

**Healy, Florence R.  
Veteran**

**Rita Shapiro  
Chemung County Historical Society  
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on July 23, 2003  
Corning New York**

**RS** - Rita Shapiro

**FH** - Florence Healy

**RS:** Florence could you state for the record what war you were in, branch of the service you served in, and what was your rank, and where did you serve?

**FH:** I was in the Army Nurse Corps, in World War II and my rank on enlistment was 2nd Lieutenant, my discharge was 1st Lieutenant, and I served initially at what is Fort Drum now but it was Pine Camp then, and then I went with the 114th General Hospital, to Dix and was trans, you know enlisted over into England for the 114th General Hospital was deployed to England in a, a base near, about 25 miles from Birmingham, outside of a little town called Kidderminster, and there we stayed until the end of the European war. Came back home on the Queen Elizabeth, saw Jimmy Stewart, had our leave, was due to go to the Pacific war, but victory was declared, and we were given our discharge, so I was discharged in December of 1945.

**RS:** Very good, thank you very much. Um then you as a nurse, you enlisted?

**FH:** Yes

**RS:** You were not, there was no such thing as being drafted?

**FH:** No, no, we were enlisted in our own discretion we just enlisted if we wanted to enlist.

**RS:** Why did you enlist?

**FH:** I wanted to. I just wanted to do something. I just decided that I should, so I did.

**RS:** Where did you live at the time?

**FH:** I lived in Corning.

**RS:** Where did you enlist, where were you sent? Did you have basic training?

**FH:** Yes, at Pine Camp, I was sent to Pine Camp or Fort Drum, whichever one you want to call it now. Uh, I and another one of my classmates, because I graduated from Saint Joseph's Hospital in Elmira New York, and uh, we went up and then went out to the camp and that started our basic training.

**RS:** What was basic training like for you?

**FH:** Very revealing because we did everything, we had the basic, uh medical, as we attached to the uh, camp hospital, we had the basics there learning all the Army

routines, Army way of doing things, but we also learned the, how to take care of yourself as long as you're in service, we had the, the marching, the classes on everything, we had the practice going under the barbed wire, with all those, those machine guns going over our heads, things like that, just that, the whole type thing, any person who enlists would get, we got.

**RS:** Did you a, you didn't have to do anything with guns or anything

**FH:** No

**RS:** What was it like?

**FH:** I liked it, I don't know whether that's a good thing or a bad thing but uh I really did like what I was doing, so um we learned and we did things

**RS:** About how many of you, were there?

**FH:** Well it's a little hard to say, I'm not quite sure that I can give you a figure of how many were in the general hospital unit because you had the nurses the doctors

**RS:** No, but I meant in your class, in your group that was in for basic training, just starting out

**FH:** Oh ok, it was probably, I'll have to give you a ballpark figure, probably maybe uh 20, 25 something like that

**RS:** All from New York State?

**FH:** That I don't know, so, I'm sure they probably were because uh, at this point I can't even remember where I enlisted. Whether I enlisted here, or where, I know that I took the oath of office, I got my orders and took the oath of office up there but, uh I had the orders to go report up there.

**RS:** How long were you there?

**FH:** I was in Pine Camp until we left for Fort Dix to prepare to go overseas

**RS:** Where you overseas almost immediately?

**FH:** Well uh in a year, in a 1943 uh we went to uh, excuse me, may I do this for uh, I don't think I've got that date down here

**RS:** Doesn't matter

**FH:** No I know that I was, went overseas, I haven't got the date for going over but I know I was over there over a year anyways, so if I was in, went in, in July of 43, and uh I probably went over sometime in the Summer of 44 and then was there until December 45, so um we were all prepared went down to Fort Dix which was the deployment area, and took off in a convoy to overseas

**RS:** Did you fly, or were you in a boat?

**FH:** No a boat, we were in a boat convoy, went as fast as, a, the slowest boat they had which was the way they do it

**RS:** Was that an experience though?

**FH:** It was quite an experience, because we a, it was load, it was full, our boat was, they all were, we had destroyers guards, destroyer boats on the side and ah, we were in a, the route, a ah, bedrooms I'll call it, I can't think of it

**RS:** Bunks

**FH:** Yeah, there were nine of us, in one, three tier bunks, well yeah and then we had a, no facilities were limited, we share with another house full, but we got along fine. We had all the things, we had a, set ups on the boat for exercise, and entertainment. The a, enlisted people and the officers arranged for dances and a, card playing, games you could play on deck, and a, we were, the, our boat was an Argentina boat, we had a delicious, delicious meals, ah we couldn't, we had two meals a day, either you had an early breakfast and an early dinner or a late breakfast and a late dinner, but then the waiters, are very nice Argentinians, would fix you a sandwich to have between times. It was delightful, we'd have card games, and we'd have contests. So it was a fairly pleasant journey until one little German submarine

**RS:** I was going to ask if you

**FH:** Oh yeah, little German submarine infiltrated. Well was seen be the destroyers, the destroyers went out, at that time we were, we had to quickly get into the mode you get into, the helmets and lifejackets and everything, an, they got the submarine, it didn't hit us but then we were all in a convoy line and we had to deploy. It was really very interesting. I guess that's why I really did not mind being away from home or being in the service because that interested me to, course I was scared but still

**RS:** Where you home sick at any time? Did you ever have time to be?

**FH:** No, no you didn't have time to be homesick but the only thing I found out this a long time ago, ah, you get homesick the closer you are to home. When I was a student at Saint Joseph's I was more home sick and I think that I never was homesick when I was up in Pine Camp or when I was over in England because I was on the, on the thought that I can't do anything about it, I might as just as well get over it. Saint Joseph's I could go home, you know, 14 miles from home so. That's just a little side you can put on if you want to

I: no, that's very interesting

**RS:** Did you get seasick?

**FH:** No, I didn't get seasick

**RS:** Great, and a, you went right to England then?

**FH:** Well, we landed in Scotland and ah, that's a beautiful country, and a, can't tell you the year but, we'll let that one go, but uh, we came down through and it was just gorgeous because it was in the summertime, that's when I think it was July because it was summer when I was over there, and you go through these little towns where they would have the beautiful little red brick homes and beautifully manicured properties, flowers in the front and gardens in the back and heather on the hill, just gorgeous, and the people out there just clapping and waving and donuts and whatever else you wanted

**RS:** Wonderful, that was when you were going through

**FH:** When we went over, we landed in Scotland, Gourock is where we landed in Scotland and then went down across Scotland came into, a, England, and of course got on buses and trucks and so forth to get to where we were to be stationed, you know Kiddyminster and that we came in that place at night but we didn't have to do anything but get out and walk in because the enlisted men carried all of our equipment in, wonderful wonderful people and a ,middle of the night, to try to find your, hut we did but it was, a, it had been a, an air force base and a, we took it over, and it was built on a hill so that the site went down like this, you had the barracks all going out there, which would be the wards for the injured and a, but you, it went down an incline. So before we could really you know open up we had to do a really good cleaning and an A1 inspection, and I like to tell this because I think, we got charge out of it afterwards, we worked as the enlisted men did, we directed because, you had a ward master a sergeant and he could do everything, so you just told him what had to be done and he would get his crew to do it and you could just go in afterwards with him and go through and inspect but we got it all done, beds made, ready to open and we were, the colonel would come with his staff for the white glove inspection

**RS:** Excuse me was he a medical man?

**FH:** yes, he was a doctor, he was a colonel, he a, just before he was due to start his inspection, we got one of those torrential rain storms that England is noted for, and I don't say this with derision because uh, it's over with in nothing flat but it just poured and of course with the incline and we had the doors open so water was going like this all we could do was get up on the foot of our bed and watch the water go through and out the other door, we couldn't do anything but laugh about it. But so we started all over again the boys did, and opened up so that's where we were stationed for the duration.

**RS:** What were your duties, tell me about the hospital

**FH:** Ok the hospital, the wards would be broken into certain, medical, surgical uh, there's an officers ward and a, there would be some private rooms in there and the rest would be open barracks, open like a ward that you would see in any hospital, maybe 20 beds or so in it, on both sides but uh, you would be assigned by the chief nurse and her staff as to what, what ward you would be in, be in charge of that, that would be your charge, might have one or two, but we were fortunate to have enough that we have one for each, each ward and you took care of them, now they might be injured, they might be somebody with medical problems, you might have some ah, psychological problems, the officers of course had their own quarters, their own

**RS:** Now were these the army infantry people? This wasn't anything with the Air Force?

**FH:** They are army infantry, yeah, no it was just the army

**RS:** You were just working with the Army?

**FH:** The army, yes, the Army Nurse Corps

**RS:** People, yes, excuse me I don't mean to interrupt you

**FH:** It's all right

**RS:** I'm interested where you got your patients from?

**FH:** They came from the Europe and theater operations. A hospital train would come in, whether there been some battle someplace they would say, they would be coming in, a full hospital train of injured or medically ill or psychologically ill soldiers and you would prepare for that, you'd be ready for them

**RS:** How often did they come in?

**FH:** Well depending on how much they needed to in the war, you know what was happening and everything, and ah, you would be prepared to be on duty as long as necessary, sometimes you'd be up 24, sometimes you'd be up 72 or longer hours, to make sure that those boys were taken care of, they had the uh, triage, as they have now in most every hospital any more but that came out of World War II, I'm not sure, but uh, you would uh, the triage unit would, this one goes here, this one has the OR immediately, this one can wait, this one needs medical units, so forth and so on. And, let's say I was assigned to uh, the general ward, where these people needed just comfort and food and everything, first thing you did would be to give them a bath or something like that, cause they hadn't had one, and then give them a good meal then they could rest, but if they needed to go to surgery the OR unit would take care of it, take them right to surgery, whatever it would be, and you'd work like that until every single one of them had been taken care of.

**RS:** Some days it was constant and other days it was...?

**FH:** Other days it was pleasant because you just, then it was postoperative, after the initial rush was over with it would be postoperative and you just took care of them, as you would take care of anybody postoperatively in a hospital. Or if you had soldiers that needed to have some ah, psychological help or ah, the chaplain then you would get them, they would

**RS:** The psychologist was there?

**FH:** The psychologist was there, yes your hospital unit had a psychologist, a chaplain, you would have doctors, and you would have corpsmen, and a, so forth like that, a complete unit

**RS:** Then, then they were either assigned, afterwards, assigned home, some?

**FH:** yes some would go back to a, active duty, some of them would be ah, maybe shipped back to the states, depending on the severity of their health problem

**RS:** You were there for how long?

**FH:** I was there for a little over a year, and a, we had, we got leaves, we had, we could get to London, we I met a lot of nice people, you wonder where they went now, where they are now, you kept track of them

**RS:** Have you kept track of them?

**FH:** I have up until a certain point, then I lost track of them all, I just, I just figured they're somewhere, either they're not living or they're somewhere but I don't know where. I could probably find out by, you know going through the records but you, you change friends after a while, but I, some of the people in my unit, two of them, one of the ladies that was a friend of mine, she was the assistant chief, she **um**, went in to Bath,

went into veterans, I found her up at Bath veterans and one of the master sergeants, was, went into veterans and he was up there so I was able to meet with them it was very nice for a while, but they unfortunately, both died, and ah, so as you said, as I said, went down we saw a lot of London, and the first time I was in London, a, we stayed at the Red Cross which was fine, it was a beautiful place to stay, and a, we took a cab trip through London and I never seen a group of people that had so much courage, you'd go through these places that where they had the buzz bombs had ruined and they would be so positive about the whole thing, and it was just wonderful to see them, I know they went through terrible terrible things you could see it, so we saw everything in London that we could that would be available to us

**RS:** There were no bombings when you were there?

**FH:** No, no that had gone someplace else, we could see the, where we were stationed on the hill we could see the bombers, our bombers going over the White Cliffs of Dover, we could see that, towards the end

**RS:** You were close to a, you were close to an airfield so you could see that?

**FH:** Yup, you could see them coming into the, coming up, and they'd be, so you, that was towards the end of the war, when they already invaded Normandy but ah, then I had the good fortune of going back to England, in 77, it was just wonderful to go back and see, I didn't see where I'd been, but I was on a tour, so you know, I went to London and ...

**RS:** When you were in the hospital, you did all kinds of work, I mean you weren't, it was a general type of taking care

**FH:** Yeah uh, yes you, if you were assigned, let's see, what examples can I give, well I was assigned to a, the officers ward and you just saw, you supervised more than anything else, the severe cases, yes you had other nurses on, if you were the head nurse you would a, establish the routine, who's going to take care of who. Corpsman would take care of some of the lesser a, lesser ills, ill persons and then you would a, something more severe you would have a nurse do the work, or they could take care of themselves, the idea was to help them get as well as they could, so which is, and a

**RS:** Did you feel badly about having to send them back to the war? How'd you react to that?

**FH:** Oh yeah, I saw some of these, well uh, you have to put on a good front, you can't a, you can't sympathize with them, if you know they have to go back, and some of them were waiting to go back, they just had to get back into it, but some you could see, and you could talk to the doctors and if there was any problem with the, well they thought maybe he shouldn't go back they would take the appropriate steps to, to a, keep them or send them back and give them or send them someplace else for further care, rest and care, and ah, I know that one of the things, little things that a, for example I'm sure that you've heard of it and I know that it's a famous thing that, lot of the soldiers got trench feet, from not being able to change their socks or shoes. And they would come and they would have to come back to a general hospital for treatment, well they put them all in one ward and see then maybe I'd have a nurse assigned to that and a corpsman and his crew of staff to take care of them and that's an example, some of the things other than

being wounded with a bullet or a grenade or anything so, and ah, we had soldiers come back that unfortunately needed some psychological help, work with them in that respect. I didn't have that to do because I, the, ward would have the nurses that were qualified or had more knowledge of that than I did, that wasn't one of my favorite things in my career so, that was it. So we just continued to do that on a day to day basis, we had leave to go to wherever we wanted to. I had the opportunity to go back to Scotland, could never get to Ireland though because I had to have a relative over there that could invite me over, and I didn't have one, least I didn't know I had one, though my ancestors came from there, anyway ah, and then the day, the day when VE came, we were very very enthusiastic, and then it was just a matter of taking care of the soldiers that we had, cause we, this was a whole year, we could have had half a dozen hospital trains come in or more than that cause we constantly busy but, and then, VE day came and it was a matter of taking care of the soldiers that we had as patients and ah, then preparing them to go home, and then prepare to close up the hospital

**RS:** You closed up the hospital? It was VE day? And pretty soon after that you came back home?

**FH:** Closed up the hospital, it was after VE day, it was quite a few months because it was, way into the fall before we came home

**RS:** Ok and what were, and you were taking care of the soldiers who were still...?

**FH:** We were there, we took care, as patients, that was the first thing, take care of those boys, so that they get well enough that they can travel and that would be up to the medical staff and then they would go to...

**RS:** It took several months?

**FH:** Well not so much, maybe we got them out as fast as we could because depending on their injuries

**RS:** But I mean with the numbers

**FH:** Oh yeah, excuse me I shouldn't say oh yeah, we a, we had a lot of things to do of closing down the hospital, getting all the records taken care of and then packing up everything, and then it was a matter of sitting and waiting until there was transportation, a boat, so we had a lot of little side things like that, they'd take us on trips, I had the, a, went down to ah, Shakespeare's home, beautiful time there, came back then to Avon, Stratford on Avon and then we got ready to come home. We come home on the Queen Elisabeth, delightful boat to come home on, got back here at Fort Dix gave us our thirty month leave, 30 day leave, came home on the old Erie railroad, right up straight through, met my folks that I hadn't seen in over a year

**RS:** That was it?

**FH:** That was it then I was getting ready to go back, when I got orders to go back to Fort Dix, well I had to go back to Fort Dicks, when I got back I thought I'd be going to the west coast and then on, but the war was over there so we got our discharges

**RS:** In retrospect what was your most memorable event or memorable, memory or you know, something that stood out that was very important to you, or very exciting?

**FH:** Well, I think the fact that, seeing the courage of those boys that would come in, that were hurting on those hospital trains and ah, even back when I was still in the states, before I went, I was attached to a hospital train that went down to North Carolina and brought a group of soldiers back to the New England hospital that was there in New Jersey, and to see those boys, which could have been from all, air force and both sides of the oceans, both the Atlantic and the Pacific, to see them and their courage, and ah, I guess one of the events that, the fact that I was part of it, which was important to me to, I can't see my life, but ah, I didn't do anything spectacular like some of the, like my friend that was at the field hospital, she probably could have had a lot more things to tell you, or the nurses over in the Pacific, that were prisoners of war, and that, so but uh

**RS:** So do you have a terrible memory, do you have anything that, what's the worst memory that you had? Was there anything that struck you?

**FH:** Yeah, uh, I really don't think so cause we were sort of, we were the general hospital and it was in a protected area, ah, it just doesn't strike me as something I would never forget, let's put it that way, I've had sad thoughts about that, that whole thing, taking care of this type of illness, but uh, nothing spectacular that would stay with me all my life, I don't think, that's an awful thing to say maybe, but ah

**RS:** You enlisted because you wanted to, so therefore the same thing prevailed with you, and you were happy that you did

**FH:** Yes, very very pleased that I did

**RS:** You didn't have any injuries? You were not given any citations or...?

**FH:** No, no

**RS:** How did your family feel about this?

**FH:** Well, both my brother and I were over in that area, and ah, I, they supported us, both of us, Joe was drafted and I enlisted, but ah, they were very supportive of us, mom would send us the, mom and dad would send us the foods, and ah, they would always put things in my package that I could send on to Joe, being they give him more you know, things that he would like that I wouldn't like, and ah,

**RS:** Were you close to him?

**FH:** No, ah, he was over in France and Germany, he was in the Battle of the Bulge like that, and ah, came home fortunately

**RS:** Was there anything that you did in the service, that you brought back with you, and that you could carry on, that helped you carry on, that helped you in your life, I assume, did you become a nurse after that?

**FH:** No, I was a nurse

**RS:** You were, yes of course.

**FH:** Yes, I graduated from Saint Josephs in 1942, I don't think so because when I came back, I worked at Corning for a year, then the lovely thing the United States gave us the GI bill, I went to college



**RS:** Did you, where'd you go?

**FH:** I went to Catholic University in Washington, and I was there for three years, you could take the graduate exams and get credit, and ah, I didn't really bring anything back from the service except my ability to be a good nurse because my major was obstetrics

**RS:** I can understand that

**FH:** I came back to Saint Joseph's and taught from 1949 to 1965, then I went to Corning Community College, taught there until I retired from the field of nursing

**RS:** Ok and were you the head of any nursing program?

**FH:** No, no I was one of the clinical instructors on the faculty at the nursing school at Saint Josephs and worked under Sister Wilhelmina and a Sister Madeline and then Sister Mary Rock (?), you know Sister Mary Rock?

**RS:** I remember some of them, yes. But then, you stayed, you're a St. Joe's person, then you went to Corning

**FH:** Then I went to Corning

**RS:** And what did you

**FH:** Well I started, I taught Obstetrics first and then they changed the curriculum into what they call the integrated curriculum so I taught all various aspects of the total nursing program and went up to professor, I was ah, I went from assistant, associate, and all the way up to full professor, and then I was chairperson of the division for one year and ah then I retired officially. Officially in 81 then came back and worked in a lab for a while and quit again in 94 so there you go

**RS:** But didn't you feel that something you had learned while you were in the service helped you?

**FH:** Well I think it did because I had more ah administrative responsibilities being ah, the head nurse of the unit and they have made me be able to delegate to other people and things like that, which you have to do and it helped me and when I would be teaching because it gave me a, we taught things and in fact we took courses in service that helped us become better people to run the units and I think that helped me too developing my teaching ability whether or not I don't know

**RS:** So in another word you felt good but, I mean you were pleased that you went in?

**FH:** Yes very much so

**RS:** You felt it was an important part of your life?

**FH:** Yes I did, and I did get a lot of satisfaction about going, I can't tell you the initial, I just felt I had to go even though it meant leaving my father and mother alone, Course my brother's wife was there with their children, one child, lived with mom and dad which gave support to, made us feel better about that because somebody was there with them

**RS:** Well thank you so much for doing this

**FH:** Well you're very welcome, I don't think I got anything that's very

**RS:** No, it's good it gives us a general picture

**FH:** Yeah must be other people that, I wish there were some other people that I could know of..