

MARTHA MARSHALL BAKER

Denver, Colorado Unit

Transcript of an Oral History Interview

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Martha Marshall Baker

PREFACE

This transcript is the product of an interview conducted 22 March, 1986, for the Women's Overseas Service League, by Marjorie Brown.

Signed, dated agreements of release and biographical information accompany the original cassette.

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers
Lansing, Michigan

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WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE

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Oral History Project

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MARTHA MARSHALL BAKER

8 Denver Unit

10 NOTE: Interviewer is Marjorie Brown of the
Denver Unit.

12 MB: What is your name?

MMB: Martha Marshall Baker.

14 MB: When did you join the Denver Unit of WOSL?

MMB: In 1972, I believe it was.

16 MB: Were you in the Service?

MMB: Yes.

18 MB: What branch?

MMB: Army Nurse Corps.

20 MB: Why did you come into the Service?

22 MMB: I was looking for a change from civilian nursing. I
had only spent six months in the civilian life. I
had heard about the Army, and I thought I'd like to
24 see what it's about.

MB: What did you do before you came into the Army?

26 MMB: I worked as a nurse for six months.

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MB: What particular jobs did you have in the Service?

28 MMB: I started as general duty, and after one year I
changed my specialty to operating room nursing.

30 This was my primary duty until the last six years of
active duty, wherein I spent time in central supply.

32 My final years were in administration as evening and
night supervisor.

34 MB: How long were you in the Army?

MMB: Twenty years.

36 MB: What kind of duty did you have overseas? Where did
you travel?

38 MMB: My first overseas assignment was Germany --
fantastic assignment! My next overseas assignment
40 was Hawaii (but I was out of the continental United
States), and I spent thirteen months in Korea, and
42 five years on the island of Okinawa, and one year in
Vietnam.

44 MB: Where were you stationed in Vietnam?

MMB: At Long Bien.

46 MB: What kind of housing did you have in general in the
Army?

48 MMB: Overall, I felt that it was adequate. I felt that
my first overseas assignment -- I was surprised at
50 the type of housing we had. I was a bit
disappointed when I left Germany and returned to

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52 Letterman (Army Hospital) to find that our housing
was not quite up to the same standards that it was
54 overseas, but it was adequate.

MB: How did you feel about the medical care that you
56 received?

MMB: Excellent. No complaints.

58 MB: What kind of uniforms did you wear?

MMB: When I joined the Army, I must say I was terribly
60 disappointed to have to wear what was called a taupe
uniform. Pictures I had seen was of the pink and
62 green, and that's what I envisioned myself wearing.
I forget the length of time that we wore the taupe,
64 but it was a brown uniform and many styles, many
articles that could be worn with this uniform but to
66 me, it was unattractive. Then came the green
uniform and other variations of green uniforms. I'm
68 still wearing a uniform today, and I am very proud
of it.

70 MB: Can you relate a couple of experiences that you
thought were particularly appropriate or exciting or
72 funny to you when you were in the Service?

MMB: There have been so many, but one of the most
74 prominent in my mind, that I think I'll always
remember is: Being in Okinawa and watching a
76 patient progress from the time he was sent from Camp

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78 Kue (Army Hospital) for his treatment to return to
the United States. He was a 19-year old young man
who was interested in the priesthood, who lost all
80 of his limbs except his right arm. I visited him on
the wards and I found out the most important thing
82 to him would have been to have his hair washed. I
worked in supply, and I was able to ask the nurse's
84 permission to take him down to our department and
wash his hair; and I found that that meant so much
86 to him. This was at a time when all the wards were
overcrowded with patients, so of course the nurses
88 and the staff didn't have all the time to give these
patients.

90 Anyway, this progress continued for about two
weeks. Soon, it was time for him to depart. The
92 day he was departing was on a Sunday, and he was so
nervous; and he said, "Oh, if I could just have my
94 hair washed!" I did this, and he said, "Will you
make sure you come to the ward before I depart?" As
96 it happened, when I returned he was on the bus
waiting evacuation to Hickam to be evacuated to the
98 States.

I boarded the bus, and there he was on the lower
100 level, and when I came near him he beckoned to me;
and with his one arm, he just placed it around my

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102 neck and he kissed me. That was something I'll just
never forget. Of course, I did hear from this young
104 man after he returned to the States. I think he
adjusted real well to the things that happened to
106 him, but I don't know what has happened since.

There have been so many experiences; things that
108 I would never trade, in my lifetime, for what I did
in the Service.

110 MB: When you first went into the Service, what was the
biggest adjustment that you had to make?

112 MMB: I can't say I had any adjustment at all. I just
found it exciting. It was a far cry from what I had
114 done as a civilian all my life. It just seemed to
open all doors and avenues; the people I met. I had
116 trained in a multi-storied hospital-medical center
complex; and my first assignment was Fort Dix, a
118 sprawling contowment type building, but that didn't
seem to matter. It was just the people I was caught
120 up with being in the Army Nurse Corps.

MB: What did you do after you left the Army?

122 MMB: For five years I did nothing much, except volunteer.
I became a tour guide at the Denver Botanic Gardens.
124 I worked with Big Brothers-Big Sisters. I did some
volunteer work in schools as a school nurse; as a

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126 school aide. I did six weeks of training for Blue
Cross-Blue Shield.

128 Then, at the end of the five years, I was asked
if I would like to teach ROTC. Of course, I knew
130 nothing about ROTC, but the person that asked said,
"Oh, you can learn." I have been involved with the
132 Junior ROTC program now for almost eleven years.

MB: What has being a member of WOSL meant to you?

134 MMB: I enjoy meeting the ladies from the different
Services; the different walks of life that had
136 served overseas, and I found out we had so much to
share and relate to. I must say that I've lost a
138 great deal of it by being caught up in the job that
I have; that I cannot give it the time and continue
140 with meetings and being involved as I should, but I
feel that it's a worthwhile experience.

142 MB: Thank you very much.

144 < End of Interview >

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