

MARGARET E. OAKS

Denver, Colorado Unit

Transcript of an Oral History Interview

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Margaret E. Oaks

PREFACE

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

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

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WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE

Oral History Project

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Margaret E. Oaks

8 Denver, Colorado Unit

NOTE: Special thanks to the interviewer,
10 Marjorie Brown, of the Denver Unit.

MB: What is your name?

12 MO: My name is Margaret E. Oaks.

MB: Do you know approximately what time you joined the
14 Denver Unit of WOSL?

MO: I'm not real certain, but I think it was around
16 somewhere around 1978.

MB: Were you in the Service?

18 MO: Oh, yes, I was in the Army Nurse Corps, and I retired
as a lieutenant colonel with 21 years service, in
20 1970.

MB: What made you decide to come into the Army Nurse
22 Corps?

MO: I came in the 3rd of July, 1944. It was during the
24 War, and it seemed like the right thing to do; but
also, that type of life appealed to me. I liked the
26 challenge and the travel and all that goes with the
Army.

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28 MB: Before you came into the Army Nurse Corps, what did
you do?

30 MO: I was about 6 months out of nurses' training. I
graduated from nurses' training in January, 1944, and
32 came into the Army in July.

MB: What were your jobs when you were in the Army Nurse
34 Corps?

MO: Overseas, we acted as an air evac hospital and
36 received everybody in direct from the front. I
worked on almost everything except, probably,
38 psychiatry. Certainly OB, general surgery, TB,
medicine, supervision. I guess that covers almost
40 everything except psychiatry.

MB: How long did you say you were in the Service?

42 MO: For 21 years.

MB: Where did your travels take you?

44 MO: I was stationed first for my basic training at Camp
White in Medford, Oregon. Then I went to Madigan
46 Army Hospital in Fort Lewis, and from there I went
overseas, to Europe.

48 We landed in Scotland; went down through
Scotland, England, France, and served there, in
50 Mourmelon-Le-Grand: Then came back to the States and
went to Fletcher General Hospital in Cambridge, Ohio,

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52 and when that closed, I went to Crile General
Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio.

54 When that closed, I went to Halloran General
Hospital on Staten Island, New York. We closed that,
56 and I went to Madigan Army Hospital at Fort Lewis,
Washington, for five years; went back to Europe and
58 was at Fontainebleau, France, and in Stuttgart,
Germany: Came back to the States to the seven month
60 administrative course at Fort Sam Houston (Texas).
Then five years at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital, one
62 year at Tooele Ordnance Depot (Utah) after I was
married. Then I got out of the Service there because
64 of pregnancy.

I went back in when Beth, my daughter, was four
66 years old and went to Frankfurt, Germany. I came
back to Fitzsimmons Army Hospital for another year
68 and a half, where I retired in 1970.

MB: Tell me about the kind of housing you had when you
70 were in the Service.

MO: It depended on where you were. During the War, you
72 were in monasteries, old caserns; just about anything
the Army could take over and make livable. As far as
74 at the main hospitals, we were in usually one room
with bathroom facilities down the hall. No cooking

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76 facilities, as such. We ate in the mess hall or out
at restaurants when we wanted to.

78 The last time I was overseas, my husband and
daughter were with me, and we had some housing at the
80 HICOG Apartments in Frankfurt, which were very nice.
Before that, on our last tour there we rented a home
82 out in Massenheim, near Frankfurt. Other than that,
just barracks style; sometimes just open-bay,
84 depending on where you were overseas.

MB: What was the nature of the medical care that you had?

86 MO: For me? I have no complaints about medical care in
the Service.

88 MB: Tell me about the uniforms that you wore?

MO: When I went in, in 1944, there were still a few of
90 the two-tone blue ones that were being issued. They
were recalled very shortly, and we were given green
92 class A's, and then we bought the pink skirts and
green blouses, which were our class A uniforms (dress
94 uniforms). We had the brown and white seersucker
duty uniforms, which we used for some years -- I
96 can't remember how many. Then we went to whites.
Our class A uniforms changed to the taupe uniforms (I
98 don't remember the years), but we wore them for some
years. Then we changed back to green class A's, and
100 then into our dress blues.

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102 MB: Can you tell me a couple of experiences that were particularly touching, or funny, or important, in your career?

104 MO: I think the first thing that ever really hit me that I always remembered was when we got off the boat coming across the channel. We came across at night, during the War; got off at Le Harve, in France, and 106 marched in formation to the train station. 108

As we got off the boat, and looked, the city was 110 just a mass of rubble. As we marched down through the town, there was nothing but concrete foundations 112 and columns and just rubble, every place. It occurred to me immediately that we in the United 114 States don't even know what war is. We lose people from our families and our friends, but we never have 116 had to suffer the destruction of everything else that we own. These people over there -- everything was 118 just utterly demolished, including their families.

120 MB: What required the greatest adjustment for you when you came into the Service?

122 MO: I didn't have to adjust at all. I came directly after six months out of training and it was pretty much the same: Rules, regulations, hours to be in. 124 I did pretty much as I was told, the same as I had been. To me, it was nothing detrimental or unusual.

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126 MB: When you first came into the Army Nurse Corps, did
you plan on making it a career?

128 MO: I don't think anyone thought about careers during
World War II. We were just there because we were
130 needed. Then it became evident that we were going to
have occupation forces, and we were going to have a
132 lot of casualties left that would be needing care.
It just seemed to me the thing to do to stay in --
134 the benefits and the travel, which to me was the
greatest, and the challenges and the new people to
136 meet constantly, to me were a great way to live.
When it became evident that people could stay after
138 the War, that was fine with me.

MB: After you left the Service, what did you do?

140 MO: My husband and daughter and I settled here in Aurora,
and my husband died in April of 1980. I still live
142 here. My daughter is now almost 25, and she's an RN,
with her bachelor of science. I do volunteer work at
144 Fitzsimmons, I drive for Meals on Wheels, I do a lot
of church work, work with the Channel 9 Health Fair.
146 I guess that's the main things.

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

148 MO: I think it's satisfying to me to know that we
pinpoint certain patriotic things that we support.
150 Also, I've enjoyed knowing several families that we

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