Hospital, in El Paso, Texas, to take their Surgical Technician training course. That text book training was beneficial, I am sure, and I 'maxed' the course, but the final' step' in my training - my opportunity to be a 'supervisor' - did not come until I got to the War in the Pacific.

Q. So - where were you on 7 December, when the War came? What were you doing?

On 7 December I was on duty in the Orderly Room, as Charge of Quarters. No one really knew what was going on - but they did want to get all of the troops back from where-ever they were - - and that was fun - and a confused mess.

In addition - I was engaged to be married on the 21st of December - and my fiancée was even then addressing the wedding invitations - while listening to the Sunday music hour. So, of course, the first thing I did was to call her - so that we could reassure one another.

As I recall - it took two weeks, or more, before we moved out by convoy - and I am not sure that anyone really knew where we were going - for, in any event, we ended up in an orange grove, in Monrovia. And, of course - it was raining - and we were wet.

I managed to find a telephone, and called my fiancée - and she said that she had a girl friend living near by - and that I should go there to dry out. That she might not be there - but that the door would not be locked - and that it would be all right for me to go in - for she knew me. So I trudged over to her place. She wasn't there - but, as the door was not locked, I went in - and carefully spread out my wet Army clothes on various chairs. And then I thought - a hot bath would be nice - and so I was in the tub when a querulous voice asked, 'Is someone there?' - to which I answered that it was 'all right'- 'that your friend, my fiancée, said it would be all right for me to come in and dry out - that you know me'. All of that was all right - only this was not the girl friend - rather it was her mother - and so that did take a bit of explaining - which was amusing.

Now - another memory - of that convoy. Although we were medics, most of us had 'side arms' - and my father got me a .45 Colt automatic - right from the factory - [it didn't even have a serial number] - and then he got the California Highway Patrol to find our convoy - and to come down that convoy to find me - to deliver that gun to me.]

It is not generally known that Southern California was under Martial Law for some period of time at the start of the war - which brings another amusing memory of that time in Monrovia. My fiancée and I had planned to have our wedding in Santa Barbara, but when the War prevented that - we decided to have the wedding at her parent's home in Pasadena. And so - as we needed to get a new Wedding License - I 'scrounged' an MP brassard - and a Jeep - and put on my side arm - and thus equipped - I picked up my girl - drove to the Court House - and holding her arm securely - I escorted her in - not realizing that it was also the location of the Police Station - and that it probably appear that I was arresting the girl - rather than trying to marry her.

By the way, I had, of course, asked her father for her hand in marriage - but now, due to the war, she had to 'ask' for my hand in marriage from General Story (my commanding General), as that was not justification for a discharge. And he said, 'Yes, by all means - have a wonderful time'- for which I was given six hours for the wedding and honeymoon.

Still, no problem - for we had found an apartment only a block away from the buildings that the Unit had finally found in which to settle - and I had no problem 'going-over-the wall' - for 'they' knew where to find me if I was needed.

As to our location - our Dispensary was set-up in the National Youth Administration buildings in Compton - and 'Doc' Sykes and I more or less lived in the Dispensary.

'Doc' Sykes was a more senior 'Tech' than I - as he had gotten to medical school. And that brings us to the Technician rating. At that time I was what was known as a 'First and Fourth' - my insignia of 'rank' being a single 'chevron' over three 'rockers' - which more or less indicted that I had the 'military' ability of a Private First Class - even though I was getting the pay of a Sergeant - because of my 'technical' ability. Recall that those were the days when a Private got '21-dollars a day - once a month'.

As I mentioned, Doc Sykes and I more or less lived in that Dispensary - we even made our beds there - using 'shock' litters (which were warm) and blankets. And while there, Doc 'introduced' me to the pleasure that a bit of medicinal (Ethyl) alcohol can provide - in spite of it nearly strangling me the first time.

And Doc and I would take turns 'taking off' - supposedly looking for medical supplies,

and I was on one of those 'missions', to Westwood Village -[where, coincidentally, my wife and I then happened to have an apartment, as she was attending UCLA]- when I received a call telling me to 'get back' - that orders had been received - and that I was to move out within the hour. That trip, getting back in time, is also an interesting story - but I did get there in time for my 'buddies' to throw me and my duffel bags into the last vehicle in the convoy.

I had no idea where I was going - until we got there - but when we got 'there' I found that it was called Camp Haan - up the hill from Riverside and across from March Field - where the 40th Infantry Division Training Center was to be located. Recall that the Draft was bringing in thousands of new personnel - that had to be trained and formed into units.

I was assigned as the Supervisor of the '40th IDTC Dispensary' - where - in addition to everything else - I think that I gave everyone in that camp their inoculations -(typhoid, tetanus, yellow fever)- as well as helping one Doctor who was working on a treatment / cure for syphilis.

Once again, when I called my wife, and told her where I was - she said - 'Look out the window - can you see a line of trees going up a hill side?' And I looked - and I could - and she then said that her Aunt and Uncle had their house, their ranch, at the top of that hill. So, once again, we were able to get together - for I had no problem in getting off the base -[had I mentioned that, for convenience, I could sign Capt. Kent Kohler's name as well as he]. And during the summer we found an apartment in Riverside. That summer was a really rather delightful period.

Some months later - after the 'initial rush' was over - and things were settled down and sorted out - I was once again detailed to the surgery at the Station Hospital - which made life even better. But then other things began to happen. For one - I was sent to Camp Barkley, in Abilene, Texas, to see if I might be interested in being a '90-day wonder' as a Medical Administrative officer. But that wasn't my interest - for I wanted to be a Medic.

Oh - and coming back from there, I had two interesting experiences. I decided to leave a few days before my travel orders specified - and on the train I noted a compartment full of MPs - no doubt there to check on the status of the military passengers. So – so I went in and sat with them - and chatted with them in a friendly fashion - so that when the time came for them to 'check' - they went on their way without bothering to check my orders.

That wasn't the end of that trip - for somewhere, as the train crossed the desert, it ran into the back of another train - and there were casualties. I was doing what I could on one side of the train - and wondering where the Doctor was that I had seen on the train - and he was on the other side of the train - wondering where I was. That was a long night

Next I was sent to the STAR Unit (the Specialized Training, Army Unit) at Stanford University - to see if the Surgeon General (Fishbine) would authorize expedited training as a Nurse. That was interesting - but, No - and so back again.

My next orders took me to the Pittsburg Replacement Station, at Pittsburg, California - only when I arrived the Station was just being built. That is how one could get lost in the 'shuffle'. In my case, I just took a months vacation. And after I got checked in - my service was still confused. At one time I was on orders to the Aleutians with the 'Long knives' (as they were 'romantically' called) - and I was standing 'tall' on the dock, with my 'A' and 'B' bags, when someone apparently thought better on the idea, for a Jeep came charging up with a change - a cancellation - of those orders.

I was back in a Dispensary once again - but how was I to get back to Los Angeles.