

Interview with Rosemary Perkins Krauel

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Interviewed by Nancy Baker

Baker: This is an interview with Rosemary Perkins Krauel--date November 30, 1989. Rosemary is a World War II veteran. So to start, why don't you just talk a little bit about where you were born and your education, your training, nursing training and so on.

Krauel: I was born in Ogilvie, Minnesota, in Kanabec Country and at the age of about seven, we moved to St. Cloud, and I attended school at Lincoln and Jefferson Grade School, went to Central junior High and graduated from Technical High School in 1939. Happened to be the, one of the salutatorians. That next fall I entered the St. Cloud Hospital School of Nursing. That's a three year program and I graduated in June of 1942. I went to work at the Milaca Hospital where, incidentally, I met my future husband. And then, of course, decided to go into the service.

Baker: Did the Red Cross recruit you at all?

Krauel: No, I volunteered.

Baker: You did.

Krauel: We heard a lot about nurses being needed. I went to Great lakes Training Station.

Baker: You signed up with the Navy, right?

Krauel: Yes.

Baker: What made you decide on Navy?

Krauel: Well, I had a few friends that had gone into the Army. I had always thought I had wanted to serve aboard a hospital ship. So, I enlisted in the Navy. And we went to Great lakes Naval Training Station and, of course, had our initial training there.

Baker: What did that consist of? Was that like a basic training?

Krauel: No. It was more an orientation into the Navy. They assumed that as registered nurses we more or less knew what we were doing. One of the reasons it was later, not as soon as I graduated, that I went in, was because I was so young. At that time, you couldn't pass the State Boards until you were a certain age. And so, I had to wait until I was a registered nurse before I could enlist in the Navy. So then, I went into the Navy at Great Lakes and I'm not sure exactly how long we were there, but an epidemic of Rheumatic Fever and Scarlet Fever broke out at Farragut, Idaho. And so, several of us were transferred to Farragut, Idaho. I remember coming through St. Cloud and my mother was down at the station and the train stopped here and we were able to just wave, because it was over two years or more before I got a leave to come back home again. That was the last time I saw my mother until I was discharged, really. I never did get a leave to come home on a visit except when I was in the Great Lakes, we would get like a home weekend or so many hours. We'd run across the back from the base, take the elevated to Milwaukee, catch the--they used to call it the Hiawatha or those trains, and we'd run back, get on the train and ride all the way to Minneapolis. It would almost take longer to get to St. Cloud than it did to get from Chicago or Milwaukee to Minneapolis. And then I'd be home like for maybe twelve hours and then have to get back down to the Cities to catch the train and go home. I did that a couple of times on those seventy two hour leaves or something they would give you.

Baker: How long were you at Great Lakes?

Krauel: That's what I'm trying to think. I think I was at Great Lakes about nine months.

Baker: Did you work at the hospital there?

Krauel: Yes, I was in the operating room and in surgical wards.

Baker: Where did you live there?

Krauel: We lived in the barracks. There was a nurses' barracks. And we had a large dining room, where everyone went for meals. I had never seen skyscrapers and that, so we did go into Chicago, some of the girls would take us and it was quite an experience. Mostly, it was a training station so we did not have a lot of casualties' right there, we had more the fellows in training, if they got sick, the boots. It was a boot camp and once in a while we'd get some of the older patients in. But when we got to Farragut, there were an awfully lot of sick fellows. And I did a lot of night duty at Farragut which meant that we walked almost nine miles of corridors in those big wards. There would be one nurse to cover all of that and there were only a couple of us on at night. There would always be a nurse who was a higher rank in charge of everything. But there were corpsmen, really taking care of the patients.

Baker: Did you have casualties? Were casualties brought in?

Krauel: Not at Farragut, no. Then from Farragut, I went to San Diego. And actually, at San Diego was a receiving hospital for the wounded from the South Pacific.

Baker: What was the name of the base there?

Krauel: At Balboa Park. One of the interesting things about the hospital in San Diego was the fact that right behind the Naval Base was a zoo. And they took over the zoo buildings. Patients would say, I'm in the monkey house or something. But actually, they were made into a hospital ward. I worked in some of those too, sometimes. But, it was a beautiful naval hospital. That's where I saw bad patients coming in, out of the Pacific Theater.

Baker: Did they usually just, over there, stabilize them and then ship the bad ones?

Krauel: Well, they did a lot of the initial care. They just shifted you around in a lot of wards. I mean, you weren't in any specific place, you would move around.

Baker: So you didn't really do the same job all of the time then?

Krauel: No. You would be assigned--like there were rotations, hours and wards. So you really had a very, how would you say, a lot of experience. In fact, some of the experience I had from the service I was able to use in my later nursing. In fact, in one instance, helping to save my husband's life with a special procedure that I had used in the Navy that I was familiar with. And I did see a lot of the casualties come right off. See, they would do their initial care, get them on a hospital ship and ship them in. And many times, they would be still dirty, still, the wounds would be messed up. Now they'd fly them in. We didn't then, they came by the hospital ships from the battles, the wounded they brought in. Also, while I was at San Diego I saw some of the prisoners that were released from the Japanese. And they were not properly cared for, their wounds, that was a shame. And they were in bad physical condition--very bad.

Baker: I'm sure psychological condition also.

Krauel: Right. And so they brought those people in and there was one time I did do some duty on a psyche ward, I was never interested in that. In fact, when I came back I probably could have gone out to the VA Hospital to work, but I had no desire for that. I was a surgical nurse, a post-operative surgical nurse, operating room nurse, that type. And so I wasn't interested in that. Then the last of my navy duty took me to San Francisco. And that's where I was discharged.

Baker: Back down in San Diego, where did you live? Was that like a barracks situation also?

Krauel: No, they just didn't have enough room, so there was like an apartment, kind of a small apartment that we took over for the Navy nurses to live in. So we had to catch like a trolley to Balboa Park. Quite a few of us lived in that apartment. At least two to a room.

Baker: Was it comfortable living?

Krauel: Well, it was like in Farragut, we had our own barracks and nice rooms and everything. This was not quite as nice, but it wasn't bad. We had to go back to the base and eat. And there wasn't an eating facility in this apartment, but there was; well, it was certainly adequate.

Baker: How about the hospital ships? Were there nurses on those hospital ships?

Krauel: Yes. And every time you'd get an efficiency or you'd get a request or something, I would write hospital ship. You got just the opposite of what you requested. And of course it was only a few nurses that were sent there. And possibly a little higher rank than we were.

Baker: What was your rank?

Krauel: We went in as ensigns. And then we went up to lieutenant, junior grade and when I left I was a lieutenant. So, after so much time you just went up in rank. And of course, they paid very well compared to civilian wages and they say a lot of things about wars that aren't good. But one

thing is that a great deal of advances in medical care and science, especially orthopedics and chest, comes out of every war situation. The medical advances and the medications advance. I remember being in a big auditorium and the Admiral speaking to us when penicillin came out. Believe it or not. At first, only the doctors were supposed to mix it, but it was such a mess that it wasn't long before all the nurses were mixing it from the powdered form, you know you had to. But, it was hard work, you worked hard. You were more of a supervisor, than you were hands on in many instances excepting my experiences in the operating room or sometimes on the surgical wards. Because they trained the corpsmen, and they didn't have that many nurses, you know, there was not a lot.

Baker: There was a shortage then?

Krael: Yes, there were. But I learned a lot of new techniques and new things, new ways to do things. I felt it was, you did it because you were patriotic, you wanted to help, but I feel that I benefited from my experience a great deal.

Baker: How about social activities and entertainment?

Krael: Well, you were eligible to go to the Officers Club. I'm not a drinking type person, so I wasn't as interested in that. The USO, they would get in programs for us to see and of course movies, things like that we got to see very easily. Actually, there wasn't a lot of time for partying a lot. Sometimes you could be asked out, you know, to go out on a date, or something, but that was limited too. It really was. Unless I supposed you happen to find somebody and fall desperately in love or something and end up getting married. But that never really happened to me. There were times when we had off for a few days and I remember a friend and I taking a bus from San Diego to Los Angeles at around New Year's. I had a friend who was married to a

Marine colonel and they had a home there and so we went and spent a couple of days with them, which was really enjoyable I think, for me. But as far as traveling, I think once, a few of us went down across the border into Mexico--Tijuana, that's as far in as we got. But that was more just, you know, when you had just a couple of days to be able to do something. But it was wartime, so there wasn't a lot. And there was a gasoline shortage, so you traveled by train or you traveled by bus. Mostly, it was just like you went with your friends. I still hear from a lot of those and see them too. Some stayed out in California afterwards, I came back to Minnesota. I wasn't interested in that. But there was always a lot of entertainment on the base, yes, there was. As far as going out, or off the base, it depended on who you were. I love reading so I did a lot of you know, books. They have libraries and things like that. And that was not exactly the time they were offering continuing education, you know, that didn't come in till later. I mean like getting your degree or something. This was offered to us at discharge.

Baker: How about being a woman in the service? Do you think that was accepted? Did you ever run into any negative responses?

Krauel: As a nurse, never, never. I would say that the men always appreciated everything we did. I never recall anything like that. But then, you know, even to this day, nurses are accepted in many different phases of life where, let's say, other professions weren't. The other professions are coming in now, but nurses were always accepted. And so I never felt any kind of anything like that. Not anywhere.

Baker: How about between staff? You were an officer, and the enlisted men? Was that a pretty workable situation?

Krael: Oh, that was very workable. So many of your corpsmen were actually, a lot of them, better educated than you. They were like lawyers and pharmacists, you know, real pharmacists and lawyers and teachers and a lot of people you know, that were quite well educated. Of course, there were a lot of young boys, too. And then there were the fleet corpsmen who went with the marines into battle. And the corpsmen who served aboard ship and actually took the place like of a doctor. These men were very well trained. Some of them went into nursing afterwards, other went into being registered pharmacists. They were good. They knew what they were doing. A lot of them aboard ship had to serve as a nurse, because the Navy did not put any of her nurses aboard the destroyers. There were corpsmen.

Baker: So just on these hospital ships, there would be a few nurses on them?

Krael: That's right.

Baker: Were there certain points where these hospital ships came from in the South Pacific to bring back patients from?

Krael: All from just the South Pacific.

Baker: They didn't have just certain areas and then the men were flown in from there?

Krael: No, the ships themselves brought them in.

Baker: Then they went all over to pick these men up?

Krael: And, they were not far from battles. They would bring in patients, bring them back to the states. That was their main thing, to transfer the patients back to the states. That was their main thing, to transfer the patients back to the states. I think we had a few going by air then. But

not that many. And then of course, at some of the hospitals, then they, if someone was badly wounded, then they started sending them to veteran's hospitals closer to home.

Baker: How about morale as far as over the long term, was morale fairly high do you think?

Krauel: It seemed to be. It seemed to me that it was. Of course, like I say, the nurses were accepted. I thought most of them were fairly satisfied. There were a few who didn't like being moved. Didn't like being transferred somewhere because you didn't have any choice with it. Especially if they had a significant other somewhere else. They weren't too happy about that. But I felt that morale among the fellows and among the staff, it was a war where everybody was involved. And so there was an entirely different feeling among the fellows in the service and everything. They were there--there was a real patriotism.

Baker: As far as your needs go--you had all your needs take care of, you could get what you wanted for personal care and what not?

Krauel: Oh, I would say so. Probably the only thing you really missed was home cooking. As far as clothing, you were in your uniform all the time. And they gave you an adequate uniform allowance. So you were outfitted with, I still have quite a bit of it, for every season and for every occasion. And they supplied your uniforms so, I would say that those needs were taken care of. As far as cosmetics, or things of that nature, there was always the PX [Post Exchange] to go to. I think very little shopping was done off base. Excepting perhaps depending on who you were. I was like a depression child so I was more than happy. We came out of the Depression.

Baker: How about food? Was it fairly good?

Krauel: It was adequate. Actually, the officers mess was probably better, a little better than the enlisted men, which probably wasn't fair, but we were either, sometimes, depending on where you were, you went through a tray line, other times you were served at a table. So, it depended on where you were. And there was always enough food. Too much, in fact. You got a little carbohydrate.

Baker: If you were to pick something out of your experience, was there anything that was very frustrating to you?

Krauel: Well, I think the most frustrating thing was that I never got on a hospital ship. But I had good experience. And of course, before this, I hadn't been much further than Wisconsin, Iowa, or Minnesota, so I saw a great deal of the United States, the western United States, from Chicago to the coast, which I had never experienced before.

Baker: After San Diego, you went up to San Francisco. Did you work at a hospital then?

Krauel: Only for a short while. Then I had enough points for discharge, to go home.

Baker: What year was this? Was this after the war was over?

Krauel: Let's see, the Europeans theater was finished. Yes, it was after.

Baker: Where were you when you found out the war was over?

Krauel: I believe I was in San Diego.

Baker: What went on when the news was out?

Krauel: Oh, everybody was very happy about that.

Baker: Were there big celebrations?

Krael: Yes, extremely so, yes. And then everybody started figuring out how many points they had. "When can I go home?" Then they very much came on, very strong, to offer you promotions, bonuses, everything. But I wanted to go home, probably because I hadn't had a leave. And it had been almost two years and I hadn't even come back to Minnesota. Maybe if I had had a chance to have a leave or something. But then, I came home and was out of the service I think, see I had all this leave coming, accumulative leave, and you didn't lose it because I hadn't gotten any. So, I think I was officially, my discharge time would show, I think it was June 30, 1946, maybe, I'm not sure. Anyhow, the only thing, if you would ask me what I didn't, what I felt frustrated about, it was because when you got married, you had to resign your commission. You could not stay in the reserve, you could not have any of the benefits that today you could have. And that I resent--highly. Because I feel that was a discrimination against the World War II woman veteran, if she married. Because today, you can, I mean--I'm sure you know what goes on today. You don't even have to be married to have a child. And if you, say that you had a child, you'd have to sign your dependent over to somebody else. I mean you couldn't have a child.

Baker: In the service?

Krael: That's right. It was really kind of, a bad situation. And then my records got all screwed up somehow, and I was paying my insurance, you know that they had, you could keep your insurance. And after my husband and I were married a few years, we went to Turkey, where his job took him. And we lived in Ankara, Turkey, and somehow or other, between there and the mail situation, I lost my GI insurance. And I resent that. You know, I really do. And so, I

honestly feel that a lot of veterans benefits, we never got simply because we had to resign. It would have been nice if we could have stayed in the reserve. And you could have automatically gone up and gone to a camp once or twice a year, like so many of the men were able to do.

Baker: So when you were discharged, you were in the reserve. But when you got married, that was it, you were out?

Krael: I had to retire. You could not be in. I could not stay in the service because we were married. And you got all those official things, you know. Now the mustering out pay, the accumulated leave I had and everything, that was wonderful. It was more money than I ever had all my life. But I really would have liked to have stayed in the reserves, and I could not. So that's why when you mentioned this woman that got called back to Korea, I've been trying to figure that out, unless she was single.

Baker: She never got married.

Krael: Okay, that's it, that's it. And see, otherwise, you could be called back for any war. She should have known that. But I would have liked to stay in the reserves. Because, after all, I gave those years and I just felt that was not fair. And it wasn't until I had a brother in the Marine Corp who was killed in Korea, and my father was--I had to take care of some paper work because he was so old when this happened, that he was eligible for some benefit of some sort. And I was trying to find out what all he was eligible for when he had to go to a nursing home. And I ran into a veteran's service officer. I unloaded on him about how I felt. He was talking about this and that, I said, "Hey, you know, if anybody's discriminated against it's the World War II woman." And so then he called somebody out here, there's apparently a representative out at the VA. I've never followed through on it, but I understand there are a few things I am eligible for. But right

now they're cutting down on everything, so I figure I'll get a flag when I die and that's it. I kept on with my nursing, did some private duty while the children were small, and then went back to work definitely into the field and I retired at the great old age of sixty-five. And I enjoyed my work. And I do feel that my experience in the service really helped. Yes, because it broadened you know. And you just didn't have that one little area of training or of knowing. Although, they were very happy to get Minnesota nurses, especially St. Cloud Hospital had a very good reputation. We had no problems getting into the service. So a lot of them went.

Baker: The other thing we were talking about is the representation that women in World War II have gotten, which I think you've mentioned, you don't feel they've gotten much.

Krauel: No. You once in a while see an old movie with a navy nurse, but that's rare. You rarely see an army nurse. And they were really out there, right in it. Right in the field hospitals. And I just--I don't know. If you do see a movie, there's always some romantic angle to it. And of course, that didn't take place for everyone. Once in a while there would be horseplay. At the Great Lakes Naval training station we had this movie star on our ward. And actually, I think he was trying to get out. You're too young to know, Billy DeWolf. But he, he was in a lot of movies with Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour and those people. And one night I was making rounds and there was a kid just moaning and moaning and you'd have about two hundred kids in a ward. And so, I was bent over his bed trying to talk to him, and all he'd do is just moan and groan, this was a set up. And I heard this thump, thump behind me, you know thump, thump. And I turned around, and you know I almost got in trouble. I turned around, and this guy was a great one for changing his way of looking. So he, he was made up like Frankenstein. And he was huge, anyway, and here he was standing over me like that. I turned around and let out this scream. I know they heard me for miles. I almost got in trouble with the, you know, higher up supervisor.

And the boys on the ward just had hysterics, you know. Little dickens. But they pulled that stunt on me.

Baker: And this was this movie actor who wanted out?

Krauel: Yes. Of course, that was just one of things he was doing. He was such a good actor. I'm sure he could portray that he had injured himself somehow, you know, in the back or something like that. But a lot of them were in for the entertainment of the troops, too. They put them in shows and things like that. But we did see a lot of movie actresses; stars would visit the hospital, they really did. I have a picture of myself with Rita Hayworth, things like that. I mean a lot of celebrities came, which was really nice that they did those things for the fellows, especially the wounded guys. Because there were some bad wounds.

Baker: What kind of injuries, like in San Diego, were the most common?

Krauel: Well, the worst thing, when I was on a ward with the paraplegics. Or, the quadriplegics. These would be really nice young men and a lot of their wounds would happen because the Japs would sit up in the trees, you know, and then the troops would be moving in and crawling down below, and they'd get it in the back. And they were paralyzed. That was awful and that was very frequently done to our fellows. Especially the Marines, you know. That was bad. And Amputees. That wasn't easy to take either because they were all so young. And stepping in land mines and things like that. Those were bad wounds, they were. And there were bad chest wounds. And fracture wounds.