

Station Three Resource Packet: Risks and Results

Oral History Interview, Dorothy Davis Thompson, June 13, 2006

National Museum of the Pacific War

Transcript of Interview with Dorothy Davis Thompson, Civilian Nurse POW, Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines

Mrs. Thompson: In December the Japanese had already started to fool around with the Philippines and one night we were disturbed by bombing. It seemed like hundreds of planes were flying over and bombing. As soon as it was daylight I walked to the hospital and checked in. We were so busy we didn't get much sleep. We would go at least seventy-two hours without sleep...

[after Japanese occupation...]

That evening when it was getting dark they loaded us up in these trucks again and took us to Santo Tomas. It was obvious that no plans had been made at Santo Tomas. It had been a university, which the Philippine Army had used prior to their leaving Manila and they had left it in total shambles. There were maybe six or ten bunk beds that had been left. Other than that there wasn't even a cot. Floors were dirty, everything was dirty and no signs of where to put anything. That is how we spent the first night...Of course being a nurse I was very concerned about the ones I could see that were already in trouble. I decided I would open up a place to treat patients.

[on conditions at Santo Tomas...]

For instance when I was on line we were fed two meals a day. In the morning we had some mush that mostly worms. Then about four o'clock in the afternoon we had a watery soup with something in it. Once I found about an inch of meat of some sort in it.

Dorothy fell ill and was repatriated with the second group of POWs in 1943.

Station Three Resource Packet: Risks and Results cont.

Eloise M. Richardson

Second Lieutenant Eloise M. Richardson was one of seventeen World War II flight nurses to lose their lives in the conflict. She grew up in Marseilles, Illinois. Richardson was an excellent student who graduated high school a year early. She attended a local nursing school and then enlisted in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps in October 1942. She attended flight training school at Bowman Field, Kentucky.

After graduation, the Army assigned Richardson to the 801st Air Evacuation Squadron. She left San Francisco in March 1944 for a post at Guadalcanal. In the field, Richardson was responsible for medical evacuations of wounded soldiers.

The C-47s used on these flights were frequently utilized for multiple purposes, and sometimes even carried military supplies on the rescue flights. This practice prevented the planes from being designated with the Red Cross as medical vessels. The crew and patients aboard therefore faced the same risks as if the plane carried a combat crew. For this reason, the U.S. Army only accepted volunteers to serve as flight nurses and medical technicians. As compensation for taking on these dangerous responsibilities, Second Lieutenant Richardson earned \$150 dollars a month. Women received less pay than men of equivalent rank when the war began; nurses were not granted full retirement privileges, dependents' allowances, and equal pay until June 1944.

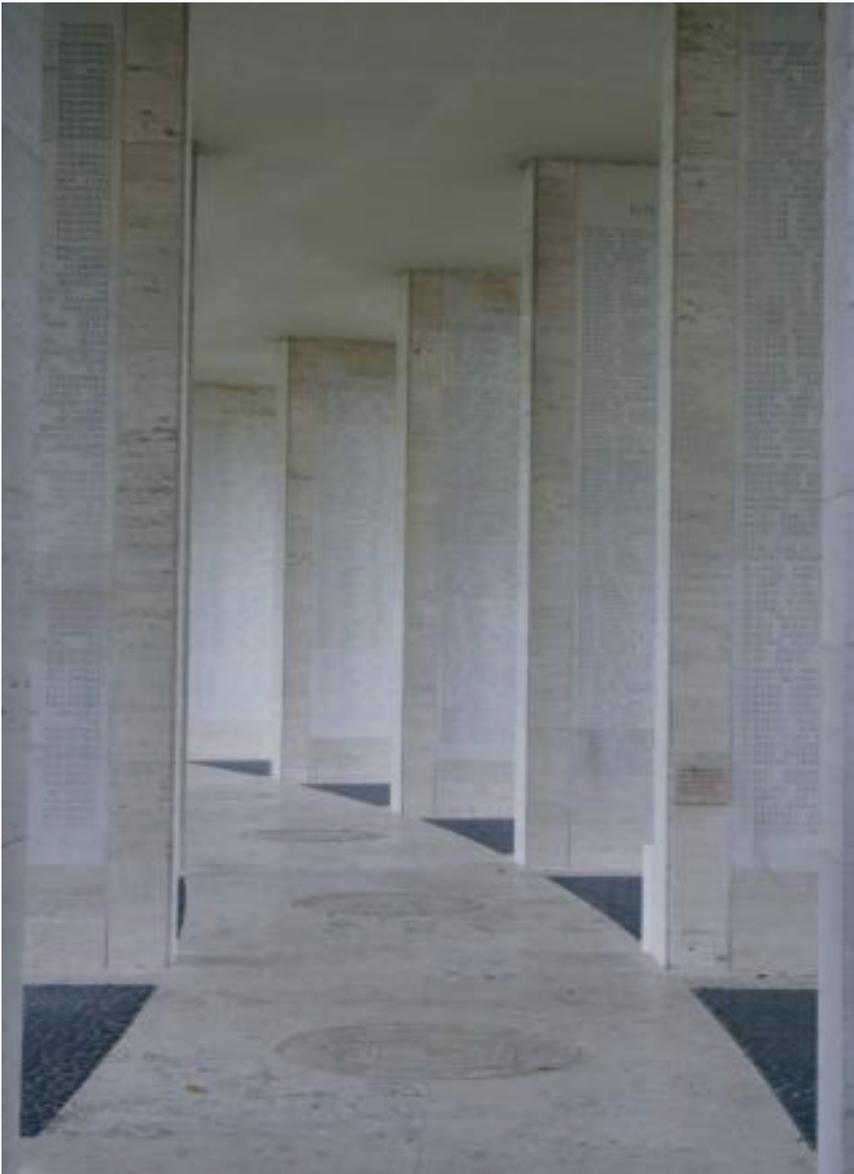


Photograph of Second Lieutenant Eloise Richardson, serving in the South Pacific, 1944. National Archives and Records Administration (54361).

Station Three Resource Packet: Risks and Results cont.

Eloise M. Richardson cont.

On May 18, 1944, Richardson was making a routine flight between Bougainville and Guadalcanal. Her plane took off under “threatening weather conditions” and never reached its destination. No wreckage from the plane or remains from the 23 on board were ever found. The Army declared Richardson dead one year and one day after her disappearance, but her parents never had the closure of burying their daughter.



Today, Second Lieutenant Eloise M. Richardson is remembered at the Walls of the Missing at Manila American Cemetery. The name of one other flight nurse, Second Lieutenant Beatrice H. Memler, also appears amongst the 36,286 names on the Walls. Additionally, the Manila American Cemetery also houses the grave of flight nurse Second Lieutenant Martha F. Black.

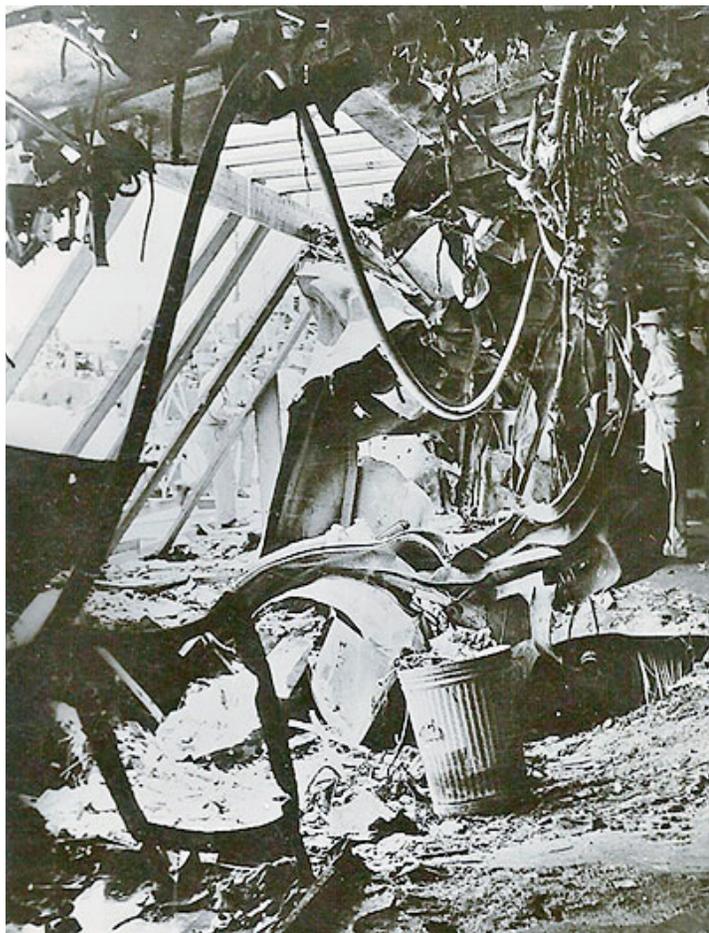
Walls of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines.
American Battle Monuments Commission.

Station Three Resource Packet: Risks and Results cont.

The USS *Comfort*

The Army Nurse Corps (excerpt)
U.S. Army Center of Military History

“Hospital ships operated under the terms of the Hague Convention which meant that those vessels could carry only military personnel on patient status accompanied by attending Medical and Transportation Corps personnel. The white hospital ships with large red crosses painted on either side were forbidden to carry cargo of any kind and were subject to enemy inspection at any time. Nevertheless, the Axis Powers did not always spare hospital ships, which were bombed in at least three different incidents...In the Pacific, Japanese pilots attacked the USS *Comfort* off Leyte Island in April 1945, seriously damaging the ship and killing twenty-nine people, including six Army nurses.”



Damage to the USS *Comfort*. Courtesy of Dorene Lynch.



Burial at Guam for those killed aboard the USS *Comfort*, May 3, 1945. Courtesy of Dorene Lynch.



Photographed at Guam, Army Nurse First Lieutenant Mary Jensen of San Diego, California, looks up through the hole in the concrete and steel deck of the Navy hospital ship *Comfort*, May 3, 1945. Courtesy of the National Museum of the Pacific War.

Station Three Resource Packet: Risks and Results cont.

World War II Nursing Success by the Numbers

Adapted from *The Army Nurse Corps*

U.S. Army Center of Military History

- More than 59,000 American nurses served in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps during World War II. Additionally, more than 10,000 nurses served in the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps.
- Within the "chain of evacuation" established by the Army Medical Department during the war, nurses served under fire in field hospitals and evacuation hospitals, on hospital trains and hospital ships, and as flight nurses on medical transport planes.
- As the flight nurse on the first intercontinental air evacuation flight, Second Lieutenant Elsie S. Ott demonstrated the potential of air evacuation in January 1943...she successfully oversaw the movement of five seriously ill patients from India to Washington, D.C. This six-day trip would have normally taken three months by ship and ground transportation. For her actions on this historic flight, Ott received the first Air Medal presented to a woman, and she also received formal flight nurse training.
- Overall, fewer than four percent of the American soldiers who received medical care in the field or underwent evacuation died from wounds or disease.
- Although it admitted only a small number of black nurses at the start of World War II, due to unfavorable public reaction, the Army scrapped racial quotas for nurses in 1944.
- A field hospital could perform approximately eighty operations a day, and over 85 percent of those soldiers operated on in field hospitals survived.
- Critically wounded patients needing specialized treatment were air evacuated to station and general hospitals. Stable patients requiring a long recuperation were sent on via hospital ship.



Brigadier General Fred W. Borum presents the Air Medal to Lieutenant Elsie Ott. National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

Station Three Resource Packet: Risks and Results cont.

World War II Nursing Success by the Numbers cont.

- Flight nurses accepted that there would always be unexpected dangers. A transport plane en route to Guadalcanal with twenty-four litter patients and one flight nurse [First Lieutenant Mary E. Hawkins] ran out of fuel over the Pacific. The pilot spotted an island on which there was a 150-foot-square clearing...During the landing, one passenger's windpipe was severed, although his jugular vein remained intact. The attending nurse quickly devised a suction tube from a syringe, a colonic tube, and the inflation tubes from a life jacket. With these tools, she was able to keep the man's windpipe clear of blood until help arrived nineteen hours later.
- More than 50 percent of admissions for disease between 1942 and 1944 were malaria patients.
- Eventually, about 500 Army nurses served as members of 31 medical air evacuation transport squadrons operating worldwide.
- It is a tribute to their skill that of the 1,176,048 patients air evacuated throughout the war, only 46 died en route.



First Lieutenant Mary L. Hawkins. National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.