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*The 44th General Hospital*  
*WW II*  
*The Army Nurse Corps*

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No record of the 44th General Hospital would be complete without commendation of the nurses staff which served the unit. No finer group of women could possibly have been brought together. Their entire deportment was of such high caliber as to deserve the praise and recognition of the nursing profession and all womanhood.

The following diary written by E.F. La Duke Hastings covers the activity of the nursing staff from the time the unit was organized until the end of hostilities and the return to the United States

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## *Fading Memories*

(And excerpt from a Book of Memoirs written for my sons. It relates my travels while a member of the 44th General Hospital.)

1942 - - Recruiters for the Army Nurse Corps came to Luther Hospital Eau Claire, WI, and several nurses joined. I decided I'd go with the Navy! After my physical I received the info that I was underweight and wore glasses - - No thank you! Next thing I knew I was in the ANC.

Orders were received and on March 15, 1943 I proceeded by train to arrive at Camp Anza, Riverside, CA on March 19 and was assigned to the 44th General Hospital Unit. Camp Anza was a "staging area" for personnel assigned to overseas duty. All nurses were on duty at the hospital while waiting orders.

When I checked in, I had to get dog tags made. Of course I was asked my serial number and I didn't know it . . . I was told I had better learn it and never forget it! - - N771748 - - see, I still know it.

We had to learn to salute, march, count cadence, have dress parade, go on field marches, you name it, we did it! What a clumsy crew we were, but we improved with practice. We went to formal dances at the Officer's Club called "Command Performances", meaning you better be there. As time allowed we could go the club for dinner, dancing, visiting, meeting new officers, seeing some leaving, wondering when our turn was coming and to where.

We had to have a series of vaccinations as did everyone who came through Camp Anza. One was against Cholera, so we guessed we were going to an area where the disease was a possibility.

As soon as we were issued uniforms, all the civilian clothes we sent home except some formals and high heels. The uniforms were something else! The first time I wore mine, I felt like a clown - dark blue jackets, lighter blue skirts, light blue shirts, white shirts, maroon tie, brown bag and shoes, gray gloves and dark blue caps. Later the uniforms were changed to beige outfits and olive drab ones. Someone said it was because the Japanese nurses wore blue. I don't remember when we were issued the brown and white seersucker wrap dresses and jackets, the khaki culottes, fatigues, shoes and boots.

Our mail had been censored to a certain extent all the time, but everything became more secretive, so we felt some changes were about to be made.

September 20, 1943 we transferred to Camp Stoneman at Pittsburgh, CA. We had backpacks, bedrolls and footlockers packed full. We were told what to take with us and what wouldn't be available at the PX. You never saw such a mess. My footlocker arrived, a wrecked pile of junk. I had to scramble and get another one and get it stenciled and repacked.

We had a gas mask drill and my mask was too large and leaked gas. I think I walked miles to get it exchanged. Thank goodness we didn't have to use them. We were told not to keep diaries in order to prevent the possibility of the Japs getting information from them.

Eventually all the 44th personnel gathered at Stoneman and we waited for shipment to the Pacific Theatre of Operations which occurred September 24, 1943. the U.S.S. West Point, a large ship, was ready for us. I heard it carried 10,000 service men and women and a crew of 2,000. Most of the women assigned to the 44th and Major "Flash" Gordon were among the group.

We zig-zagged across the Pacific Ocean until October 10, 1943. This snake-like travel supposedly would make us less likely to be hit by a torpedo. I didn't believe it. As large a target as we were the Japs' aim couldn't be that bad. Our destination was still unknown to us.

Life aboard ship was different! There were five of us in what was a stateroom with port holes blacked out and locked. We had one double set of bunks and one triple set - - one bathroom. Water was rationed and turned on at certain times of the day and if you didn't hurry you might end up soapy in the shower.

There were so many of us to feed that we were assigned chow time two hours a day. The tables in the dining room had a ledge on all four sides so that in rough seas the plates didn't slide off. At night we used the tables to shoot penny ante crap.

Daytime was spent sitting on deck in assigned areas, playing cards, reading, writing letters and talking. Our life jackets were our constant companions. Periodically a drill was announced and we put our life jackets and went to our assigned life boat stations.

Smoking was allowed on deck certain times of the day. An announcement would come over the P.A. system, "the smoking lamp is lit", meaning it was O.K. - then toward early dusk the message "the smoking lamp is out". This was important because the light from a match or a glowing cigarette could be seen for miles over the open seas.

This trip began September 24, 1943 and ended October 10, 1943 as previously mentioned, or seventeen day shipboard. We finally were told our destination was Sydney, Australia. We wondered why Australia. We crossed the equator on October 1. Every ship crossing the equator had a big celebration and initiation for first timers, a ritual for sailors, but we were included. It was called "Dominion of Neptunus Rex". We were given cards stating we were duly initiated into the "Solemn Mysteries of the Ancient Deep". It was a hilarious affair and great fun. I still have the certificates issued after this event.

When we reached Sydney, we were taken ashore in Landing Crafts, as the large ships couldn't go to the docks. From the port we went by bus to our assigned station outside the city limits of Sydney to the 118th General Hospital APO 927, for staging and waiting. We were allowed rations and quarters but not assigned to duty. I remember it being cold with snow on the ground. We found out how to get to Sydney and did go in to shop, check out the pubs, and tea rooms - saw double decker buses for the first time. A pretty city and the people were nice.

On October 23, we left Sydney by train for Brisbane arriving the next day, and were taken to Camp Columbia APO 923, near Wacol. The railroad tracks were narrow gauge and when leaving one territory for another you had to change trains. The passenger cars were individual - - meaning you couldn't get on a car and walk through all the other cars like you can in the U.S., so you had to be nimble and jump into a car that had some seating available because the trains were fast and didn't stop long. To be choosy where you sat, could mean being left behind.

We stayed at this post until January 23. This was our first Christmas away from the U.S. and there was much sadness and tears among the group. We were housed in large tents with wood floors on a slope of ground. Next to us on the same slope was a cleared area where we went through marching maneuvers, calisthenics, etc., anything to keep us in shape and occupied part of the time. We had some K.P. duty, mostly peeling huge piles of potatoes and washing the meal trays and cookware. The Army required dishes of all kinds to be scrubbed and scalded but never dried with a towel.

I had forgotten this tid-bit, but Marian Lutz remembered that at this post there were frogs in the latrine and sometimes you would get a butt bump! Perhaps I didn't get bumped.

We soon learned to get to the R.R. station and hop a train to Brisbane and we did at every opportunity. We had to make sure we caught a train back before the last one left or we would be AWOL. We went in to eat, shop and to see what was going on in the city. One thing I enjoyed eating was a waffle with ice cream and some kind of sauce on top. Just like a glorified ice cream cone. The customary tea time was fun -- drinking tea and eating a variety of little cakes and cookies. At night the bars were our attraction (some of us!). They served a drink called "Pims Cup #1" and "Pims Cup #2", don't ask what they had in them cuz I don't remember. Rather tasty but the name is what slayed us. We learned to sing "Waltzing Matilda" and "Tie Me Kangaroo Down Boys" and did with much gusto.

Most of us had beige uniform dresses made to measure by a local seamstress. We were short of dress uniforms and had no way to get replacements. Laundry was a constant chore.

I'm sure we complained a great deal about our food, but now I don't remember that much about it. We did make sandwiches with onions sprinkled with sugar for a snack at night. The onions and bread were very good as was the raspberry jam from Tasmania.

This waiting continued for several months and we became bored and discontent. We wanted to be working -- at our own place as a unit. In the meantime, the male officers and enlisted men had been ship wrecked on the Great Barrier Reef and the 44th G.H. didn't have an assignment.

The long awaited "pack up" orders came and on Jan. 23, we left Brisbane by Aussie troop train for Townsville, arriving Jan. 25. We were assigned temporary duty at the 13th Station Hospital and went to work, finally! If I am correct, it was here that we used penicillin for the first time. On April 7, we were relieved of temporary duty -- packed up and were transported to the 44th General Hospital outside of Townsville. This place was called Black River, a large post to handle the ill and injured brought in from other hospitals.

Our quarters were barrack buildings partitioned off so as to be two to a room. Latrines and showers were in separate areas. We finally got a boiler to heat water and eliminate cold showers if you got there in time. Had a day room in a separate building with a cook stove and we made candy. Got our friends in the mess hall to give us the where with all to do it. Had an officers club, PX, mess hall, plus all of the departments needed to operate a hospital and many wards for the patients. Food was the usual army rations and fresh foods as they became available. We had a cigarette and liquor ration. Didn't always want the brand you got but took it anyway.

We rarely went to Townsville due to lack of transportation, but when we did we purchased yarn and started knitting and crocheting. The yarn was beautiful, plentiful and inexpensive. We made wool shawls by lacing and weaving yarn on a large wooden frame. These we sent to family members.

We had dances at the club and made the most of every opportunity to live it up. On a day off from work we would go horseback riding, hiking in the area looking for wallabies, koala bears and anything else of interest. Didn't meet up with the aborigines as they were deeper into the interior. There was a bluff beside the camp and we would climb it once in awhile -- easy up but not coming down if it was getting dark. A couple of officers had a pet parrot that kept pecking the tips off their shoestrings. That's about as exciting as things got.

We stayed here until Oct. 13 when we were sent by Aussie troop train back to Sydney to go by ship to our next destination which was APO 565, another staging near Hollandia Dutch New Guinea. It was on this trip by Dutch Hospital Ship that we ran into foul weather in the Coral Sea. A friend, Florence Turney and I were showering when the ship started to roll and we had to roll with it by sliding from wall to wall in the shower room. When we finally got out we

discovered some port holes were opened and some of the nurses on the top bunks had been washed off the bunks. Only minor injuries but they were well soaked. During this pitching and rolling I saw a large platter of spaghetti shoot off the galley and hit a wall. What a mess!

We arrived to New Guinea Oct. 24, and after anchoring in the harbor were loaded on landing barges to go to shore. The landing area was a muddy mess. Our truck transports were not there so we just waited and waited. The natives had shacks built over the water and the naked kids were jumping into the water. Adults were dressed from the waist down -- kids bare and brown. When the trucks came we were taken to the nurse's camp area which was a stockade. We were housed in tents with armed guards patrolling the camp. This area was really a jungle and no freedom for us because of the natives, Japs, snakes, varmints and anything else that might harm us. We reported for duty at the 27th G.H. Oct. 30 and were transported to and from work about 1/2 mile away by ambulance. There was another hospital across the road from our stockade and some of the nurses were assigned there. We also used their mess hall when not on duty.

We stayed here until Jan. 3, 1945, when we were relieved of duty and departed Jan. 5 by ship to the next destination. Again we traveled by Dutch Hospital Ship the "Maetsuycker" to the island of Leyte, Philippines arriving Jan. 10, after an uneventful trip. Again taken to our station out in the boonies at Burauen and mud again! We were issued men's boots so we could walk through it and rarely had dry feet. Here, too, we were quartered in a stockade because Japs were in the hills. The officers and enlisted men had set up camp on their arrival. There is an account of a Jap attack before our arrival. The first operating room was in a tent and the gloves and instruments were sterilized by soaking in disinfectants. So you know we started out on a crude scale. The soldiers were treated here if possible and returned to duty or sent on to a general hospital.

We were close to a native settlement and the men folk roamed most of the night. Rarely saw them sit -- they squatted, jabbered, gestured and laughed. Occasionally they would get in a fight and slash each other real good with their bolos. They lived in squalor though seemed adequately nourished for their small stature. The water buffalo were used like oxen and we'd frequently see the kids riding them.

We were warned not to go barefoot even in the shower for fear we might contract Schistosomiasis, so we wore native made wooden clogs. Never could figure out why wet feet from the mud wasn't just as dangerous.

Some of us contracted viral hepatitis and had to go into the infirmary. We swallowed yeast tablets by the handfuls to get an intake of vitamin B, and ate a hi-carb diet. No RX for hepatitis at that time.

It was at this post that some natives came out of the hills, through our camp laughing and jabbering. They were carrying a basket, and in the basket was the head of a Jap! It was here before our arrival that some of our men were playing baseball and the ball went into the brush. Before they could go look for it, the ball was thrown back. It was thought that some Japs were watching the ball game! So I was told. This post was work and very little play. We had movies occasionally and a USO show rarely.

On June 19 we packed up the unit and moved to a beach area near Tacloban, which had been a post of General MacArthur's. Our quarters were tents again with wooden floors, two to a tent. We were near the beach among the coconut trees. This place was paradise compared to the other places we had been.

We had an Officers Club for dances and gatherings, a reading room with a good supply of paper back books. We spent time off on the beach and in the water. Evenings on the beach watching

the waves was so peaceful. Our work here wasn't any different than at Burauen but being a general hospital, the patients stayed longer until recovered or were sent to the U.S. We located some Philippino women to do our laundry which simplified that chore -- only problem, the clothes smelled from whatever they used to heat their irons. Our hospital facilities were everything we needed.

Seems strange to think about it now but with every move we adapted without a great deal of stress or many problems. Of course we complained but my T.S. card never got punched! When the news came that the war was over, the ships in the bay had a super fireworks show. Everyone was jubilant to say the least.

On Oct. 19, 1945, we received orders to go home and on Nov. 10 our replacements arrived and we were relieved of duty. On Nov. 13 we again were loaded on trucks and went to White Beach to await boarding the "U.S.S. Admiral Hugh Rodman". We finished boarding the following day and moved out of the harbor. Much to our delight we found hot water in our cabins and not rationed and the food was good. We again had the abandon ship drills, same deck activities but the conversation was different. We talked about where we had been, what we had seen, our work experiences, the scores of ill and injured, the deaths, the war, the going home and what we planned to do when we got there.

Nov. 21, 1945 we crossed the 180th meridian 29 degrees 19', and another celebration was held. "Domain of the Golden Dragon, Rules of the 180th Meridian". The festivities were similar to "Domain of Neptunus Rex". This time we were initiated into "Silent Mysteries of the Far East".

Nov. 27 we passed Alcatraz, went under the Golden Gate Bridge and into San Francisco harbor. From there we were transported to Camp Stoneman. All issued equipment was turned in and signed off and we re-packed for departure. After a few days, we were taken to a train station to go to Fort Des Moines, Iowa for processing out of the service. Upon loading the train four of us found a compartment and settled in. Every time the train stopped we got off to buy whatever food we could find, even though we were fed on the train.

On Dec. 7, 1945, we arrived at Fort Des Moines and processing soon began -- many good-byes and promises to keep in touch and we went our separate ways, a long time ago.

E.F. La Duke Hastings  
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You never see her on parade  
Like WACS and WAVES and such,  
She's much too busy working hard  
To keep away death's touch.  
I won't forget her tender skill  
From Private Joe to Captain Bill.  
My thanks to you! I wish folks knew  
The hell you've seen and waded through;  
I'd like to tell the universe,  
God bless you, keep you,  
Army Nurse.  
-Sgt. Frank Day, U.S. Army-