

SOPHIE STEFFER

Denver, Colorado Unit

Transcript of an Oral History Interview

All rights, title, and interest in the material recorded are assigned and conveyed to the Women's Overseas Service League for the purpose of publication, use in teaching, or other such uses that may further the aims and objectives of the League, such use and participation to be acknowledged in appropriate fashion and with due credit to:

Sophie Steffer

PREFACE

This transcript is the product of a tape-recorded interview conducted on 1 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

1 May, 1988

SOPHIE STEFFER

2 Denver Unit

MB: What is your name?

4 SS: My name is Sophie Steffer.

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

6 SS: I joined the Denver Unit in 1968.

MB: What branch of the service did you serve in?

8 SS: I joined the Army Nurse Corps.

MB: Did you volunteer?

10 SS: Yes, I did.

MB: Why did you volunteer?

12 SS: By the patriotic feeling that existed at that time, I had
14 the feeling of being left behind. When other nurses were
16 joining through the Red Cross, I was declared essential
in the civilian hospital. Therefore, my application was
rejected by Washington for two years.

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

20 SS: I took my nurses training at the New Asbury Hospital in
22 Minneapolis; a course in operating room technique at the
Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago; and then, before I
went into the service, I worked as superintendent of a
private hospital in New York City.

24 MB: What did you do in the Army Nurse Corps?

26 SS: In the service, I worked mostly in the operating room,
and occasionally in the delivery and labor rooms.

MB: How long were you in the Army?

28 SS: I was in the Army for twenty years.

MB: Where did your travels take you?

30 SS: I went to India during the last part of the war; and to
32 the Philippines, Germany, and Japan with the occupation
forces.

34 MB: What kind of housing did you have when you were in the
service?

36 SS: In India, we lived in contonment-type houses with
thatched roofs, and screened windows and doors, and
cement floors. They were comfortable except for the
38 termites and bugs. During the rainy season, the water
came through the roof. Our quarters in the Philippines
40 were Quonset hut-type, and comfortable; but during

42 typhoon season, we moved into more solid quarters. The
quarters in Germany and Japan were apartment-type, with
two or three nurses living in each apartment.

44 MB: What kind of medical care did you get when you were in
the Army?

46 SS: I had good medical care when I needed it.

MB: What kind of uniforms did you wear?

48 SS: During the war, we wore regulation uniforms both on and
off duty and during the occupation, we wore our civilian
50 dress off duty.

MB: Tell me some of your experiences?

52 SS: There were many experiences. I will mention two. When
the war was over in India, I was sent to "DY" in
54 Calcutta. There we processed all the Americans who were
prisoners of Japan. These were soldiers, sailors, and
56 missionaries; and all other civilians ever imprisoned.
The largest number of sailors on my ward came from the
58 Battleship Houston, who had been prisoners for four
years.

60 In the Philippines we tried to help the leper colony by
purchasing beds and other items for them.

62 In Germany, one Christmas I recall; we adopted a small
town and exchanged Christmas gifts with them, and in

64 return, we were treated to a wonderful Christmas program.
It was all in German.

66 MB: What required the greatest adjustment for you when you
went into the Army Nurse Corps?

68 SS: Learning to salute, and keeping the enlisted personnel
ranks separated.

70 MB: What did you do after your Army Nurse Corps service was
concluded?

72 SS: I worked in a nursing home for a few months, and then
took retirement.

74 MB: What has being a member of WOSL meant to you? Any
thoughts you would like to share with us about belonging
76 to WOSL?

SS: I enjoy being a member of WOSL. Our members are of
78 various groups of Red Cross and enlisted women. I think
it is important for many retired, single women--many that
80 do not have relatives close by, and have someone that
cares and when they become ill, who will see that they
82 are not left all alone.
The conventions are always enjoyable and something to
84 look forward to each year.

MB: Thank you very much, Sophie.

SOPHIE STEFFER, Denver Unit

5

86

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers

88

Lansing, Michigan