Wisconsin Veterans Museum Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

LUCY D. WALLACE

U. S. Army Nurse Corps, World War II

2002

OH 211

Wallace, Lucy D. Deggs, (1915-2007), Oral History Interview, 2002.

User copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono. Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

ABSTRACT

Lucy Wallace, an Oregon, Wis. veteran, discusses her World War II service as a general duty nurse with the U. S. Army Nurse Corps stationed in New Guinea and Biak (Indonesia). Wallace talks about entering the service, ship ride aboard the U. S. S. America, and arrival in Brisbane (Australia). Wallace and her unit were ordered to help convert an agricultural school at Gatton (Australia) into a hospital, she comments on the lack of hospital supplies, receiving cold weather gear rather then tropical gear from the Army, and adjustment to wearing men's clothing. She describes treating 32nd Division soldiers wounded while fighting in New Guinea. Wallace was later stationed in Biak (Indonesia) where she again helped build a hospital, she tells several stories about duty there such as meeting Charles Lindburg and the reason why nurses wanted to date men in the Navy. She talks about medical care including the treatment of gonorrhea, lack of antibiotics, and soldiers pretending to be sick to avoid fighting. Wallace comments on military life including the lack of privacy, sleeping in tents, learning military discipline, and food. She touches upon race relations in the Army, receiving a Bronze Star for service in a combat area, chemical warfare training, and stateside service at Fort Devins (Massachusetts). Wallace provides an interesting discussion about prisoners of war, she comments on providing medical treatment for American ex-POWs who were forced to labor in mines and seeing the freedom of German POWs at Fort Devins.

Biographical Sketch

Wallace (b. September 3, 1915) served as a nurse with the Army Nurse Corps during World War II. She served in the Pacific theater of operations for three and a half years and settled in Wisconsin in the 1970s.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2002. Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2002. Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

Interview Transcript

John: This is John Driscoll, and I am with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, and today

is December 19, 2002. And we are doing an oral history interview with Lucy Wallace, a veteran of the Army Nurse Corps, in World War II. So, good morning, and thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview. Would you say something, just —

Wallace: Yes. I'm very happy to do this, and I guess I should start way back at the

beginning --

John: Okay, let me go back and just make sure — okay. At the beginning, you were

saying —

Wallace: Actually, I was born in Messina, New York.

John: Okay. When was that?

Wallace: September 3rd, 1915.

John: Okay.

Wallace: When I was about four years old, I moved to Massachusetts. And that is where I

went to school. I graduated from the Peterbent Brigham School of Nursing. And I then went to Simmons College for a certificate in Public Health. And I was doing public health nursing, in Boston, in 1941, when I was interviewed by the military, saying they were desperate for nurses in the Pacific. And they just needed me for six months. So, I agreed to go for six months, and I went as a member of the Harvard Unit, which was the 105th General Hospital. We immediately went to San Francisco, and shipped out of San Francisco. Within ten days of when I enlisted. We landed in, first, we planned to land in Sydney, but Sydney docks

were mined by the Japanese, so we landed in Melbourne.

John: Was this after Pearl Harbor?

Wallace: Yes.

John: Okay. About what date? Do you recall?

Wallace: This was May of 1942.

John: Okay.

Wallace: Pearl Harbor would have been December 7th, 1941.

John: Ah, can we just stop there a minute? Could you go back. What, do you recall Pearl

Harbor? When it happened? And what were you doing, and —

Wallace: I absolutely do recall that. And the thing that I remember most was Winston

Churchill speaking, saying, "This is me, Winston Churchill. And England is

prepared to support the United States in whatever they propose to do." Now that is

what I remember of December 7.

John: Okay.

Wallace: And I was, of course, very shocked at what happened at Pearl Harbor, because that

was just devastating.

John: Now, you were in the military when Pearl Harbor took place?

Wallace: No.

John: Okay, you hadn't gone in yet.

Wallace: I hadn't gone in. See, that was, I went in, that was December 7th, 1941, and I went

in the service in May of 1942.

John: Okay.

Wallace: And I went from Melbourne, by train, with my unit to, we went through Sydney

and then we went to a little city called Brisbane.

John: A little city? Okay.

Wallace: And then we took motor vehicles, and trucks, to an agricultural school, which we

were to convert into a hospital, because the Japanese had already gone from New Guinea, and they had crossed over into Australia. And so the first army division that I remember that tried to combat the Japanese was the 32nd Division, from Wisconsin. And the soldiers who survived that Japanese attack did so by staying in the swamps, and ducking their heads whenever the Japanese came, and then they would come up for air, and then they would go down again. We converted this agricultural school into a hospital and my first assignment was, we had, the Army, instead of sending hospital drapes for surgery, had sent bolts of cloth.

John: Oh, wow.

Wallace: So I was given fifty nurses, two sewing machines, and twelve bolts of cloth to

make drapes for surgery in the operating room.

John: Did you have a specialty, at the time?

Wallace: No. Sewing was not my specialty.

John: Okay, I get that.

Wallace: But I quickly found people who had skills in that area.

John: Okay. But, I meant like surgical nurse, or —

Wallace: See, I was in public health nursing.

John: Okay.

Wallace: And I had had experience in surgery.

John: Okay. Did you tell me, Lucy, where this hospital, this school that you were

converting, was in Australia?

Wallace: It was north of Brisbane, in a little town called Gatton. G-a-t-t-o-n. And, of

course, the Army had made a slight error in that they sent us supplied with cold weather gear instead of tropical gear. So we had very warm clothing, and, of course, they did not provide for any womens clothes, so we quickly had to get used to wearing men's underwear, men's shirts and pants, and boots. The chief of our hospital was an orthopedic surgeon before he volunteered, so he fitted us very

carefully with boots that fit.

John: How large a unit, by the way, was this? Do you recall how many people?

Wallace: We were prepared to take care of a thousand patients.

John: Oh, wow. Oh.

Wallace: But, in the beginning, we had probably about five hundred.

John: How many doctors and nurses, and other personnel were in your unit?

Wallace: We had ninety-seven nurses, and I would say probably the same number of

doctors, in different specialties.

John: Large unit.

Wallace: It was a large unit. It was what they call a general hospital. And the first patients

that we got were brought in were from New Guinea and from the northern coast of Australia. And they were very badly wounded. And many of them did not survive. I had not heard much about the state of Wisconsin, at that time. But I knew these men were from the 32nd Division, and, since I was on the surgical unit, I became

quite familiar with many of them. And I kept thinking to myself, there are not going to be any young men left in the state of Wisconsin because all these men were from Wisconsin.

John: Yeah.

Wallace: Some of them were Army men, some were Navy men, some had stretched their

age, so they were very young. Many of them were seventeen.

John: Yeah.

Wallace: And we stayed there until the Americans drove the Japanese back into New

Guinea, and as they moved them back into New Guinea, then we closed our

hospital and we went to New Guinea.

John: Okay.

Wallace: And we lived in tents while we waited to move farther north towards the

Philippines.

John: Do you remember where in New Guinea you went to? Was that Port Moresby?

Wallace: That is where we started. And there still were Japanese around. When the women

wanted to go to the latrine, they had to have an Army guard go with them. And I

guess I shouldn't say it, but the latrines were all ten-holers.

John: Okay.

Wallace: So, you had no privacy. You had to, I remember the first time I went to the latrine,

and I had a Army guard with me, and the only spot left was right in the middle.

And I quickly forgot why I had gone there.

John: Oh, I can imagine.

Wallace: In New Guinea, we had to use, we slept on cots, and we had to use mosquito

netting, because of the danger of malaria. After New Guinea, I went, by then I am no longer a second lieutenant. I had been promoted, and I took five nurses and twenty enlisted men, and we were flown to an island called Biak, which is in the

Dutch East Indies, two degrees off the equator.

John: Oh, heavens.

Wallace: And we had to, to begin with, we had to build our compound.

John: Oh, wow.

Wallace: Which required cutting down coconut trees, stripping the bark, and making the

frames for tents. And then we had to have, we didn't have a ten-holer any more,

we just had a two-holer, and we had material to put a skirt around it.

John: Okay.

Wallace: After we got the base camp made, then more nurses and enlisted men were flown

in and we set up, for the first time, a thousand bed general hospital, where the young men could be flown right there. And we had excellent surgeons. We, of course, had to have a number of psychiatrists, because this was very traumatic.

John: I can imagine. Yes. Yes.

Wallace: And we took patients from the islands for two and a half years, while I was there.

John: Wow. Oh, that is something.

Wallace: And once in a while, we'd get something other than K-rations.

John: Once in a while?

Wallace: Not very often. And when we got any food, that was not K-rations, it first went to

the patients. Because they were suffering a great deal.

John: I imagine they were, of course, they wouldn't have been there without being

injured, or hurt, but they must have been in bad physical shape also, from —

Wallace: They were. And, of course, we had to take Atabrine to prevent malaria. And the

Army cleared this island, at the lower level. And one soldier told me they always made it look like a national park. But up in the hills, behind us, were Japanese.

John: Still on the island?

Wallace: Still up there. So, when we had a siren go off, we would always have to hit the dirt

until the siren cleared. And I would guess there are probably still some up there in

those hills.

John: I can imagine. Did you treat any Japanese.

Wallace: The Japanese were not very nice to the American soldiers. So the American

soldiers, in turn, made sure that there were no live Japanese that needed to be

treated.

John: Yea, I've heard that, And I can understand that, That was a real bad time.

Wallace:

It was a very bad time. And, of course, where our tents were, there were no trees. No nothing. Because we had cut down all the trees to make frames for tents. And sleeping, if you, when I was a night supervisor, that would be a twelve hour shift. Then you would go back to your tent and try to sleep, but the temperature, by about ten o'clock, was so high that you couldn't sleep. And we were very limited in water. So, when it rained, and it occasionally did, we would dismiss all the nurses that we could to go down and shower with the water that caught in the tent frames.

John: Oh.

Wallace: Let's see what else I can tell you about that. Most of us lost a great deal of weight.

When I came back, I weighed eighty pounds.

John: Oh, heavens. Oh.

Wallace: Part of it was because of the heat, part of it because of the long stressful hours.

John: I can imagine that.

Wallace: And part of it was the food.

John: Yea. K-rations.

Wallace: I thought I would never want to see powdered eggs again.

John: [Laughing.]

Wallace: While I was there in Biak, one very exciting thing happened to me. I was asked, I

was night supervisor at the time. And I was asked to find a bed, which was a cot, of course, near the edge of one of the tents, so someone could come in and sleep there, without being noticed, and then leave early in the morning. So, I found such

a bed. And the person who wanted that bed, that I met, and it was Charles

Lindbergh.

John: Oh? Oh, okay.

Wallace: And he was over there, flying experimental planes, and testing them, for the Air

Force. Now, many people didn't know that he was doing that.

John: I didn't know that.

Wallace: But there was a lot of criticism about Lindbergh before the beginning of the war,

but he was truly an American, and he served all through the war doing this testing of new planes and new devices on planes. So he slipped into his cot and the next morning, when I was making rounds, he was gone.

John: Okay.

Wallace: And, of course, the Army always put a hospital right next to an airfield.

John: So they could let you have noise and dust?

Wallace: Thinking that it would protect the airfields, because they'd see the hospital, and

we had the Red Cross signs. So that is why Lindbergh had come from that airfield.

John: Okay. Was there, did you have any time off during this period. Any relaxation?

Could you get away from it?

Wallace: When I was in New Guinea, I had a three day leave to Sydney, Australia. But then

after that, I didn't have, we didn't have any, we liked to, the nurses liked to go out

when there was a Navy ship in port. They liked to go out with a Navy man,

because the Navy had good food.

John: Good food, showers on the ships.

Wallace: And they would take us on the ship for dinner, and that was a great luxury.

John: Oh, I bet, yea.

Wallace: :Let's see what else I can tell you.

John: Now, most of the time after New Guinea, you were at Biak?

Wallace: Yes.

John: For how long, total?

Wallace: I was on Biak for, probably, two and a half years.

John: That six months stretched, didn't it?

Wallace: Right.

John: Did you volunteer to stay on, or get drafted?

Wallace: We had no choice.

John: You had no choice.

Wallace: Now, after three and a half years, some of us came back to the States for a three

week rotation, so we could get a break. Well, when I came back to the States, for my three weeks, and they looked at my record, they said, "You don't go back." So, I was sent to Fort Devins, in Massachusetts, where I was chief nurse of the surgical section.

John: When, about, was that? 1944 or '45?

Wallace: That was in 1944.

John: '44.

Wallace: And at Fort Devins, we had many soldiers who had been injured in the European

theater. And had been prisoners of war.

John: Oh, I see. Okay.

Wallace: And they had been forced to work in the mines, and if they didn't work hard

enough, they were struck in the back with one of these pick-axes. So we had rows

of patients who had huge back wounds.

John: Oh, wow. That is terrible.

Wallace: And yet, on that base, they had German prisoners of war who were treated very

well. As a matter of fact, at one point, they went on strike. Because they didn't get, Germans like to eat raw pork, as some kind of a dish that they make with raw pork. And our raw pork is not safe to eat. So they were on strike because they wanted raw pork that was suitable to eat. And they did a lot of chores on the base. So, I just couldn't believe that the Americans let them do that. And they served

food in the mess hall.

John: The Germans did?

Wallace: The Germans did. And, you know, sometimes, I'd go into that mess hall and see,

having seen a lot of the patients that had been mistreated by the Germans, and I

could hardly eat in there.

John: I can imagine. To go back to the Pacific, the, you were treating mostly Army men?

Wallace: No, we had some Navy men, and a few marines. But we had both the surgical

section and a medical section, so we could take a thousand patients.

John: A thousand people? Okay.

Wallace: And just the work in the operating rooms, to keep that covered with nurses, was

quite a challenge.

John: Were you well equipped? For surgery, and for everything else? Did you have

equipment, supplies?

Wallace: We had good surgical supplies. Linens and clothing for the staff, we didn't have

as much as we could have used. One of the difficult things I remember was you

could not, the only water you could drink, was water that was hung in a —

John: Lister bag, a big canvas or rubber bag.

Wallace: Big canvas bag, and, of course, there was no shade. So that water, I can't guess

what the temperature of the water was, but it was like drinking hot water.

John: Sure.

Wallace: One of the patients, I was making the rounds one day, and one of the patients said,

"Captain, would you come over here?" And he said, "Why is it that the United States has to make every hospital area look like a damned national park?" See, they had cut down all the trees, so there was no shade. And even the tents where

the patients were got very warm. They put the flaps up but still —

John: Yea. How about the nurses and the doctors you were with? Was there much of a

drain, physically, I mean, did you have losses there? Did you lost people from

fatigue?

Wallace: We lost, you know, if a person, we had one nurse who developed cancer. The only

people who were flown back to the States were Navy personnel. With rank.

John: Oh, yea?

Wallace: So, she had no real treatment, and she died. But, and we lost many of our patients.

When we first went over there, it was before any antibiotics, and so that was very difficult. When we finally, the first antibiotic we got was a limited supply of sulfa.

John: Yes, I remember that.

Wallace: And so that was very helpful. Back in Australia where we treated both Army and

Navy people, we had a number of Navy personnel who had "played on the beach too much." And our urologist developed a, it looked like a long box, where a patient could be slipped in, and it had lights inside of it, and the patient would be in except for his head. And there would be a nurse sitting right at the head putting cool cloths on his head. But the purpose of the box was to get the temperature up.

The person's temperature up to about 107, or 108 degrees.

John: Oh, that's dangerous, isn't it?

Wallace: That's very dangerous. But it killed the infection that the boys on the beach had

acquired.

John: Okay. Any cure will do, I guess.

Wallace: Of course, the disease was gonorrhea.

John: Oh, yea. Sure.

Wallace: What they had. But I only saw one person who came back again for that treatment.

And he was a lieutenant, and he didn't learn the first time. But the person who sat at the patient's head would just keep putting cold cloths on the patient's head.

John: Yes, to keep the brain cool.

Wallace: To keep the head cool. But the body temperature went, had to go up.

John: That is amazing. I've never heard of that. That is amazing.

Wallace: Yes, that doctor is a very well known urologist, in Boston. I think he's gone now.

But he did devise this treatment, which cured them.

Wallace: It worked. [End of Side A of Tape 1.]

John: You came back about, back to —

Wallace: I came stateside in March of '45.

John: Okay.

Wallace: I went to Atlantic City for three weeks rehabilitation. And it was at that time that

President Roosevelt died.

John: Right.

Wallace: So we had to march in formation to a big hall there, and had a special ceremony.

John: He died somewhere down there, didn't he?

Wallace: He died in Florida.

John: Florida, was it? Okay.

Wallace: At his friend's —

John: Friend's place. Yes.

Wallace: And then after three weeks of rehabilitation, rejuvenation, then I was sent to Fort

Devins as Chief of the Surgical Unit.

John: Did you intent, at the time, to stay in the service? To make it a career?

Wallace: No, I didn't, because I was interested in getting married.

John: Okay. Lucy, while you were in, was your name Wallace? Did you serve as

Wallace?

Wallace: I first served as Deggs, D-e-g-g-s.

John: Okay.

Wallace: I thought I saw that on there, somewhere. It should be on there. Yes, on that sheet.

John: And then, did you get married while you were in the service?

Wallace: Yes.

John: I see. After you got back?

Wallace: No, in that three week period that I mentioned. And so that when I went to Fort

Devins, I was married then.

John: What did you do at Fort Devins?

Wallace: That is where I was Chief Nurse of the Surgical Unit.

John: Okay.

Wallace: I had been, I forget when I was promoted to captain. But at that rank, you are in an

administrative level.

John: And then, when did you get out of the Army?

Wallace: And then, I got out of the Army in the fall of 1945.

John: Okay.

Wallace> If I had stayed in one more day, I would have automatically been promoted to

major.

John: Oh.

Wallace: But I lived in Massachusetts, and Massachusetts gave everybody with a rank up

through captain \$1000 when they were discharged.

John: Oh, that's nice.

Wallace: So I decided at that time, which was probably a mistake, I would take the \$1000

and not stay in that extra day.

John: Okay. And then, how about after the military, what did you do?

Wallace: After the military, I had two children. Then I went from, I was living in New

Hampshire, and I went from New Hampshire to Syracuse, New York. And because I wanted a graduate assistantship, and they gave a much better, Syracuse University gave a much better graduate assistantship, in the field of social work,

than they did in the field of nursing, so I changed fields.

John: Okay. All right.

Wallace: And —

John: After you came out, did you have anything to do with veterans organizations, the

VFW, the American Legion, anything like that?

Wallace: No, and I've often regretted the fact that I did not go into the reserves.

John: Yea. How about reunions with folks from back then? Do you ever get together?

Wallace: No.

John: Or stay in just contact? Christmas cards?

Wallace: I stayed in contact with a number of people, both doctors and nurses, but most of

them are gone.

John: Yes. I know. I just was contacted, in August, by two fellows, who had been in

contact with each other. And there is a reunion coming up next November, in North Carolina. So the three of us are thinking we might, after fifty years, we might go. Ah, did you have the GI Bill, and did you make any use of it?

Wallace: Yes, I did. At Syracuse, I did.

John: Okay.

Wallace: Then I got, that is where I got, in addition to the GI Bill, I got a graduate

assistantship from the university, because of my background.

John: Okay. Then, what brought you to Wisconsin? Other than having seen all those

guys from here.

Wallace: I was working in child welfare, in Texas. And the state of Wisconsin was looking

for people with my area, I would say expertise, and so the state flew me up here. Matter of fact, they flew me up here twice. And hired me. And I was going to

make double the salary I had made in Texas.

John: Good.

Wallace: So I came to Wisconsin, and I have been here for —

John: When was that?

Wallace: I've been here about thirty-four years, now. 1970.

John: And you worked with the state? Health and Social Services?

Wallace: Right.

John: They brought me up from Ohio, and I came into State Purchasing, in 1977.

Wallace: Oh, that is interesting. Well, they must have gotten the cream of the crop in every

area.

John: I guess so. Okay. Any incidents that especially stand out, and as a suggestion,

when you first saw combat casualties, what, and you and the people with you,

what was your reaction? I mean, you don't prepare for that.

Wallace: No, we weren't prepared for what was flown in from New Guinea. One of the

other interesting things that happened was that we also had many soldiers who were brought from the States to Australia, and they did not want to go to the front.

John: I can understand that.

Wallace: And so they developed all kinds of ailments. And our orthopedic surgeon, very

outstanding in Boston. His name was Doctor Edwin Cave. He even took a picture

of all these people marching by with back pains and shoulder pains.

John: I can imagine.

Wallace: And particularly the blacks were frightened.

John: Were they? The Army was segregated at that time?

Wallace: Yes.

John: Okay, they were separate.

Wallace: And, when I was on Biak, they sent in a unit of black soldiers who had shot their

commanding officer.

John: Oh, wow.

Wallace: So they were designated to do hard labor, so they leveled a lot of the island. They

just did hard work.

John: When casualties would be brought back to you, to the base hospital, I assume they

had been treated, to some degree, when you got them.

Wallace: In Biak, that was the first experiment of putting a general hospital close to the

front. So many of the soldiers who were flown back had not been treated.

John: I see.

Wallace: Now they might have something tied around them for pressure to stop the

bleeding, but I remember one soldier who had been shot in the abdomen, and he had lost his dog-tags. And, so he was just sitting on the ground, and you had to have your dog-tags if you had anything done. And he called me over and he said, "Captain, can you help me?" I mean, the man was holding his belly. And I said, "I sure can." So I really pulled rank for that man. And got him in, and got him under treatment. But no matter what happened to a soldier or a Navy person, they had to

have those dog-tags.

John: Sure. That serial number and, of course, the blood type, too.

Wallace: Because, otherwise, how did you know which side they were on?

John: That's right.

Wallace: Particularly Navy personnel.

John: Any decorations, or that, from your time in?

Wallace: I got the Bronze Star.

John: Oh, that's interesting.

Wallace: And I have another. When I went to that veterans meeting, it was at the Veterans

Hospital, and I talked with someone, and they checked and I am going to get another medal that I hadn't gotten there, in addition to the Bronze Star.

John: I see. Was there a citation with the Bronze Star?

Wallace: Yes.

John: I see. What was that about?

Wallace: That was for serving in a battle area.

John: I see. I see.

Wallace: Both New Guinea and Biak.

John: Yea.

Wallace: And, of course, when we got our uniforms back, we got, now I forget what they

were called. A V-shape for how long you served.

John: We called them hash-marks.

Wallace: Hash-marks.

John: Hash-marks, okay.

Wallace: And I had served three and a half years. So, I had a few hash-marks.

John: Well, what did you go through, very early on, from a graduate nurse going into the

Army, and Army life, and Army discipline, and Army routine? Was that an

adjustment for you?

Wallace: Ah, some of it was. When we first went to Australia, and we went into this

agricultural school, the shower room and the latrines, there were six showers that

were open.

John: Yea. Privacy.

Wallace: Privacy was gone. And I guess that was the hardest thing for me to get used to.

John: You didn't do much basic training, or that, did you? You went right in as, well,

they needed, they didn't have time to teach you how to march. They needed

nurses.

Wallace: No, but in Australia, the top commander ordered that everybody had basic

training. So, because we went to work at six, in the morning, and had to have our

breakfast before that, we went out at four-thirty for close-order drill.

John: Oh, for heavens sake.

Wallace: And, in Australia, they don't believe in screens.

John: Okay.

Wallace: They like the fresh air. So when we'd be marching, you could look at the person

in front of you and her back would be covered with flies, because Australia has

these flies that hatch baby flies.

John: Oh, yea? Okay.

Wallace: And, you know, when you are at attention, you can't do anything about those flies

that are back there.

John: I know. I remember the sand fleas at Parris Island, and we'd stand at attention, and

our nose —

Wallace: Oh, right!

John: Okay.

Wallace: And the other thing that was very difficult in Australia, because these flies, there

were no screens, so when we got our food, mutton was the favorite food, meat, in Australia, and they would make nice gravy, but when you saw the gravy moving,

one stopped eating.

John: I can imagine.

Wallace: One stopped eating.

John: I can imagine.

Wallace: Because the flies would get in there, and because they hatched fly flies —

John: I've never heard of that. That is something.

Wallace: The gravy would just —

John: [Laughing.]

Wallace: So that is when I first started losing weight.

John: When you got back, of course, when you got back, you were serving, you were

still in the Army when you got back. Was there much emotional break when you

got away from all that?

Wallace: No. I think I, when I was at Fort Devins, see, we had three weeks where we really,

where they really gave us a good re-indoctrination back to Stateside, but when I went to Fort Devins, I guess the hardest thing for me to adjust to was the German prisoners who had so much freedom. And then I would see what had happened to

the American prisoners.

John: Yes. Yes. I belong to the History Round Table, and two years ago, they had two

speakers. One was a German POW who had been captured in Africa, and spent the war on a farm in Iowa. And the other was an American who was captured at Corregidor, and ended up in the mines in Manchuria. And the two stories were

just opposites. You can imagine.

Wallace: It was very hard for me as I saw these Germans. You know, they had freedom to

walk around the base.

John: Of course, they didn't want to go anywhere. They didn't want to go back.

Wallace: No guards. And then I would, because I was the Chief Nurse of that surgical unit,

I had to make rounds. And I would, each ward took seventy-two patients, and I suppose, I had about twelve wards. And I would talk to the soldiers that were there, and were very badly injured, and it was from the pick-axes. And then I

would see the Germans, you know. And that was very hard for me.

John: I can imagine. I remember, as a little boy, growing up in Marion, Ohio, and they

had a POW camp there. And on Sunday, we would walk to church, and they

would come by with trucks full of prisoners, taking them out for a ride on Sunday. And every so often there would be a Jeep with an armed MP, but they didn't have to guard these guys. They certainly weren't going to break out and go back to Germany. But I remember that just as a little ten year old. Oh, yes, here is your Bronze Star, mentioned. This is great. So, overall, you did how long in the

service?

Wallace: Three and a half years.

John: Three and a half years, okay. Okay.

Wallace: That six months stretched out quite a bit.

John: Yes. I had a captain who joined the Marine Corps in 1939. He enlisted. And that

was the last time, or the first time and only time, he ever enlisted. He became an officer in Korea, but he was due to get out, and the war was on. They held him over and sent him to China. He was about to get out, and Korea broke. He got commissioned in Korea, and here the man was going on twenty years, and had only signed up once. Yea. Well, this is interesting. This is very, very interesting. Your, how do you feel overall about it? It was a terrible time, but was it worth it

to you?

Wallace: I think it was. I think I really feel that I was able to serve my country, with my

skills. And for the men that I was helping, it was —

John: I don't know if you can answer this, but what were the losses? Of the wounded

that got to the hospital, did they make it, or —

Wallace: We had a lot that didn't. At that time, again, we had no antibiotics.

John: Right. Okay.

Wallace: The best treatment for infected wounds was maggots.

John: I've heard that.

Wallace: And that was very difficult for the patients.

John: I can imagine.

Wallace: And it was also difficult for most of the staff, but it did work.

John: Did it? Okay. Ah, you went over by boat?

Wallace: We went over —

John: Do you recall the name of the boat? Or what it was like?

Wallace: It was the USS America.

John: Oh, okay.

Wallace: It was the largest ship, I think, I forget, now, what its original name was. But we

went over in seven days. And we went by zig-zagging, and what was I going to

tell you? Oh, on board that ship were seven hospitals.

John: Wow.

Wallace: If the Japanese had sunk that ship, that was it! Because all the equipment for the

seven hospitals was on board.

John: Were you escorted, or did you go alone?

Wallace: We went alone.

John: They used to figure the liners were fast enough, but, of course —

Wallace: Many times, you know, we'd get an alert and we'd have to get on deck-side.

John: Did you have much to do with Australians? Get to know many of them?

Wallace: Got to know many of them. They were very grateful.

John: Yea. I can imagine.

Wallace: For us.

John: New Guinea was just, right there.

Wallace: Right there. And the Japanese had crossed over, into Australia.

John: Okay.

Wallace: So, the Army had set up a hospital in a city called Charlieville, which is in central

Australia, because they were figuring that the Japanese would come down the coast, and this would be a safe place for patients. But the people who manned that

hospital in Charlieville sat there for three years, and never had a patient.

John: Wow.

Wallace: But that was bad news and good news. Because we stopped the Japs. And that

was the 32nd Division.

John: Didn't they go to Iceland, or something first, and then go to New Guinea? You

mentioned being equipped with cold weather gear. And it runs in my mind that they went to Iceland, Greenland, somewhere, and then got sent down there. But I remember talking to two brothers who had been machine gunners, and they were telling about during a lull, they would go through the empty belts looking for a piece that hadn't rotted, so they could use it again. It was just that jungle, and wet.

Wallace: Um-huh.

John: Yea. That is something. This is quite a story. Anything else that you would like to

get on there?

Wallace: No. When I was in New Guinea, there was, the Army sent over, or the Air Force, I

think it was twelve B-17s.

John: Okay.

Wallace: And of the twelve, I think only two arrived safely.

John: I see.

Wallace: And in New Guinea, not far from where we were stationed, was where one of the

planes had crashed.

John: I see.

Wallace: And, of course, the jungle grows right up around it, so within six months, you

couldn't see anything. I, when I was in northern New Guinea, I was sent back to

Port Moresby, where there was a large Army unit.

John: Okay.

Wallace: And they had an epidemic of scarlet fever.

John: Wow.

Wallace: So I was sent down to track where it was coming from.

John: Okay.

Wallace: So it could be stopped. And, sure enough, I did that. It was a man who, a soldier,

who worked in the kitchen.

John: Oh, man.

Wallace: The mess hall. And that is where it was —

John: He was the source?

Wallace: And when they did a throat culture on him, of course, it was very positive. They

removed him, and everything began to quiet down. Then I was flown back to my

unit.

John: In northern New Guinea, did you get to Buna? That was the big battle that, I

guess, eventually broke the Japanese.

Wallace: No. But we got a lot of —

John: Casualties from there?

Wallace: Casualties from there. Yes.

John: Okay. This is great. This is a remarkable story. I just, I talked to a fellow that I had

known, and worked with. Jack Rogan. And, this doesn't sound very glamorous, but his whole army service, from early in World War II. was in the Finance Corps. But, I never knew what went on in the Finance Corps. And he did such a job, well, nothing would have been paid for if these guys, well, he wasn't in the Battle of the Bulge, by any means, but that was so interesting. This is so interesting. It's, but I've talked to, I've read the interview from one other nurse. I didn't talk to her, I read the interview. But she had gone in and been trained by the Army. You went

in as a practicing, professional nurse. You were ready to go.

Wallace: I was, in Australia, I was sent to school for chemical warfare.

John: Oh?

Wallace: And I had to come back and teach that to the doctors and nurses.

John: I see.

Wallace: Not only the symptoms, but what could be done.

John: The Japanese never did use —

Wallace: No, they didn't.

John: What were you trained for, though? What would you expect, had you seen it?

Mustard?

Wallace: That is what they were afraid of. And we had, the Japanese, when they captured

Japanese — [End of Side B of Tape 1.]

John: Let me see where we are, okay? Now, is that, I'm just doing this to see, now you

were mentioning about the Japanese —

Wallace: The Japanese soldiers who were captured all had in their gear a mat. So that, if we

should spray, each one could put a mat down.

John: That is amazing.

Wallace: And protect themselves. One other thing I didn't tell you was that when I was still

in Australia, I had to train soldiers to be medical corpsmen.

John: Okay.

Wallace: I, one of my requirements was that they had to have at least an eighth grade

education, because we had many soldiers who didn't have that. And, even with the eighth grade education, it was a challenge to train them so that they could be front line first-aid medical corpsmen. And I suppose I trained probably two

hundred and fifty men, in different classes.

John: It's interesting that they weren't trained here in the States. I've talked to vets who

were corpsmen, but they all were, but, of course, that was pretty early on.

Wallace: This was early.

John: Yep. Yep.

Wallace: And, you know, every once in a while, you'd have one or two who couldn't make

it. But if they had at least an eighth grade education, most of them could make it.

And they had volunteered to be trained, so that was an advantage.

John: Ah, did you get any other training or education while you were in? You mentioned

the chemical-biological, but —

Wallace: No, I think that was the only one, and that one I had to, that was one of the

toughest courses I had ever taken. And we'd go twelve hours a day, and the to go

back and teach —

John: Sure. Sure.

Wallace: Teach it. I had to teach all the doctors and nurses.

John: You had started, and then we got off on something else, about staying in touch

with the people you had been with. You said most of them were —

Wallace: I used to keep in touch with a couple of the doctors and several of the nurses, and,

but they are gone. They are all gone.

John: Okay. This is quite a story. This is remarkable, really. It really is. I'll do the

transcription, here, the next couple of days. And I will send you a copy.

Wallace: You may want to clean it up a little.

John: No. Believe me, in fact, the tape is more important to them than the printed word.

They want the tone of voice, they want — I didn't bring something. Do you have the letter I sent you? We'll need to sign that release. Both of us will have to. Do you have that?

Wallace: I don't know. I'm not sure whether you sent me anything.

John: I thought I sent a letter, oh, and some papers on the museum, and there was a

release in there. I didn't bring an extra copy of one.

[End of Interview.]