

Bianci Amthor
Veteran

Senator Patty Ritchie's Office Interview

November 11, 2013
Oswego County Legislative Office Building
46 E Bridge St, Oswego, NY 13126

PR: They're called the greatest generation. Men and women, from all walks of life, grew up in the Great Depression, lead our nation to victory in World War II, and helped make America a beacon of freedom and democracy for all of the world. And, do they have some stories to tell. I'm pleased to be partnering with the New York State military museum and Veteran's Research Center to preserve the words and memories of many of our World War II veterans. These stories will be entered into our states archives where they will be accessible to researchers, academics, and future generations. Our veterans have given so much to help build a brighter future for all Americans. This tribute is just one small way of saying, "Thank you."

BA: I had finished training here at mercy, and I was working for Doctor Simpson up at the TB stand. And my two brothers were already in the army, one was air core, and the other was artillery. And they wanted nurses so bad, so I enlisted. My friend and I both enlisted right here in Pine Camp, it used to be.

Interviewer: Now was that decision made like, you know, you wanted to enlist and be a nurse and your friend wanted to, or did you guys talk to each other about that?

BA: No! It was me because if my two brothers got hurt and want somebody to take care of them so that's, I talked my friend into it, (laughing). And she went with me.

Interviewer: Now talk a little about your experience, if you could. You know, being a nurse. When I got here you were telling me being a nurse during the Battle of the Bulge?

BA: Okay. When I enlisted we had to go to Atlantic City, New Jersey, for basic. And there's pictures over there about that. And we went through basic, and then I was assigned to Governors Island right off the shore of New York City. And I took care of lots of army people that came from either the California or the other side, you know, the East. And we were there, um, I'm trying to think... a few months, and then we got orders to go overseas. And it was in a convoy.

Interviewer: Now when you got those orders was it a little bit frightening? Was it exciting? I mean, describe what-

BA: It was ordinary.

Interviewer: -what the feeling was, you weren't nervous at all about going overseas?

BA: Nope! (laughs.)

Interviewer: So it was another day at the office, so to speak?

BA: Yeah, I'm just gonna' do nursing, it didn't matter to me where!

Interviewer: But then you get over there and the Battle of the Bulge starts right?

BA: Well, no. no. We went to England first. Liverpool, and they put us in a place call Oulton Park. And there were just huts with potbelly stoves in them that would go out at night, and you'd freeze. And we were there until we got orders to go to replace the 99 general, which was in Reims, France. We went on the ship and there was lots of engineers, all kinds of army people, on the same ship. And we got to, um, cross the canal, and when we got to Le Havre, which was where we were supposed to dock, we couldn't because the Germans had bombed so many ships that we couldn't dock at all. So then we had to go to Cherbourg, which was another city, and tried there, same thing. So then they ordered an LSD, so we went out in the canal and at midnight somebody hands, uh, we were told to get our full gear on. Our regular helmets, everything. And you could hardly walk, you know, you had your mesh kit, first aid kit, everything with you. We stayed online, absolutely until midnight, when this man hands me a ladder. And he said, you're going over the side of the ship. You hand it the the guy below, so he can hand it back to you again.

Interviewer: Wow!

BA: I was shocked!

Interviewer: I imagine, yeah!

BA: We couldn't see the water! And down we went, all of us nurses, the whole hospital.

Interviewer: Pitch black, midnight? Wow.

BA: Yep. You couldn't see, you know, because of the planes coming you couldn't have a light, and when we got into Le Havre where we were supposed to dock, we couldn't cause of the sunken ships. Then we went to another city, I'm trying to think of the name of that one... and we couldn't dock there either and that's when they ordered the LST and we had to go over the side of the ship. But we finally landed on this little beach called Etretat and from there we waited. We were put in these chateau, no heat, no water. The one I was assigned to anyways, not all of them. There was one that had everything and that's where the mess was. And we were there until we had to leave. Like I said we had to go over the side of the ship, to Etretat and then we waited for a train to take us to Reims.

Interviewer: How long did you have to wait for the train?

BA: A couple of days, and the night we got there was my birthday, I remember the date, December 18, a week before Christmas. I got on line to take a bath, because when you're on the ship you only get salt water. And so, I just got in the tub and the airraid ? went off. And my friend that was outside asked one of the 99 General Nurses, is this what you get every night? And she said no we've never had one before!

Interviewer: (laughter.) Happy birthday, huh?

BA: Yeah! So anyway I had to get out of the tub, get dressed. And that's when we learned, you know, what it was like.

PR: So what happened after that, once the raid had gone on?

BA: I was assigned to a regular ward, and we were doubly staffed because the 99 General couldn't get out and they started coming every night, we used to call them bed check Charlie. And they never bombed us, but they did strife the whole hospital all the time, you could hear the bullets bouncing off the brick.

Interviewer: Was that nerve wracking at all for you?

BA: No! I had the whole ward to watch and take care of!

Interviewer: So you weren't even concerned that you were getting shot at? That the building was getting shot at?

BA: No

Interviewer: Wow.

BA: We were too busy, I was on night duty. So, every night they would come, just about.

Interviewer: Wow. Now is there one memory or one story that sticks out in your mind more so then than the other one during your time as a nurse?

BA: Yeah, I was on the shock ward, it was just before I left, and a 26 year old captain came in as a patient. He was taking a load of prisoners to a work detail and the guards, one of them didn't put a safety on, and they went over a rut. The gun discharged and guess who it hit? The captain. As he was reaching for a cigarette, it went through his hand and into his arm. And he bled to death, when we got him it was too late. The doctor jumped on the bed, and gave him CPR, and we couldn't revive him.

Interviewer: Wow, my gosh, wow. Any regrets? Would you do it over again if you could?

BA: Yeah! I had two brothers that were in, and wanted somebody to take care of them.

Interviewer: Now were you the big sister?

BA: No! I was the youngest.

Interviewer: So you just wanted to make sure that your brothers were okay?

[Amthor nods]