

EVELYN BARBIER

Denver, Colorado Unit

Transcript of an Oral History Interview

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Evelyn Barbier

PREFACE

This transcript is the product of a tape-recorded interview conducted on 4 March, 1986, for the Women's Overseas Service League.

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

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers
Lansing, Michigan

10 May, 1988

EVELYN BARBIER

2 Denver Unit

MB: What is your name?

4 EB: Evelyn Barbier.

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

6 EB: In 1953.

MB: Were you in the service?

8 EB: I was.

MB: What branch of the service were you in?

10 EB: The Army Nurse Corps.

MB: When did you join the Army Nurse Corps?

12 EB: In 1941.

MB: What made you decide to go into the Army Nurse Corps at
14 that particular time?

EB: The impending war. In 1940, it seemed sure that we would
16 be going into war, and I had several friends who advised
me to go in at that time.

18 MB: Before you went in the Army, what did you do?

EB: I was a registered nurse. I was a delivery room
20 supervisor, and then most recently I was assistant to an
endocrinologist; a French doctor.

22 MB: What did you do in the service?

EB: I was in the Army Nurse Corps, and I think I did just
24 about everything from general duty up to Chief Nurse, and
a few things in between; such as Director of the Cadet
26 Nurse program, which was very helpful as a recruiting
program. I was also instructor at the medical training
28 center in Germany.

MB: How long were you in the Army Nurse Corps?

30 EB: Twenty years.

MB: While you were in the service, where did your travels
32 take you?

EB: Panama. Panama was interesting because at that time it
34 was fairly sure that the Germans and the Japanese would
meet at the Canal; and we were told when we first got
36 there, in 1942, that we could not expect to go home.

MB: What were some of your other assignments?

38 EB: Well, I was in Germany; in Japan; in Guam; and in Siapan.

40 MB: What kind of housing did you have when you were in the
Army?

EB: Everything from bad to good.

42 MB: Did you ever have any duty in a tent?

EB: Not for any length of time, but brief times in the field.

44 MB: What can you say about the medical care that was
available to you in service?

46 EB: Excellent.

MB: What was your uniform dress. What did you mostly wear?

48 EB: When I first went in, in '41, they had no uniforms
available for us; so we wore civilian clothes, and from
50 that time on, every uniform that was allowed from 1941--
late '41, until I retired in 1961.

52 MB: Tell me about some of your experiences that were
especially memorable to you?

54 EB: Well, I think I should mention two. One was when I was
in Guam: I worked with the Guamanian natives during a
56 measles epidemic, and I should explain that measles was
very dangerous to the Guamanians. In a previous
58 epidemic, it had killed over two thousand because they
had had no contact with this type of disease. I was

60 there in '48, and we treated every case. The epidemic
was taken care of during three months by teams of one
62 Army nurse, and the other members of the various teams
were Navy corpsmen, and we got through that epidemic with
64 only eleven deaths. And the eleventh, we just took
because we were generous. We didn't really think it was
66 measles.

MB: Any other experiences?

68 EB: Then, when I transferred up to Siapan, the day after I
arrived in Siapan the island was hit by a direct hit by a
70 typhoon. So we had to get all our patients in the
typhoon shelter, and I started off from my quarters to go
72 to the ward where I was needed. I was told not to use my
jeep, because it was going to be needed for something
74 more important than my transportation. I got beyond the
shelter of my quarters and was lifted clear off my feet--
76 nothing to hold on to. I only weighed 102 pounds.
Nothing to hold on to, and floating toward me on a direct
78 course, was a big GI can full of garbage. I decided I
was not about to meet it and I willed myself down, backed
80 off, got into my jeep and drove off for about the
distance of a block, and by then I was just soaked
82 through to the skin; although I wore our nice raincoat.
We had the crew of one of our B-17's had flown in from
84 Okinawa to seek shelter on Siapan, so they got right in

86 the midst of the typhoon. One of the crewmen--the only
88 one who managed to save a personal belonging--was a young
90 airman who had bought a sewing machine for his wife, and
92 he said that machine would stay with him no matter where
he was, because he had promised his wife to bring her a
sewing machine. So if he died when they crashed near us,
she would know that at least he had gotten the machine
because that would be saved for her. (Laughter)

94 MB: What was the greatest adjustment you had to make when you
came in the Army Nurse Corps?

96 EB: I can't say that I had any difficulty whatsoever. I had
traveled a great deal before I joined the Army.

98 MB: When you came in the Army Nurse Corps, did you plan to
make it a career?

100 EB: I wasn't sure that I would make it a career because at
102 that time they were only promising one year of service;
but I found out that a couple of nurses who were at Fort
104 Jackson, where I went in, got out. They went home, and
we helped them get their things home because they
happened to live in Columbia.
106 This one particular girl went home on December 6. That
was Saturday, so she was going to get home for the
weekend. And we all know what happened on Sunday,
108 December 7. They sent us back to bring her back on the

Monday, the 8th. Then I decided: Sounds as though
110 they're going to keep us longer! So, the longer I went
the more I was sure I was going to stay.

112 MB: After you retired from the Army Nurse Corps, what did you
do?

114 EB: I tried civilian nursing, and after twenty years in Army
nursing, I just couldn't stand it. I did try. I helped
116 to open a nursing home. It was being built; it was just
a hole in the ground when I joined them, having been
118 referred by our chief nurse at Fitzsimmons.

The owners wanted it to be the best nursing home in town,
120 and they gave me carte blanche to do whatever I wanted to
organize it. We had a pretty nice thing going.

122 Everybody came to see it because it was considered a
showplace.

124 After one year, the owners decided they weren't making
enough money. So they wanted me to cut down on the help;
126 the aides and LPN's and RN's. I said, If you want to be
the best in town, you can't cut your proportion.

128 MB: O.K. Besides the nursing home, what did you do?

EB: Then, I decided to do something entirely different, and
130 for ten years I worked as a travel consultant in a travel
office.

132 MB: What does being a member of WOSL mean to you?

EB: When I first joined the Unit, there were only two other
134 members of the WW-II generation. All the other members
were from WW-I, and I was extremely interested in talking
136 to these members and finding out how very different our
experience was to theirs.

138 The organization was of great interest to me because it
applied to a very special group of women, who during
140 WW-I, had a much more difficult experience than we had.

MB: O.K. Thank you very much.

142 EB: (Laughter) You're very welcome.

144 Transcribed by Patricia Siggers
Lansing, Michigan