

## War Era Story Project 2012

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### Where Were You in '42?

When President Roosevelt gave his famous speech in 1941 declaring war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, my fellow nursing students at Butterworth Hospital (Grand Rapids, Michigan) and I were a captive audience. As freshmen, we had already responded to the plea for more nurses in the event of war. Shortly thereafter, the Cadet Nurse Corp was formed and we were given attractive uniforms plus a small stipend. In return, we agreed to work as nurses, whether in the military or in civilian life, for the duration of the war.

Three years later, I was inducted in the U.S. Army Nurse Corp at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. After finishing basic training with several hundred nurses, fifty of us were assigned to work at Madigan General Hospital, Fort Lewis, Washington. We traveled by train through the Rockies. It was February; the snow was deep, and the scenery spectacular. Several days later, we arrived in Seattle with no one to greet us. We waited (Army style). Eventually, some covered wagon trucks were dispatched to ferry us to Ft. Lewis.

Madigan General Hospital had several sections spread out over a vast area in case of enemy attack. A group of us banded together and signed up to work at Section II which was near the main Fort and included a PX, transportation facilities, and "dining hall". I was assigned to Ward Thirteen, a communicable disease ward for severe cases such as meningitis, mumps encephalitis, polio, scarlet fever, etc. We had a number of private rooms to accommodate critical patients, officers, female patients or children as needed.

Most of the time, we worked the regular "day shift" but all of us had to take turns working the night shift as well. When we worked the night shift, we were in charge of multiple wards and spent much of our time walking from ward to ward. The "wards" were actually in barracks-type buildings with beds on either side and a wide aisle to walk through. There was limited room in between the beds. Each barrack or ward held approximately fifty patients (in one room) and had a nurses station, laundry, latrine and a ward office (for the doctor).

Working in a military hospital was actually rather entertaining. That is, while working in a civilian hospital, most of our patients were older. In the military, most of our patients were young men who had a great sense of humor not only with us as the nurses but with one another as well. They were all eager to return to active duty and we were eager to support the war effort by getting them back to their responsibilities.

The most amazing thing was the way the whole country seemed to band together in their patriotism. I will always remember that when we were traveling (during leave, etc.) and we got off the train for a rest stop, there would be people offering fruit, drinks and other refreshments to those in uniform. We were clearly a nation united.