

**Hannah Elizabeth 'Betty' Clark, nee Knapp  
Veteran**

**Mike Russert  
Wayne Clark  
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 1:30 PM  
New Scotland Historical Society, New York**

**Q:** Could you give me your full name?

**EC:** My name now is Elizabeth K. Clark. In the military, its first name, middle initial so I had to go by Hannah E. Knapp which was my maiden name.

**Q:** Where and when were you born?

**EC:** I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1921.

**Q:** Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**EC:** It was a Sunday afternoon and I was double-checking they said that Pearl Harbor someone said at 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. And I said "No, it was in the afternoon!" But that was Hawaiian time. I was home for college for the weekend. Sunday afternoon my parents were asleep upstairs taking a nap and I just remember hearing it.

**Q:** Do you remember your reaction, what you thought about it?

**EC:** This whole report, I must tell you I was extremely naïve, very naïve. I didn't know what was going on. I was engrossed in my college and I wasn't particularly concerned. It didn't mean much to me at that point.

**Q:** What was your educational background prior to going into service?

**EC:** I got my Bachelor of Arts at Miami University at Oxford, Ohio and I graduated June, 1942. At that point I went down to the recruiting office and I wanted to join up. And they said "Well, what can you do?" And I said, "Well, I'm a Liberal Arts graduate." And they said, "Yeah but *what can you do?*" [Laughs] And I said, "Well, I don't know." They suggested I take my dietetic internship, which was one year and I had already been accepted for that. So that was from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942 to July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943. They said if I joined the army in '42 I'd be a WAC with a private's pay, if I take the internship I'd be a commissioned officer with a lieutenants pay. Obviously that's what I did.

**Q:** Why did you decide to enlist?

**EC:** It was the thing to do. Everybody did it. I didn't give it a second thought. The strange thing is, I realize, my parents never showed any deep concern because my first orders were NYPE, New York Port of Embarkation. I knew I was going to go overseas. To me it was a big adventure and they never protested. But I'm sure they must have had a pretty good idea what it was all about.

**Q:** Did you go for basic training at all?

**EC:** No basic training. I don't think I was particularly welcomed by a lot of the nurses when I was at Camp Shanks because they were all still in there blue uniforms from basic training in the States and I immediately got my OD, olive drab uniform, and that meant I was going overseas. So that's what I got.

**Q:** Now what rank...?

**EC:** Second Lieutenant.

**Q:** Second Lieutenant, okay. So you went basically without much military training overseas?

**EC:** I didn't know how to salute. I didn't know how to put the insignia on my uniform. I was so green I didn't know anything that was going on.

**Q:** So you went right to New York as a port of embarkation and then you went overseas immediately?

**EC:** Yeah. I went to the Brooklyn port of embarkation. And, of course, when I arrived there I was in civilian clothes. It was just a beehive of activity. To go from one room to another I had to have a military escort, even if it was just one room to the next room. Then they shipped me off to Camp Shanks. Now I noticed in this movie that we've seen by Ken Burns they said "Camp Shanks, New Jersey". I went to Camp Shanks, New York.

**Q:** That's where Camp Shanks was.

**EC:** Yeah! So that's where I was as a staging area.

**Q:** So when did you go overseas?

**EC:** I think it was actually August 8<sup>th</sup>. I reported for duty August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943 and eight days later I was on a ship; within a week or so.

**Q:** What kind of ship were you on?

**EC:** A big one. [Both laugh.] I understand there were seven thousand troops on our ship. We were in one of the big convoys that zig-zagged across the Atlantic. I don't know how many troop ships but we had the battle ships on the outside for protection. I don't know if it had a name. Maybe I knew it but I don't remember.

**Q:** Were there a lot of women aboard the ship?

**EC:** I just remember nurses from our unit but there must have been other units of nurses, but not many.

**Q:** So you were assigned to a hospital unit?

**EC:** Yes, 70<sup>th</sup> General.

**Q:** How did you get along with the other nurses, the others in your group?

**EC:** Fine. We didn't have too much contact because there were one hundred nurses at General Hospital, five hundred enlisted men, fifty male doctors, one hundred female nurses, two physiotherapists and two dieticians. The women were all housed together,

tented together. We got along fine. My work was mainly in the kitchen in the patients mess so I didn't have an awful lot of contact with them.

**Q:** Now where did you go after you crossed the Atlantic?

**EC:** We didn't know where we had gone, and then after a while they gave us a little book that said North Africa on it. We landed in Oran, North Africa. We spent two weeks in a staging area west of Oran in an area called Ain El Turk. We were there for a few days and then they sent our unit on temporary duty to a little town seventy-five miles south of Oran called Bou Hanifia, and that's where the 21<sup>st</sup> General Hospital had been stationed for a year. We were there for about six weeks to relieve them so that they could have some r & r. It took that long for our hospital to be built.

**Q:** What did your hospital look like? Was it tent structures...?

**EC:** Everything was in tents except there were a couple of permanent buildings. I'm not sure, maybe they were offices or something like that. But the patients and all the personnel were in tents. The women at least were four to a tent. I don't know about the men. Then we had three mess halls: a patient's mess hall, an officer's mess hall and an enlisted men's mess hall.

**Q:** Now as a dietician what were your duties? What did you have to do?

**EC:** We planned the menus. We supervised a special...interestingly enough there were a lot of special diets even though they were in the military. I know we had to cooks who prepared the diet food but they didn't know a thing about special diet cooking, you know? We supervised that and we visited the patients in the wards. That was essentially what we did.

**Q:** What sort of foods did you serve?

**EC:** Well when we first went overseas we had dehydrated powdered eggs – which didn't go over very well – and canned vegetables, canned fruits. I vividly remember the lister bags. We had the great big canteen containers that held the water, chlorinated water. So the only way you could drink it is you made it into lemonade or coffee. We had margarine not butter, lots and lots of orange marmalade and spam. We had some fresh meat but not a lot. I don't know how soon after... it was quite a while before we got fresh eggs for breakfast. Ultimately we did.

**Q:** Were you ever able to use any of the local food services?

**EC:** Yes, I think we used a local produce for fruits and vegetables. Our hospital was located about six miles outside of Oran and that what Ernie Pyle wrote about in *[Here] is Your War*. I tried to find that book at home, we have it. It's the one he described in his book. There were six big general hospitals there together.

**Q:** Now you said you served a lot of special diets, basically were they because of malnutrition or...?

**EC:** Well now, the pace of fellows that came in with broken jaws, fractured jaws, had their jaws wired together so obviously they had to have liquid foods, like liquid custard and things like that. Then, I'm sure we had some diabetics. I'm not sure how they got

into service but they did. Then we had soft diets, mechanically soft foods, you know, if some of them had stomach wounds and couldn't tolerate regular foods.

**Q:** Were the officers fed differently than the enlisted [men]?

**EC:** No we all had the same food. Ultimately when we got up to Pistoia in Northern Italy we had a lot of German patients. They got fed adequately but they would be the ones to get the powdered eggs not the fresh eggs. That would be the main difference.

**Q:** How long were you in North Africa?

**EC:** We were there for about fifteen months, from September of '43 to January of '45.

**Q:** Did you ever get to travel around?

**EC:** Yes, when I was in Oran I would get passes to go into the city of Oran. We were in Naples for a little while so I got to go to Rome for a few days. Then when I was in Pistoia I remember [laughing] one of the nurses and I – I don't know how we got away with it – we took an absolutely illegal trip. We got one of the enlisted men to drive a jeep and we went up to Genoa, Venice, and Bologna. We had no problem. I don't know if I ever reported this.

**Q:** How much did you work? Did you work every day?

**EC:** We had eight hour shifts. 7 to 3:30 or a split shift from 8:00 to 2:00, 4:00 to 6:00, something like that. There were two dieticians in the hospital to begin with. Later when we got up to Pistoia we had three dieticians. But it was usually a split shift and never more than eight hours.

**Q:** Did you do any work besides dietary work?

**EC:** No just strictly dietetics.

**Q:** How many did you have working with you? You had the two dieticians. How many cooks did you have?

**EC:** Seems to me like we had about ten or twelve cooks but I can't be sure.

**Q:** Did you use any local people in the kitchens at all?

**EC:** I remember one...We had an Italian prisoner of war and he was very friendly, very interested in our set-up.

**Q:** Now was this in Italy or in North Africa?

**EC:** This was still in North Africa. He wanted to know all about our work and he was just genuinely interested. At the very beginning in around October or November of '43 we started out with just a few patients and built up more and more and more. I think it was in December of '44 that we had built up to about fourteen hundred patients; most of them bed patients at that point. Although in the spring of '44 I remember that we had a lot of psychiatric patients and they mention that in that movie how a lot of them just couldn't handle the war. We had both open and closed psychiatric wards and we had quite a lot of them. I think most of the patients were that to begin with.

**Q:** Where did the patients stay? Did they stay in tents or were there any more permeant structures built?

**EC:** Not in North Africa, no. It was very different in Italy. In Italy we were in building with big red crosses on them, two story buildings, with officers, patients and kids.

**Q:** When did you go over to Italy?

**EC:** In the spring of 1945, not sure if it was January or February, something like that. We went to this little town called Pistoia which is North West of Florence. Apparently they considered that at the time a combat area and the movie we saw last night they started telling about the troops going up to Anzio and Rome. I don't think last night we got any farther than Rome, maybe there's going to be more of that. We took a hospital ship from Oran to Naples. Then we stayed in Naples for a short time and then we took a big convoy up from Naples to Pistoia.

**Q:** That was along the coast, then?

**EC:** Yes.

**Q:** Did your food supplies change any moving up there?

**EC:** I can't say that they did, no.

**Q:** Did you rely on local foods again?

**EC:** Yes but it was winter: January, February, March. We had snow up there. So we didn't get local garden food at that time but I think we had local produce, I'm sure we did.

**Q:** Did you ever make use of local meats or anything like that?

**EC:** I don't think so. I remember the meat coming in frozen all the time. These boys would have the ground beef they'd have to make into meat patties. I remember specifically one fellow that actually developed arthritis because of working with that frozen meat all the time. I think that all came from the states, but I'm not positive.

**Q:** Was your hospital in Italy larger, because you said there were three dieticians?

**EC:** I don't know why they got three. It wasn't any larger. But they did add a third one.

**Q:** Now up there you did have German prisoners? Were they separated?

**EC:** Yes, German prisoners. Yes, of course I never saw them on the ward. Like I said I was terribly naïve and didn't really realize a lot was going on. Compare these combat pilots at number ten and me being a one, as far away from adventure and guns. Now we could hear the cannons up at Pistoia, like distant thunder. We were obviously not too far from the front there.

**Q:** Were most of the people in the hospital there, had they received combat wounds or again did you have psychiatric treatment?

**EC:** Actually they were combat wounds. We became a large station hospital.

**Q:** What do you mean by that?

**EC:** Well when soldiers were wounded they would go to a field hospital first. Then a bigger hospital would be a station hospital and the ultimately the big general hospital from which they would be sent home. But acted much more like a station hospital closer to the front when we were in Italy.

**Q:** So there were the three different types: the field, the station hospital and the general?

**EC:** Yes.

**Q:** Do you remember where you were when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

**EC:** That was in '45 wasn't it? So I was in Pistoia when I heard that.

**Q:** Were there ever any USO (United Service Organizations) shows at all near your hospital or any entertainers come in?

**EC:** Actually I didn't see any or hear of any USO shows. Unfortunately I was a lot longer in Africa than I was in Italy. There must have been but I don't recall hearing about them.

**Q:** Did you ever see Ernie Pyle?

**EC:** No, I never saw him.

**Q:** Your hospital then, being called a general hospital but [acting as] a station hospital, you were just handling them that were coming in from the field hospitals? So you must have been treating some pretty severely wounded?

**EC:** Yes. I remember that they'd say that it'd be fifty ambulances coming in and they only held two to four patients. But they'd come in like fifty of them a night and one hundred another night.

**Q:** So your hospital must have been much larger in Italy than...?

**EC:** Well not in personnel, but in patients. I had a little record book at home that showed the number of patients we had each day in North Africa and what their diets were but I can't find it.

**Q:** Did you have to go with a lot of specialized diets when you were in Italy, also?

**EC:** Yes, but my memory of Africa, even though it was further back, is much more vivid than when in Italy.

**Q:** How long were you in Italy?

**EC:** We were there until about September 3<sup>rd</sup>. We went from Pistoia to Leghorn and that's where we stayed until we left Italy.

**Q:** Now what was that like?

**EC:** We were all just stationed in a big room and they were just waiting and waiting and waiting for us to ship out. We all thought we were going to the Pacific until we were out at sea and they said we were going home.

**Q:** Where were you when the war in Europe ended? In Pistoia?

**EC:** Yes, that was in June of '45, wasn't it? '44?

**Q:** No '45.

**EC:** Yes I was in Italy then.

**Q:** What was your reaction in the hospital when that was announced?

**EC:** See I say I was so naïve... I wasn't touched that much by the actual conflict, just all the patients, you know? I know we were happy about it but it didn't seem to, kept right on... If that was in June we maintained the hospital for several months before we disbanded.

**Q:** So the hospital stayed in operation at least until the fall?

**EC:** Yes, until September.

**Q:** How did you return home?

**EC:** By ship. But I don't remember that ship as well as I remember the one going over.

**Q:** Where did you...where did the ship dock?

**EC:** At Boston.

**Q:** How much longer did you stay in the service?

**EC:** I immediately left, within a week. They had me on the rolls until January '46 but from September to January I was at home.

**Q:** How did you feel about your experience overseas?

**EC:** Well I wish I had seen more adventure cause my experience was quite tame compared to the rest of them. But I was very happy to serve; it just seemed the thing to do. In my internship there were eleven dieticians and ten of us went into service.

**Q:** How did you keep in contact with your parents?

**EC:** My parents? Oh, just with a little e-mail. Oh, not e-mail [laughs].

**Q:** V-mail?

**EC:** V-mail! Yes. I remember getting some letters from them and they were real small, about 3x3, very small. Of course we could write what we wanted, I could never say where I was, but we didn't have our mail censored.

**Q:** You didn't have your mail censored?

**EC:** Not us officers, no.

**Q:** Did you use the G.I. Bill at all?

**EC:** Oh yes, when I came home. I got home in September of '45. Then in 1947 to '48 I took graduate degree at Ohio State and got my masters.

**Q:** What did you get it in?

**EC:** Dietetics.

**Q:** Dietetics. Did you work in that field then?

**EC:** Not... I was married and had a family right away and I didn't go back to work until 1974. I worked in the VA hospital in Albany for twelve years.

**Q:** Were you able to join any veteran's organizations at all?

**EC:** Well you know it's interesting. I finally joined the American Legion just recently. But my first husband although he wanted to get in the war, served in the war, he also wanted to get home. I think it bothered... he was a lawyer with a good education, but I outranked him. He was a staff sergeant and that didn't go over very well. He never mentioned it particularly, but I was never allowed to have any kind of contact with anyone from the 70<sup>th</sup> General Hospital all my years I was married to him, never the Legion or anything military. It was just forbidden.

**Q:** Really? Did you stay in contact with anybody after that?

**EC:** With my boss, one dietician, and we sent Christmas cards ever year, we still have.

**Q:** She's still living?

**EC:** Well I tried to get her on the phone the other day and they gave no record of anybody with that name at that address, so I'm not sure because each year somebody has died in my group. I don't know whether she is. She was alive last Christmas though.

**Q:** How do you think your time in the service had an effect on their life?

**EC:** Well I'm proud of it, I'm really, really proud. I wish I had done more because mine is insignificant compared to what most of them did. But...

**Q:** Without you they wouldn't have been able to eat!

**EC:** [Laughs] Oh they would have eaten somehow. But I was pleased, proud that I served. I have a son who is fifty-eight and he was drafted for the Vietnam War and he's a pacifist. Course his father being a lawyer he went through the legalities of becoming a conscientious objector. And yet he has been very kind to me and taken me to military places in Washington and things like that.

**Q:** Now you have some photographs with you.

**EC:** Yes, now they are in sequence here.

**Q:** Okay, okay.

**EC:** I don't know how many of them you want. There's one here... now this first one... [Holds up photograph]

**Q:** If you hold it like that Wayne can focus on it.

**EC:** This is in Bou Hanifia in this resort that we took over when we were on temporary duty when we first went overseas, and this is about seventy-five miles south of Oran. They were in nissen huts there. [Holds up another photo] Now this is our hospital in tents. We were in a little, tiny town called Sidi Chami outside of Oran.

**Q:** This is all around 1943 then?

**EC:** Yes, '43. Yeah and this is just like it. [Holds up photograph] Everything in tents, even the church was in a tent.

**Q:** Did you have covers on the sides?

**EC:** Yeah. When we first went overseas we did not, we just had tents that was just the canvas to the ground. Then they did what they called winterizing them and they put I guess it was plywood or something up. [Holds up another photograph]

**Q:** Did you ever have any trouble with insects or snakes or anything at all?

**EC:** No, but it was very cold, even in Oran in North Africa. My little washcloth would freeze to the little clothesline I had. We did have mosquito netting and we also got malaria shots all the time.

**Q:** Now was that shot you and your husband?

**EC:** Where? No! [Laughing] That's the Mess Sergeant. I didn't bring him along. Then that's me in Oran. [Holds up photograph]

**Q:** So yeah you were there during...was it ever that warm there?

**EC:** Yes it got quite warm.

**Q:** Do you want to hold up that big picture? ...did you ever have to wear a helmet at all?

**EC:** [Holds up photograph] Well we took some hikes. Of course we used to fill the enlisted men's backpacks with rocks. [Laughs] And this is the best picture of me, military wise, although it's small. [Holds up photograph]

**Q:** I'm getting a little glare can you just tilt it forward a bit. Yes that's good.

**EC:** This was our convoy from Naples to Pistoia. [Holds up photograph]

**Q:** Now did your hospital have a lot of trucks that were assigned to it?

**EC:** These must have been assigned to it. I don't think we had a lot of trucks but...

**Q:** You must have had a lot of ambulances though?

**EC:** Oh yeah, we had a lot of ambulances. [Holds up photograph] And this is in Oran, North Africa in 1943. I had a picture of our hospital in Pistoia, it was quite different, but it ran away.

**Q:** There's another one. That might be it.

**EC:** [Holds up photograph] Yes, this was the hospital in Pistoia, a brick building. You know in 1988 my daughter and I were over there, we went to Pistoia and I said "I wonder if our hospital is still there." So I saw some men, elderly men, sitting on church

steps and I thought maybe they had lived at that time and nobody knew anything about the hospital.

**Q:** Now what kind of building were those? They must have been Italian structures that were used before you?

**EC:** Brick. I think they maybe they were a school, but I'm not sure.

**Q:** Okay, well thank you very much for your interview.

**EC:** Okay.