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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF FRANCES LIBERTY

3

4 July 14, 2003

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2 MS. HUNTER: Frances M. Liberty
3 was a surgical nurse serving during the times of
4 World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

5 This interview is taking place in
6 East Greenbush, New York on July 14th, 2003 at ten
7 o'clock in the morning.

8 This interview is being conducted
9 by Kenneth and June Hunter.

10 MS. HUNTER: Tell us your name
11 and when and where you work born.

12 A. My name is Frances Mary Liberty.
13 I was born in Plattsburgh, New York. 14th
14 September, 1923.

15 Q. And what did you do before you
16 entered the military?

17 A. I was in nursing school.

18 Q. And which nursing schools did you
19 attend?

20 A. Plattsburgh, New York. Champlain
21 Valley Hospital School of Nursing. It no longer
22 exists.

23 Q. Now, why did you go into the
24 army?

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2 A. Because there was a war on and I
3 thought it would be a big adventure.

4 Q. And can you tell us a little bit
5 about the day you registered, where you registered
6 for the army and what basic training was like?

7 A. I registered in Watervliet, New
8 York. I was twenty years old at the time. In New
9 York State you're not allowed to take your boards
10 or nursing registration boards until you're
11 twenty-one. But at the time of the war, Mr.
12 Roosevelt needed nurses so badly he let us take
13 them early. And those of us that wanted to, went
14 into the military. Those that didn't, didn't go.

15 And basic training was difficult.
16 Now, most people don't realize it but nurses aren't
17 used to that sort of thing. Oh my God, we went on
18 hikes, we pitched tents. We ate out of rations.
19 We kept our room -- our bed clean. There were
20 twenty-eight women in one dorm or barracks. And
21 open showers which was difficult for me. And we
22 ate in a mess hall, but we were used to eating in
23 dining rooms, you know, that wasn't too bad.
24 But -- and the food was very good.

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2 And that was rough. Basic
3 training was very hard in this state. We had to
4 climb that fence, that big board. We had to swing
5 off the rope in mud. We -- we learned how to crawl
6 on our bellies under barb wire with our fannies
7 down and that ain't easy for a woman.

8 And that's about it. And then
9 we -- I went to -- I was one of the ones that was
10 sent to Fort Patrick Henry in Virginia. And I went
11 overseas.

12 Q. Where did you go on your first
13 assignment overseas?

14 A. Well, as we -- when you go up
15 Gangplank you give your name, your rank, and your
16 serial number.

17 And now you've got sixty pounds
18 of medical supplies on your back and you're
19 carrying your duffel bag with your personal things
20 in it.

21 So you -- and you've got fatigues
22 on -- or not fatigues, they were slacks and shirts
23 at that time because they still didn't have us
24 dressed properly. So, we walked up to gang plank

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2 and I said, Liberty, Frances, M. N seven nine nine
3 five one seven. And he looked at me and he said,
4 "O my God, you're a woman." I said the last time I
5 checked I was. They had spelled my first name
6 wrong. With an I instead of an E.

7 So he said, well you'll have to
8 stand over here, ma'am. So, I went over there and
9 pretty soon -- maybe a half an hour later another
10 girl comes up the gang plank and her name is
11 Marian. And they had her classified as a man too.

12 So, she and I stood there and
13 these -- there are four people -- four bunks in a
14 stateroom with a -- you know, an alley way, or you
15 know, passage way between the bunks. So there was
16 one up so they slung hammocks between them for us
17 or -- for her and I. She in one room and I in the
18 other.

19 There were five people in that
20 stateroom, four of them were seasick and I was one
21 of them. And so the first night I met out -- slept
22 in the hall. Or the gangway. She did the same
23 thing. And then the next night, she and I were
24 together and we thought we'll go up on deck, you

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2 know. At least the air was better.

3 So we got up on deck and sailors,
4 you have to be very quiet. Don't say anything.
5 You know, don't move even. So we crowded behind a
6 gun emplacement. We were in convoy. We slept
7 there. Cold, the Atlantic in October, it was
8 really cold so -- each night. And we were not --
9 there were blankets and pillows there.

10 We landed in England. And I was
11 separated from the group. There was a Texas outfit
12 that needed a surgical nurse. And because of my
13 nurses training, my education I was selected to go
14 with that group, you know. I was the only Yankee
15 in the crowd. And that's when I learned there was
16 Yankees and that they were shunning us.

17 Then we went there to Africa.
18 And from Africa we went over to Anzio. We were in
19 Anzio ahead of the information that they received,
20 there was more resistance than they expected. We
21 were supposed to be the third wave, but we were
22 still -- we were still the first when we landed
23 there.

24 And this big Texan says to Archie

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2 who was a little -- maybe she was five feet tall
3 but she wore cowboy boots, and she had red hair and
4 a thick, thick braid down her back, which she put
5 up on her helmet.

6 And he says to her, "O my God,
7 you're women. You're not supposed to be here."
8 She says, "We're here." He says, "Well, you're not
9 supposed to be here." She said, "We're here and
10 deal with us." So, I don't think she came up to
11 his chest, she was so small.

12 So, we lived fox holes with the
13 fellows, not -- not with the fellows, we lived in
14 fox holes that they dug out for us. And we used a
15 bigger fox hole for our little hospital until we
16 could get help. But nobody died on us. They
17 didn't dare.

18 MR. HUNTER: A little -- little
19 question, was there -- your basic training, where
20 did it take place?

21 MS. LIBERTY: Fort Dix.

22 MR. HUNTER: And any unusual
23 person that you can remember from that time that
24 had a lasting impression on you?

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2 MS. LIBERTY: The drill sergeant
3 who gave me a bag of rags -- rocks to hang in my
4 left hand so I'd know which foot to step off on.
5 And I later saw him in Korea coming back from a --
6 one of the MASH units I was on the hospital trains.
7 And I turned this man over so I could look at his
8 wound, and he said to me, hey, do you remember me?
9 I said yes. He said, I suppose you're going to let
10 me bleed to death. I said, I thought about that,
11 but there would be a black mark on my record.

12 MS. HUNTER: Now, when you were
13 in Africa what kind of wounds did you see --?

14 MS. LIBERTY: We saw very little.
15 We were just there waiting to step off.

16 MR. HUNTER: Now, where was
17 Anzio? What Country?

18 MS. LIBERTY: Italy.

19 MR. HUNTER: And from there?

20 MS. LIBERTY: We went up the
21 road, up the boot. And along the way we stopped
22 off and filled the -- you know, refilled first aid
23 stations and stuff. We had to go to the bathroom
24 regularly. And you wore slacks. And we didn't

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2 have any problems in most of the places.

3 But we got to this one place.

4 And I don't know if they'll let you keep this in
5 the tape. And it was a slit trench. Now, that's
6 difficult for women with slacks on, you know that?
7 So, we went out and we said to our chief, that's a
8 slit trench, we can't use that.

9 So, she went and found the
10 officer in charge and she said to him, something
11 has to be done, these are slit trenches and my
12 ladies can't use them. He said, Sergeant, they're
13 sufficient. Tell them to use them. She said, sir,
14 my ladies are sitters not pointers, fix it.

15 So they did something and we --
16 and then we settled in Rome. We had one of
17 Mussolini's palaces. And we used one of his
18 bathtubs as a --.

19 And it was absolutely beautiful.
20 All black and white marble. It didn't make for a
21 good hospital but it was nice. And all the rooms
22 were -- would have apparently been guest rooms.
23 There must have been -- there was a lot of them and
24 they were big.

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2 And we used to walk to St.
3 Peter's to mass anytime we felt like it. And you
4 know, you could go there any time during the day or
5 night there was a mass going on.

6 MR. HUNTER: Now was there any
7 special military precautions put in place around
8 the -- the Vatican area? Was it free for anybody
9 to go back and forth?

10 A. Anybody could go back and forth.
11 The Pope did not come out. The Pope came out I
12 think in 1945 for the first time after the war.
13 That was one of the most beautiful sights you'd
14 ever want to see. He came out on a litter being
15 cared by the Swiss Guard. And he wore a diamond
16 this big right here.

17 And now the crazy American's are
18 out there and it's raining and there's mud all
19 over. And the Americans when he approached them
20 knelt. The Italians stood up screaming, "Viva la
21 Popa." There's a doctor next to me and he pokes me
22 and of course the Americans are crying. He pokes
23 me and he says, I don't know what the hell I'm
24 crying for, I have been suited."

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2 But he -- he -- many years later
3 he remember that. He said it was one of the most
4 inspiring things that he's ever seen.

5 Q. On your way to Rome, what kind of
6 housing did -- you slept out in the field. Did you
7 have shower facilities?

8 A. No. No. We didn't have shower
9 facilities and unless they were presented to -- for
10 us at the places that we stopped at. And we slept
11 mostly in our vehicles. We had ambulances. We
12 slept in those.

13 Q. And when did you first start
14 seeing a greater number of casualties for
15 treatment?

16 A. All along the way. Then in Hanza
17 we saw a lot of them. But all along the way we saw
18 a lot of casualties.

19 And we did what -- later on and
20 MASH was described as meatball surgery. We patch
21 them up as best we could.

22 Q. Now people heard of MASH because
23 of the popular television show, conditions
24 certainly were nothing like that. But could you

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2 tell us what MASH stood for and also what it was
3 like operating as a unit inside one of those
4 facilities?

5 A. They did not have MASH units in
6 World War II. Those had been thought of and hadn't
7 been actuated until Korea.

8 The MASH unit -- MASH is a very
9 amusing show. Although those things did not happen
10 in one unit, they happened. I won't say they
11 didn't happen. And a lot of stuff that happened
12 they were never put on television. But it happened
13 in all of the MASH units, some little thing
14 happened, you know, and they put it all together in
15 one story.

16 Korea was difficult. That's the
17 most, that's the coldest I'd ever been in my life.
18 And the dirtiest. And the smelliest. And the
19 wounds were vicious. And the kids were young for
20 the most part.

21 Now, in World War II, they were
22 contemporary. In World War -- in Korea they were
23 contemporary as most of them. And a lot of the
24 people that I worked with were what we -- we were

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2 called retreads. I was called that and so was a
3 lot of others.

4 But in Vietnam they were babies.
5 I was older, they were younger. That bothered me
6 more than anything.

7 Q. Now, after being in Rome what did
8 you do -- where did you go from there? What kind
9 of experiences can you tell us about?

10 A. I came home from Rome. And got
11 out of the service. And I worked at the Leonard
12 Hospital in Troy which is now defunct, until I was
13 called back for Korea. Now, my father was a
14 patient in the hospital with a heart condition.
15 And I come from a large family. There's six girls
16 and three boys. One boy died very young. And when
17 I got the orders, I was the only one at home when
18 my father -- when I got called back in. My
19 father -- my mother had been dead for a number of
20 years. My father had remarried. And I had two
21 step sisters who were young adults.

22 And when I got called back in, I
23 didn't want to leave him because he was cardiac.
24 But they told me I had to go because I had other

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2 sisters in the area.

3 So, when I went in to tell him I
4 had to leave, now my father was not a "ply winker."
5 He didn't want me in the service to begin with.

6 So, when I went in and told him he said to me, "My
7 girl, I'm very proud of you. You have a talent and
8 a career that can aid your country which it needs."

9 That was not my father.

10 So I looked at him and he said to
11 me, "And I mean that. I've always been proud of
12 you. I just didn't want you to notice."

13 Now, this is not about the
14 military but, he had to have blood drawn and he was
15 very difficult to have blood drawn. So, I was the
16 supervisor. I was the youngest nurse on duty, the
17 supervisor, because of my experience in the army.
18 So, this one nurse came to me and she said Lib, the
19 labs tried, I've tried, and there was a girl that
20 worked on OB/GYN who had to draw lots of blood,
21 she's tried. We can't get in.

22 So I said okay, I'll do it. So I
23 went in, I stepped outside the door and I said,
24 "Please blessed mother, let me get into this vein."

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2 I went in, when he turned around he said, "Huh,
3 you're going to try? Everybody else goofed." I
4 got right in. Dumb luck.

5 So, a couple of days later I made
6 a trip to the bathroom off his room and my brother
7 was there visiting him, and then he says to my
8 brother, "Don't tell him I said this. But she's
9 good. She could get in when nobody else could.
10 Don't let her know."

11 MR. HUNTER: You think that it
12 would be difficult of parents wouldn't you.

13 MS. LIBERTY: Yeah.

14 MR. HUNTER: Now from your recall
15 into service, did you have to go through any kind
16 of training --

17 A. No.

18 Q. -- retraining?

19 A. No. I went to Fort Dix and I was
20 issued uniforms and then I -- I went to McGuire
21 Airbase next door to Fort Dix. And I went to Korea
22 which I went to Japan First. I landed in Yokohama.
23 I went from Yokohama to Tokyo. And then got
24 assigned to Osaka. I was in Osaka about three

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2 months. Then I went to Korea.

3 In those days they didn't give
4 you a ride and they just sent you. And I never
5 thought of -- of objecting to an assignment because
6 I thought that's where they needed you, you know?
7 So I kept getting sent back to Fort Dix.

8 So, I was in the Chief Nurse's
9 Office in Washington one day they said to this
10 friend of mine, how come they keep sending me to
11 Fort Dix? Do you know what their answer is? You
12 don't complain. I thought that was the craziest
13 damn thing. I said, you're kidding? She said, no.
14 Nobody wants to go Fort Dix. I knew everybody in
15 the area. I knew the quartermaster. I -- I knew
16 the guy weather suffer. I knew them all. And it
17 didn't bother me.

18 Q. Now, when you were over in Korea,
19 how soon was it before you got into real serious
20 use of your medical and nursing skills?

21 A. Maybe three days.

22 Q. And what was it like?

23 A. It was shocking. I was at a
24 hospital in Seoul for about three days. And

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2 that -- one of the nurses that worked the trains
3 got sick. So they picked me. Which was to my
4 opinion lucky I enjoyed it.

5 You -- you usually went up north
6 empty or I mean you have a general -- or a couple
7 of nurses that were going to different stations or
8 some Corpsman -- or some men that were being
9 transported. But nobody sick. Coming back you
10 were loaded with patients.

11 You picked them up you went up as
12 far north as you could go and you came down slowly
13 and picked up patients. And you left some of the
14 patients off at the train to remember that.

15 Seaport -- or the port where we
16 left off patients on the hospital ships. The good
17 hope.

18 Q. Pusan?

19 A. Taegu.

20 Q. Taegu.

21 A. Yeah. Taegu. And that was lovely
22 because that's when you got a shower and cleaned
23 the most. The navy nurses had showers and they
24 wore these gray jumpsuits that zipped up the front

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2 that were the most comfortable things in the world.
3 And I always carried clean underwear with me.

4 So, when we got there, I would
5 take a shower and they would give me one of their
6 jumpsuits. And they were so -- nobody ever said
7 anything or objected. And we had the chief nurse
8 of the army nurse corp. And I've forgotten what
9 her name was.

10 But she said to me, "Which army
11 region are you reloading to, young lady?" And I
12 looked right at her and I said the one that's got
13 the clean clothes. She said hmm, and walked away.
14 So somebody said to me, you're in trouble. I said
15 what else is new?

16 So, I told her the truth. They
17 were clean clothes. So we got down to Pusan to
18 Seoul -- to Seoul. The chief nurse there was a
19 friend of mine. And she said to me, "What did you
20 do now?" And I said, "Why?" And she said well,
21 they're going to take you off the trains. I said,
22 "That's okay." She said, "They're going to send you
23 up to one of the MASH units." It's okay with me
24 too. But they didn't.

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2 The doctor that was in charge of
3 the trains told her flat out, "No way are you
4 taking her." Because when she comes down all of
5 her patients are alive. They didn't dare die.
6 That's a lot of paperwork.

7 Q. Now, did you treat casualties
8 from other countries? We had quite a few ally
9 forces over there. Was there any special
10 treatment?

11 A. They had -- we had -- we had
12 Swedes. We treated them the same as we took the
13 others. Our own. There were Swedes, there were
14 Danes, there were Filipinos.

15 Q. Australians?

16 A. English, English and Australians,
17 yeah.

18 MS. HUNTER: Did you find the men
19 were happy to see a woman when they were injured?

20 MS. LIBERTY: Oh yes. Oh yes.
21 Yes. And I at that time had long, long hair that I
22 used to keep braided and keep. Under the helmets
23 we had like a little baseball cap, a knit baseball
24 cap that fit right over. And then I would put my

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2 braids up under that and then the helmet on.

3 Because those helmets were hard. And I mean they
4 were really not nice things.

5 And one day I was working on this
6 kid. We had taken our helmets off. We were in the
7 triage area.

8 A. And I had taken my helmet off in
9 my cap because it was hot. It was British. He
10 said, "Ma'am, how long is your hair?" I said, I'm
11 not sure but what a question to ask." He said,
12 "Well, it's awful nice to to see a white woman." I
13 said, okay. That's all right.

14 So one of my braids fell and went
15 down to my waist. And he said ohhh, I bet your
16 hair's pretty when you let it out. And I said,
17 "Get your mind off that stuff."

18 MS. HUNTER: Well then how long
19 were you in Korea?

20 MS. LIBERTY: Fourteen months --
21 sixteen months.

22 MS. HUNTER: Where did you go
23 after that@.

24 MS. LIBERTY: And I'll tell you

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2 something else about Korea. For sixteen months for
3 twice a day wherever I was, I ate peas. I don't
4 eat peas at all. Now, I will not have a pea on my
5 plate.

6 MR. HUNTER: What did you think
7 of the Corpsman and the Corpwoman who were
8 stationed over there?

9 A. We didn't have any Corpwoman, but
10 we did have Corpman. They were excellent. They
11 really knew what to do and they knew how to do it.
12 And they knew when to do it. And there wasn't
13 anything you could ask them to do that they
14 couldn't do. If they didn't know how they would
15 tell you. They never faked it.

16 Q. Did you on any occasion treat
17 civilian casualties, children?

18 A. Yes. In Korea -- in Vietnam.
19 Not Vietnam, Kore.

20 A. We treated them in Vietnam too
21 but in Korea we treated -- kids got sick. You
22 know, they had pneumonia and stuff like that. And
23 we had antibiotics. And we had a couple of bad
24 deliveries. Actually we didn't have any equipment

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2 to take care of that but you'd be surprised at what
3 doctor's could do and will do.

4 Q. Now the quality of the equipment,
5 how would you rate it in Korea versus what they
6 used in the World War II theatres?

7 A. Better.

8 Q. In what way?

9 A. Well, World War II taught them
10 they needed different equipment. That they needed
11 little things, you know. They needed to upgrade,
12 move with the times. And there were so many
13 inventions or discoveries that were the result of
14 World War II.

15 Like they're starting to use
16 surgical glue now, I noticed. We were
17 experimenting with that in Kore.

18 A. Instead of sewing they glued it
19 together.

20 And just like the space program,
21 is helping them now, the surgical units. World War
22 II helped, so did Korea for Vietnam.

23 One of the first leg transplants
24 was done in Korea for a Cadaver. You know, you

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2 didn't have to go through all that fuss of getting
3 permission and stuff like that. It was just done.
4 Maybe not legal but it saved a kids life, and it
5 saved a kids leg.

6 And a lot of doctors will do
7 anything to save a limb. They do not like to cut
8 them off.

9 Q. Can you recall seeing the same
10 patient more than once? Or throughout your tour in
11 Korea?

12 A. Yes. It was another Sergeant
13 from -- I can see him now, he had blond hair. And
14 he was from Georgi.

15 A. Macon Georgi.

16 A. And each time he came in and he
17 was wounded he was mad as hell because he felt he'd
18 been stupid to stick a sting out that way.

19 Both times -- one time was a
20 shoulder wound and the next time was a thigh wound.
21 And he really did get mad because he didn't get
22 sent home. He got passed over. And he said to me,
23 "What do I have to do? Get my head or my arm taken
24 off?" And I said, "Oh, God, don't even say that.

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2 And if you do, tell them you don't want to come to
3 this hospital."

4 MS. HUNTER: Do you have -- do
5 you have any idea where he is today?

6 MS. LIBERTY: No, no.

7 MR. HUNTER: Now promotions, did
8 you have to do some kind -- any kind of testing
9 study? How did they accomplish giving a promotion?

10 A. I have no idea.

11 Q. It was a complete surprise then?

12 A. Always a complete surprise to me.
13 Because I had such a big mouth. You know, if it
14 was -- as far as I'm concerned in medicine, there
15 is no shade of gray. It's all black or white. And
16 I said it that way.

17 And I had a theory for all of my
18 tours those patients or those men were out on the
19 line doing the best they could for their country.
20 And by damn, they were going to get the best care
21 money could buy or I was going to know the reason
22 why. And they did.

23 And I saw to it anybody that came
24 to my unit that the best care money could buy.

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2 Sometimes better than money could buy because they
3 got it with compassion.

4 Q. Can you remember what kind of
5 salaries you had, and you probably had no
6 opportunity to purchase any luxuries while you were
7 stationed overseas?

8 A. We had the Sears catalogue. You
9 could buy anything with that. And our salaries
10 were compatible. After World War II our salaries
11 were more than compatible with civilians. Now, I
12 retired at forty-eight in 1971. My pension covers
13 me completely now. It did then.

14 But I know nurses that were --
15 didn't retire until they were in their sixties and
16 they didn't retire with what I had. So the salary
17 has to be good. The pension is good. And plus we
18 get -- now that I'm on Medicare we get supplemental
19 insurance from the military. And all we have to do
20 is pay for our prescriptions, all we do is pay
21 three -- three dollars for a generic drug and nine
22 dollars for a pain pill.

23 Q. That's the Tri-care Supplement.

24 A. Tri-care Supplement. It's a very

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2 **good program. And we don't pay anything for it.**

3 Q. Well, you did at one time have to
4 promise that you would have medical care for the
5 rest of your life but that it was taken away in the
6 1950's and it wasn't only until approximately two
7 years ago that those benefits were restored.

8 A. Yeah, well we had Champus there
9 for awhile.

10 MR. HUNTER: How long were
11 you --. How far were you -- oh, excuse me.

12 MS. HUNTER: I was going to say
13 now when you left Korea what did you do? Did you
14 stay in the military?

15 MS. LIBERTY: Oh yeah, I stayed
16 in the military. I traveled around. I was at Fort
17 Dix, I was in Georgia, I was in San Franscisco,
18 Fort San Houston Texas. And I was at Fort San
19 Houston Texas I went -- when I was at Fort Dix for
20 awhile, I used to go to New York with a bunch of
21 the lady nurses to go to Columbia University. I
22 got my Bachelor's degree there.

23 Then when I was at Fort Sam we
24 started I started in carna warden And you did this

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2 on your off duty time. And I paid for my own
3 education because I had seen nurses get their
4 education from the military and then they had to do
5 what they told them to do. I mean you had to do
6 what they -- but I didn't feel that I was a
7 teacher. And a lot of the girls that got their
8 advanced degrees were made to teach. I'm too rigid
9 to be a teacher. Or was. Still am.

10 One of the Carna word I went to
11 Walter Reed and I got -- I was -- I went to a
12 Catholic University and finished my Masters. When
13 I finished my masters they sent for me to go to the
14 Chief Nurses office. And the only reason they knew
15 I was getting my masters was because I had to ask
16 for the day off to go to the graduation ceremony.
17 And it made the papers that I'm an army captain and
18 graduated third in the class.

19 So she sent for me and she said
20 you're -- we want you to go to the research
21 building to work. I said I've been over there. I
22 did my stint over there and I don't want to go
23 back. I don't feel I work it is my style.

24 She said, we educated you, you'll

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2 do as you're told. I said, you didn't educate me.
3 I did it myself. And I'm not going there. I'll
4 get out first. She said, you will never be
5 promoted.

6 So when I got my -- I was at Fort
7 Sam when I got my retired colonel's thing. They
8 sent her a telegram she was retired down in Florid.

9 A. And I knew where she was because
10 she lived with a lot of other nurses that I know,
11 you know, in like a little village.

12 And I said for someone who's not
13 being promoted above the rank of captain I'm not
14 doing bad, am I? And I signed it Frances M.
15 Liberty, Lieutenant Colonel, AMC. A couple days
16 later, Command Officer calls for me.

17 I went in and the secretary says
18 to me, "What'd you do?" I said, "I don't know."
19 She says, "You got a phone call and apparently
20 you've upset somebody's down at card terribly." So
21 I went in and reported to him and he said, "Why the
22 hell did you send that telegram?" I said, "I had
23 to." "Why?" I said, "I just -- I thought she
24 should know." He said, "Did you do it when you

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2 were a major?" I said, "Nope." He said, "Why
3 now?" I said, "I just thought she should know."

4 And he says, "Well she's really mad." I said,
5 "Because I've been promoted?" "No, because you had
6 the audacity to send her a telegram." Then the
7 chief nurse first army was stationed there, come to
8 Corpus Island. She says to me, "Why did you do
9 that in her English Noth Jersey? Why did you do
10 that?" I said, "Because I wanted to." She said,
11 "Well, she thinks you're a brat." I said, "I am."
12 But she really got upset.

13 MS. HUNTER: Good for you. How
14 long was it -- what was it like when you received
15 orders to go to duty in Vietnam?

16 A. Well, I knew I was going. You
17 know, you know you don't get that attacked. And I
18 will confess to you, I didn't want to go. But I
19 didn't object. So I went.

20 We went to San Francisco, we flew
21 to Alaska then, and it wasn't bad. I landed in Ton
22 Son Nook airbase. And during the flight I was the
23 only female aboard. During the flight next to me
24 was a young navy pilot. I think he was a captain,

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2 yeah captain.

3 And he was really excited about
4 getting out a destroyer -- on an aircraft carrier.
5 And we chit chatted. When we get off the plane,
6 now we traveled -- and why they sent us in this
7 outfit to a place like Vietnam I will never know.
8 But then we had to travel in a skirt and a blouse.
9 You know, and shoes and pantyhose. Get off the
10 plane, just as we stepped onto the tarmac, they
11 screamed get down, get down. We're under attack.

12 So I laid down on the tarmac,
13 right? And this navy pilot says to me, "Oh my God,
14 I'm going to get killed on the ground without being
15 in the air." And all I could think of was, "I'm
16 going to die with a run in my stockings." Now they
17 sent us to Bonavivk. Then from Rhon Du they issued
18 us a change, fatigues and all that stuff and then
19 they gave me the duty assignment. They assigned me
20 to Saigon I had to go back to Saigon.

21 Then they said in deuce and half
22 you know what a deuce and a half is? With pinchers
23 around the side? There were three civilian woman
24 me and about five GI's. Six, four, there were

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2 twelve -- there must have been eight GI's.

3 Then along the road we got under
4 attack and we had to get out of the truck and get
5 into the ditch.

6 These two women wouldn't get down
7 into the ditch. They didn't want to get dirty.
8 Then this one says to the sergeant, I'm Jack
9 O'Labors secretary, you're going to be in big
10 trouble if you don't stop talking to me like that.

11 So I stood up and I said, "What
12 the hell can they do to me?" I said, "Get down in
13 the ditch." She looked at me and she said, "Did
14 you hear who I am?" And I said, "I don't care who
15 you are. I know that you're endangering a lot of
16 people. Now get down in the ditch before I throw
17 you in the ditch."

18 "I want your full name." I said,
19 "Get down in the ditch." She got down in the ditch.
20 So after everything was over, I said to the
21 Sergeant, a piece of paper and pencil? He said,
22 "Yes." And I wrote down my name, my rank, my
23 serial number and I handed it to her and I said,
24 "Here, I don't want anybody else getting credit for

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2 this. You be sure to give the General my name.

3 And then when you do, you tell him Lib said hi."

4 So, we got back -- we got into
5 Saigon and the Sergeant says to me, "Colonel, she's
6 really going to report you, you know." I said, "I
7 hope she does, because I'd like to tell the general
8 what -- what she is."

9 The hospital in Saigon was
10 gorgeous. It had at one time been a school for all
11 the European and American Diplomats children. It's
12 all white marble. Absolutely gorgeous place. Well
13 kept.

14 Well you know, beautiful, all
15 that, the equipment you could imagine in. It has a
16 very nice triage area where the patients would come
17 in. Beautiful lies It was a beautiful well-kept
18 place.

19 And I don't know how they set it
20 up so fast. They had all the stuff you could want
21 in there.

22 So, about three days later the
23 commanding officer calls me into his office and he
24 says, "General Abrams wants to talk to you." I

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2 said, "Where is he?" He says, "He's coming alone on
3 this air strip and he wants to make sure you're
4 ready for him." I said, "I'm ready." He said,
5 "What's the matter?" I said, "I told his secretary
6 to get down into the ditch before I threw her
7 down." He said -- and I told him about it. And he
8 said, "No, he'll understand." Maybe he is going to
9 congratulate for saving her life. I said, "I doubt
10 it."

11 He came along, I ma reporting Sir
12 I saluted him and all that jazz and he said to me,
13 "Are you the young lady that ordered" -- he gave
14 her name, "Down in the ditch?" And I said, "Yes, I
15 am." He said, "Do you want to tell me why?" I
16 said, "She was endangering the lives of eight men
17 and myself. That's why." He said, "Could you tell
18 me the circumstances?"

19 And I said, "Certainly." I said,
20 "I hope you don't think we all got out of that
21 truck for exercise. I said they were straffing
22 us." And then I said, "The Sergeant told everybody
23 to get in the ditch and we all did except her. And
24 then she kept announcing to the world that she was

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2 doesn't want to go to work, it's time for her to
3 fold her tent.

4 So, I went in now, the Sergeant
5 Major at Fort Belvoir -- at the hospital at Fort
6 Belvoir, he and I had the exact same birth date and
7 year and everything. And I'd known Smitty since he
8 was a first private and I was a first -- second
9 lieutenant. As a matter of fact I was gone when
10 they took a couple of his kids.

11 So, I went in -- on the way in --
12 I used to go in very early in the morning so I
13 could see all the critically ill and the real sick
14 patients at the new admissions. Because I had to
15 give a report to the commanding officer in the
16 morning.

17 And I think when you're going to
18 report about somebody that that's ill, you have to
19 see them. You can't take somebody else's word for
20 it.

21 So, I went in and I said to
22 Smitty, start drawing up my papers, I'm going to
23 retire. He looked up at me and said, we're not old
24 enough. I said, I am. I'm tired, Smitty.

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2 So I went on up to my office and
3 I gave the report -- I picked up the report from
4 the -- from the night supervisor, and then I went
5 around and visited my patients. Went back to my
6 office to drop a few notes off. The phone rang.

7 And I picked it up -- secretary wasn't in and I
8 picked it up and I said, "Colonel Liberty, can I
9 help you?" And this voice said, Libby, and it was
10 a friend of mine that worked out of the Chief
11 Nurse's office in Washington. She said to me, get
12 out. They're going to send you back to Nam. And
13 the last time I talked to you, you said you didn't
14 have it anymore.

15 I said, "I don't." She said,
16 "Get out." They're going to promote you and send
17 you back here. I said where are you. So, she
18 said, "I'm in the parking garage on the payphone so
19 nobody can trace this call." I said, "Okay." So I
20 went down and as I came down the hall Smitty came
21 out to me and he said, "I called Lucy. And she
22 said we're old enough. I'm putting my papers in
23 too." So he said, "I'll have them ready for you to
24 sign when you come out."

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2 So, I gave the report and the
3 commanding officer and I were friends since he was
4 a second -- an intern and I was a first lieutenant.
5 I knew his wife. He said, "What's this, I hear
6 you're retired? You're not old enough, Lib." I
7 said, "Oh, yes, I am Bob, I retired."

8 And he retired. The three of us
9 retired at the same time. I came out and I signed
10 the papers and I said, "Smitty, get these on the
11 courier today." He said, "Why?" I said, "I have a
12 bad feeling. Get them on the courier."

13 My papers were signed and dated
14 and timed before the other papers arrived. And I
15 got out. They probably sink the boat. But you
16 know, you got to learn you can't press them.

17 MS. HUNTER: So, what have you
18 done since you've been out of the military?

19 MS. LIBERTY: Well, when I got
20 out, I did go home and I -- after I decided to
21 retire, I used to come home on weekends and look
22 for a place to live. I didn't want to live with any
23 of my sisters. Because my life style is completely
24 different than theirs, you know? And I couldn't

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2 find anything I'd live in.

3 One apartment I almost rented,
4 and as I'm standing there talking to the manager, I
5 could hear a fight in the next -- next room. I
6 walked out. So I came home and I didn't know what
7 I was going to. One of my sisters called me and
8 she said to me, come home this weekend, they built
9 something called condominiums in East Greenbush and
10 they're having an open house.

11 These were the first condominiums
12 in the area. So, I came home. Two sisters and a
13 niece came with me to look at it. They have town
14 houses and ranchers. I picked a rancher because I
15 knew I was getting arthritic. And I didn't think
16 I'd be able to make the stairs, after twenty years.
17 This wasn't even built yet. They had models so I
18 picked this one for fifty dollars down. That's
19 thirty -- thirty years ago.

20 MR. HUNTER: Did you experience
21 any hostility when you came back from Vietnam?
22 How -- what was the general feeling of the country?

23 A. Well, when I came back from Nam,
24 I came out of the state of Washington and I'm

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2 trying to remember airport there, but I can't.

3 Q. Is it in Seattle?

4 A. Seattle. I was in fatigues. And
5 I carried my class B's with me or class A's with me
6 to change. And I'm coming down the hall and I've
7 got this garment bag over my arm and a small
8 suitcase. Now I hadn't bathed, I'd eaten
9 sandwiches for two days, slept on the plane, I
10 wasn't very happy.

11 This woman walked up to me and
12 called me a baby killer and hit me right in the
13 mouth. Now, I only have one eye, I've very careful
14 about people coming near my face. She's lucky I
15 didn't hit her. But before I could get to her, two
16 security guards grabbed her. And they said to me,
17 "Ma'am, we're sorry. We did not know you were on
18 that plane." I was the only female on the plane.
19 "Or we would have been right there with you. We're
20 sorry." And I said -- I was still pretty shocked
21 that somebody would hit me.

22 So, I went in and changed my
23 clothes and I -- when I come out of there, there
24 were two guardsmen. Put me on another plane to

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2 come home.

3 And I didn't -- I experienced
4 some hostility among the civilians when I moved
5 here, the fact that I was an army nurse. I don't
6 know what they thought I was, but they guarded
7 their husbands carefully.

8 And as I said to one other girl,
9 I don't know what they're guarding but I wouldn't
10 have the best part of that.

11 Q. Now, looking back on your
12 military career, if you were faced with doing it
13 again, would you do it?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And what would you do
16 differently?

17 A. In a heartbeat.

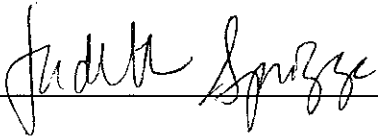
18 Q. Would there be any change in your
19 attitude?

20 A. No. In a heartbeat. As a matter
21 of fact, when the gulf war was on. When they
22 started the gulf war, I almost felt like I should
23 pack. But I wouldn't change my life -- there's a
24 few things I would have done differently, but those

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This is a transcription of the audio provided to us. It is completed to the best of our skill and ability. The transcript consists of pages 1 through 41 inclusive.



Judith Spriggs

Associated Reporters Int'l., Inc.

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