

Interview with Rosemary Seifert

October 21, 1989

Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

St. Cloud State University Archives

Interviewed by Nancy Baker

Baker ([00:02](#)):

This is a World War II interview with Rosemary Seifert from St. Cloud, October 21st, 1989. So just to start, why don't you just tell me where you were born, where you went to school, et cetera?

Seifert ([00:19](#)):

How much of that do you want? All the way through? I was born in Little Falls, Minnesota. You don't want the date do you? 1914.

Baker ([00:28](#)):

Okay. Oh, that's good. That's fine.

Seifert ([00:32](#)):

And I went to school in Little Falls, grade school, high school, Catholic schools there. And then from there I went into nurses training in Duluth. I graduated from there in 1931.

Baker ([00:45](#)):

Okay. Was that a three-year nursing?

Seifert ([00:47](#)):

Yes. Three-year Nursing.

Baker (00:48):

In Duluth.

Seifert (00:50):

Yeah, at St. Mary's. And I worked up there until I went to California. That would have been in about 39, I guess. I went to Merseyside, California. I worked there for about a year and a half or two years. And from there I was called into service. I was, prior to that, a reserve for the American Red Cross and as a reserve for the American Red Cross, you automatically were also reserved for army or Navy, whichever you chose. So I was an army reserve and I was called into active duty.

Baker (01:29):

Okay. So you weren't really drafted, what they did was--

Seifert (01:32):

No, they didn't draft nurses as such. They didn't draft the women in those days.

Baker (01:36):

Okay.

Seifert (01:37):

And so I was called in and reported at Camp Roberts in California on August 4th, 1941.

Baker (01:50):

Okay. Now, did you have some training there, like a basic training type thing or-

Seifert (01:57):

Not really. Well, some training. Yeah. And a little bit in the way of bills, but it was very minimal. I was at Roberts until-- I don't know what time I went overseas-- About 1942, '43 I think it was, I don't remember the exact date. Then I was sent up to camp Vancouver Barracks in

Washington, state of Washington. I was up there until I was assigned for overseas duty. And I can't tell you how long that was, because I don't remember the exact date I went overseas anymore.

Baker (02:39):

Okay.

Seifert (02:40):

Then we went down to Camp White in Oregon. That's where I had training for overseas. We had drills there and things like that. And as a group, I was with the 40th general hospital I think it was, and we were assigned overseas through drilling and so forth, I don't remember that too distinctly. And we went down to-- Excuse me. Then we came down to the San Francisco area, I don't remember exactly where I was shipped out and shipped out from there. We didn't stop any place along the way. We landed in Milne Bay in lower end of New Guinea. That was in the English part of New Guinea.

Baker (03:31):

Okay. So now this was on the ship from San Francisco to New Guinea.

Seifert (03:34):

We went directly over there and I couldn't tell you how long we were on board the ship for--

Baker (03:37):

Okay, how was that--

Seifert (03:39):

Going over was no problem. I mean, there was not-- In fact, in neither coming back or going over, did I have any encounters of any kind or did we have any problems. It was crowded on the ship of course, they had-- It was really a troop ship.

Baker (03:51):

Okay.

Seifert (03:51):

And then I was with the general hospital down in Milne Bay. I'm sorry, I don't remember how long.

Baker (04:03):

Can you just talk about kind of what your duties were there? What you did--

Seifert (04:07):

My duties there were just-- They had a hospital set up there and we did just general duty. It was an extremely warm area and we had rain, rain, rain all the time. It's one of the wettest places in the world. And it was just a general hospital. Did general duty and nursing and nothing special.

Baker (04:26):

Okay. So it wasn't combat nursing?

Seifert (04:28):

No it was not combat nursing. It was, I think more-- Well, it was defense down there. It's not too far from Australia actually. And then we were being sent up to the more combative area. And then we were sent up to Biak, B-I-A-K, in northern or New Guinea or new-- Northern New Guinea. It belongs to the Netherlands. I think yeah, that's right. I had to stop and think if that's right. There was a station hospital and we still didn't have combat, although there was some in the outlying areas. We weren't in the combat there, it was sort of a waiting area, until we went on up into the Philippines.

Baker (05:24):

Okay.

Seifert (05:25):

Then we landed at Clark Field in the Philippines. And there we worked as a sort of an emergency hospital. In other words, they were bringing people in from the battlefield in the Philippine area. And we did, I worked there and sometimes in the operating room helping out and otherwise, but it was more an emergency kind of hospital.

Baker (05:50):

Okay. What kind of conditions were these?

Seifert (05:53):

Well, this was again, they took over in a building that was there. So it was not as rough. Down in New Guinea, there we had improvised more of the housing and so forth, that we had. In the Philippines, we didn't have-- The housing wasn't too bad. It wasn't great. And I think we were probably in Clark Field, that area, about two months, not over three months, we were taken down to Manila. And we were in the general hospital there. This hospital was one that had been a TB hospital prior to the war, and interestingly, there were little goodies there that were kind of interesting. They had-- The Japanese had occupied this and until the Americans took it back, then when they came back, it was amazing. They have taken out a lot of the bathroom fixtures and some of the different equipment that they had there. And they had taken them apparently back to Japan. I don't know where, but we had had to put in some bathroom equipment again when we were there, but we were very limited on it. It was very bad. And there, it was a general hospital. Again, I did just the head nurses work, that sort of thing. It was just regular nursing, nothing that unusual. We had some different experiences there, but that was about it. Then I returned from the Philippines or from Manila directly back here. That was in '45, probably September, October 1945.

Baker (07:34):

Now what was-- No. What rank were you again?

Seifert (07:39):

I didn't get very high. I was a first lieutenant. I was a first lieutenant when I got out. They didn't promote like they did in later years, if you were so many years then you got-- Well, they didn't do that during the war.

Baker (07:53):

Okay. What about back to when you were overseas on these islands? How about the relationships between the staff? Did people get along fairly well or was there friction like between men and women? And then--

Seifert (08:08):

Not really. No. There was no friction and there were Australians in the vicinity or close to where we were in Milne Bay for instance. I can remember going to parties and things with some of the Australians, they would have parties and the general relationship was good as far as I could tell. Well, there was always one or two officers that somebody didn't like and so forth. You wondered if they should go out in the battlefield, whether they'd come back. But no, that wasn't that bad at any of that. Any of them that I had. And also the same-- There really wasn't that friction, maybe I wasn't aware of it, but I didn't sense it.

Baker (08:47):

Okay. So there was no problem.

Seifert (08:51):

No. No problem between personnel and that sort of thing. Not, real friction, I don't know what else you would call it. Just competitiveness. Well, there was naturally a certain amount of competitiveness, but not a great deal of that. Not like you get sometimes in organizations.

Baker (09:07):

Okay. Did-- The men accepted the women being over there? They didn't--

Seifert (09:11):

Oh yeah. There was no problem. Of course, you want to remember I was in a hospital situation, which is a lot different than being in some other organizations.

Baker (09:16):

Okay. Okay. How about the food? Were you fed well? Were your needs taken care of?

Seifert (09:25):

Fairly good. I mean, the food wasn't anything to brag about, but we weren't mistreated or I mean, we didn't have to eat rations particularly, we had them once in a while. But I did learn that I don't like spam anymore.

Baker (09:43):

No spam for you, huh?

Seifert (09:45):

No, you can keep your spam, but otherwise we didn't have it too bad.

Baker (09:51):

Okay. How about your living quarters now? Where did you live? In tents or were they building apartments? Or--

Seifert (10:01):

Down in Milne Bay I think it was more-- I think we had tents down there and in Biak, I know we had tents there. And there you had a certain amount of rats and so forth, because I remember we would lose some things once in a while. And once in a while somebody would find them, they'd find a big nest of pack rats had come in there and had hold of the way if you put-- And we had to sleep with mosquito netting in these areas.

Baker (10:26):

How many women were in a tent, say?

Seifert (10:28):

Oh, it was-- It varied. In a tent there were probably six or eight. In some of the compounds where there was bigger buildings, there were probably 15 or something like that. And of course, when we were in Milne Bay or in Manila, we were housed in the same building as the hospital, so that was not that bad. The one thing about Manila I can remember, they had the biggest beetles I've ever seen in my life. So help me, they were as big as-- They were bigger than your wristwatch or-- They were about so long and rounded and they would scare the living daylights out of you. They didn't really hurt you, but they would come in and we didn't have screens, so they would come in whenever the lights were on inside.

Baker (11:12):

So they were-- They would come inside then.

Seifert (11:14):

They would come in, yeah.

Baker (11:16):

Oh, boy. Okay. What made you-- I'm just going to ask you some little questions like what was the most frustrating?

Seifert (11:24):

I don't think I have anything to answer that.

Baker (11:28):

Can't answer that. Didn't get too frustrated, huh?

Seifert (11:29):

Well, I probably did, but--

Baker (11:32):

How about like anything scare you? Were you-- Was there any ever combat or--

Seifert (11:38):

We were around combat areas a few times. Yeah. There-- And I think I've told Clementine, there have been times when-- We were probably at some-- I can remember one incident when we were at a movie and we were told-- All the lights were suddenly down, so we were told to get down in the benches, to get out of the way. And we found out later that there had been some of the enemy coming down from the hills and they were isolated and in the hills and they didn't have food, so they came down looking for the kitchens. And so they were in the area and the guards and so forth were chasing them. So this is why they had us-- But nothing really happened.

Baker (12:18):

And you went out and said, here's my spam. You can have it.

Seifert (12:21):

I would have been happy to.

Baker ([12:25](#)):

How about something funny? What was the funniest thing that happened?

Seifert ([12:25](#)):

Nothing that I can remember.

Baker ([12:31](#)):

Nothing funny either.

Seifert ([12:32](#)):

Not that I can recall. It may have been. At the time it was funny, but nothing that I can--

Baker ([12:36](#)):

Sure. Hard to remember after so long.

Seifert ([12:39](#)):

Yeah. You want to remember that? It's a long time ago.

Baker ([12:41](#)):

That's right.

Seifert ([12:42](#)):

40, 50 years ago.

Baker ([12:44](#)):

Yeah. Okay. How about when you came back then? You got back to the United States and where did you--

Seifert ([12:55](#)):

Oh. I landed in the San Francisco area, Clementine met me.

Baker ([12:59](#)):

And that was in '45 you said?

Seifert (13:03):

Yeah. That was in '45. Must've been in about September or October '45 and I don't know how long we were in that area. I know we came back, we were-- That's where it was, yeah. We left from Pittsburgh or someplace like that and came back to St. Cloud, that's it. And I think we traveled back to Minnesota on our own. I mean, we may have had the therapy[?], but I don't think I came with a group or a troops or anything like that. I came back here and I think I was on vacation until Christmas. I was-- Over Christmas I was at home.

Speaker 3 (13:54):

You came back on October of '45, you came back, that was right.

Seifert (13:56):

Oh.

Baker (13:56):

Okay, October of 45 you came back and-

Speaker 3 (13:57):

No wait it was-- You left your-- This is a fine 18 October of '45 you left and you arrived-- Date of arrival in the USA was three November '45.

Seifert (14:08):

Yeah. And it seems to me, if I remember correctly, I didn't have to report back to-- I was discharged from Fort Sheridan in Wisconsin, but that wasn't until after Christmas because I think I was home over Christmas.

Speaker 3 (14:26):

Yeah. But you went to Chicago first. You came home for Christmas. I got home before you did and I didn't-- I'd met you and you left, went to Chicago. Then you were home over Christmas.

Seifert (14:36):

Oh, well, then I went in there. I went to Chicago prior to going. I think I had to go to Chicago to get to Fort Sheridan, which is up from Chicago. It's not too far. Because I remember I had quite a good time in Chicago, I had friends down there and-- Well, we saw a few places down there too.

Baker (14:58):

And you gambled?

Seifert (15:00):

Well, anyway we had a pretty good time. And of course when I got back here is when I came down with malaria. I did have malaria.

Baker (15:07):

Okay. And that was when you got back?

Seifert (15:08):

I didn't have it until I got back. Yeah. Because we were taking-- At that time, they used to give you pills to prevent malaria and a--

Baker (15:16):

Just back to that a minute. Was there a lot of that in those places that you-- The people you took care of in those hospitals, was there a lot of those diseases like that?

Seifert (15:26):

No, because we got army people and they were taking the same thing. It was a drug called Atabrine and you took it once a day and it maintained the level. But once you were off of it-- This is what, I was off of it after we got back to the States and then I came down with it.

Baker (15:39):

Okay. So then what? You were hospitalized here then?

Seifert (15:41):

I was hospitalized here. I think I got it when I was home here in St. Cloud first, then I had a relapse when I was in—Apparently, I went to Fort Sheridan first, before Christmas, because I was up in Duluth when I had a relapse. And I don't remember if I was-- I don't think I was in the hospital there. Then I had another relapse when I was back here in, oh I don't know, maybe March or something like that. And they did get me up with a drug that did-- Apparently got rid of it because I've never had a recurrence. It was kind of a rough drug to take, but it was effective.

Baker (16:18):

So when you came back then, where did you work first? Did you go back up to Duluth?

Seifert (16:22):

No. When I first came back here, I worked for a little while for a doctor in Little Falls, in his office. And then about that summer, which would have been the summer of 46, probably late summer, I started working out at the VA and so forth.

Baker (16:42):

Okay. And so you did nursing work there?

Seifert (16:44):

Yeah. No, I never went back to work in Duluth after that.

Baker (16:50):

Okay. So you worked at the VA. How would you contrast being a nurse? Like say here, as opposed to being a nurse in the hospital during the war, you think there was a great difference in it or not?

Seifert (17:04):

Oh yeah. You were more on your own when you were in service. You had to make some decisions for yourself and things like that. Whereas here, you're more closely supervised and directed and so forth. And I think you know a little more about that.

Baker (17:04):

Yeah. Right.

Seifert (17:26):

Your assignments and you were always a little more, if you had to help out someplace, you had to do it in service.

Baker (17:34):

Okay. How about when you were a nurse over there, overseas or anywhere in the service, how military was it? I mean, did they-- I mean--

Seifert (17:44):

Not too military, there was some grilling, but once we got overseas, we didn't run into much of that. No. It really wasn't that military. Not that the-- The men had to do some drilling and so forth, but we didn't. We did a little bit of it at Camp Roberts when I first went in. And then of course, as I said, we did some training before going overseas, but like when I was up in Vancouver at the barracks up there, we didn't have military training or that sort of thing.

Baker (18:14):

Okay. What kind of entertainment did you have? You mentioned you went to a movie and--

Seifert (18:22):

Yeah. It was that sort of thing. Or else, as I said, too, they had-- They would have bulletin boards and you could sign up if you wanted to go to a party someplace, they would go with a big truck

and take a group, or else sometimes they came to pick you up. And some of it, as I said, when I was down in Milne Bay, we had some of it with the Australians. When I got up into the Philippines, then it was pretty much American Army, and we'd have some of the same thing. We might have parties or-- And some of it you made yourself in your barracks, I mean, you just had fun with the group. And I can remember we were enjoying records a lot. We played cards a lot, that sort of thing. It was what you made up yourself.

Baker (19:01):

What you did yourself.

Seifert (19:02):

Yeah. It was not organized too much except for these parties and that's it.

Baker (19:07):

Okay. How about as far as the nursing part, did you ever have trouble getting medications needed? Like-

Seifert (19:15):

No, I can't really remember that where we were the medical supplies were short particularly. We didn't run into that. I'm sure there were times when other people did, but I happened to be in an area where apparently they hadn't.

Baker (19:28):

Okay. So just overall, are you glad you did that or?

Seifert (19:35):

Oh sure. Not regretful, I don't say I would want to go and do it now or something like that. No, at the time, no, I didn't regret it particularly. There are sometimes when you get papers from the States and you'd read some of the things you would become a little bit annoyed at what was

happening here, but it was nothing serious. Like, we used to get our rations with-- Talking about food, we used to get our rations of beer and liquor if you wanted that you could go buy it.

Baker ([20:07](#)):

To [inaudible 00:20:08] the spam huh?

Seifert ([20:09](#)):

Yeah.

Baker ([20:17](#)):

Okay. So you were in Manila when you found out the war was over.

Seifert ([20:20](#)):

Yeah. That's right.

Baker ([20:21](#)):

What went on around you?

Seifert ([20:23](#)):

Oh a certain amount of celebration. There was some noise and of course-- I'm trying to remember, it may have been-- I don't remember for sure if I was at the hospital yet, or if we were at an area where we were preparing to come back, because at that time people returned to the States according to point system, and you got a certain amount of points for the number of years you were in and the time overseas and so forth. And I had my required number of points, so I know I came home partly on points and partly because the war was over but points really had something to do with who came home first.

Baker ([21:00](#)):

Okay. And then you came back also on a ship?

Seifert (21:03):

Yeah. I came back and I-- We didn't stop any place on the way back either, because a lot of ships did stop in Hawaii, going and coming.

Baker (21:15):

Okay. So when you came back then, did you have an option? Was there something like a reserve--

Seifert (21:23):

When you came back from the service?

Baker (21:24):

Yeah. Would you be like in a reserve?

Seifert (21:27):

I think you automatically were put into a reserve.

Baker (21:29):

Okay.

Seifert (21:30):

This was not an option. As an officer, we automatically were put into a reserve and I was in that reserve until about '48 or '49. Matter of fact, they wanted to pull me back in on regular service. I don't know if you wanted that on tape or not?

Baker (21:45):

Go ahead. Sure. We can take it.

Seifert (21:46):

There you go. No, I was called back for regular service, just about at the end of the period for my reserve period. And part of it was, they wanted me to go down to Houston, Texas, and I don't

know why particularly, but then with that, they wouldn't assign me, unless I signed up for another four or six years, I don't remember what it was. And I didn't want any more of the reserves, so I got out of going and I also got out of staying with the reserves. That's how I dropped out of the reserves. But otherwise, I might've stayed with them. That was with it. It was kind of one with the other and I wasn't that crazy at that time to go back down there. I had finally gotten back home here and I was sort of settling into a pattern and I guess I was getting old.

Baker ([22:36](#)):

Do you think that generally-- Did the people like when you were overseas or wherever, was there a good feeling about the government? The United States government? Or was there a lot of a--

Seifert ([22:49](#)):

Oh there was a certain amount of resentment on some things. I don't remember what they were, but I know there was some resentment and criticism, but I think that's normal.

Baker ([22:59](#)):

Sure. Where you kept-- Did you know-- Okay. You were over in the South Pacific, were you kept up to date what was happening in Europe or--

Seifert ([23:07](#)):

To some extent. Yeah, we were aware of when the war ended over there, probably not as fast as maybe you did in the States, but we used to get your army magazines and papers and of course you always get your gossip from word of mouth, so we had some knowledge, but not as fast, I don't think, as you. I don't remember that it was very much delayed, but it was--

Baker ([23:31](#)):

So you got mail when you got correspondence from home, did you get that fairly fast?

Seifert (23:36):

It wasn't too fast. No. It took a while for mail to come through.

Baker (23:36):

Okay.

Seifert (23:44):

And packages, they weren't too bad, but it wasn't like it is today. It probably was a month before the mail would get over or something like that.

Baker (23:44):

Okay.

Seifert (23:54):

The same thing with getting back.