Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University initiating an Oral History interview with Cdr. Patricia Warner. Today’s date is the twenty-eighth of June 2005. I am in the interview room of the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech. Commander Warner is joining me by telephone from Florida. Good morning Pat.

Patricia Warner: Good morning Laura.

LC: Pat, first of all, let me thank you for taking the time to get involved in the Oral History project here at the Vietnam Archive. I want to just clarify with you at the outset that you’re willing to let the Vietnam Archive make this interview available for researchers who have an interest in your career and the things that you encountered.

PW: Fine.

LC: Okay, thanks Pat. Let’s go head and start with some background questions that will help people understand a little bit more about who you are. First of all, where were you born Pat and when?

PW: Okay. I was born twenty-six September 1937 in Rochester, New York.

LC: Tell me a little bit about your family if you would. What about your father, what did he do?

PW: My father was in business for himself. He owned a refrigerated transport sixteen wheeler. He carried frozen food between Rochester and Boston. He was told in
his youth that he had had Scarlet Fever and he would always have to work outside. So, he was in business for himself and that’s what he did. He was Canadian by birth. He had a sixth grade education and his parents told him to get out and go to work.

LC: Now was he from Ontario?

PW: Yes, he was from the province of Ontario, but he came to this country when he was about four years old.

LC: Oh, okay.

PW: So in essence, he was really an American and he was a naturalized citizen and loved this country.

LC: Sure. What about his parents? Were they long time Canadians born in Canada?

PW: As far as I can recollect they were born in Canada, both my Grandmother Vincent and my Grandfather Warner. I’m trying to find out something about their ancestry, but it’s very negligible.

LC: It’s slow work to find out how—

PW: Yeah. I’m probably not going to get it, but I think there may be some English and Dutch in there.

LC: Sounds right. Were they farming people?

PW: My grandmother when she was younger worked in a canning factory in Webster, New York, which is where my father was brought up. Grandpa, I’m not sure exactly what he did. He was a veterinarian of sorts.

LC: Okay.

PW: I was little when he died. He was kind of an interesting man and he used to take care of our animals and spay them and things like that. I don’t know if he was a bona fide vet though.

LC: Maybe he learned it on the job.

PW: Maybe.

LC: Let me ask about your father. You said that he had been ill when he was younger.

PW: Yes.

LC: Did he ever have any military service?
PW: Yes. My father took the exam for West Point. Because he didn’t have formalized education, he didn’t do very well in English, but he passed some of the other exams. He was an enlisted man who taught pistol sharp shooting at West Point. When he was younger, he had learned how to fly and that was the age when our government was carrying the mail. My father was part of that. He used to dead reckon, which means navigation by the seat of their pants. You look at the rivers and you follow them, that type of thing. He would sit in the front of the cockpit, cockpit, throw the mail in the backseat and take off. He had a lifelong interest in flying, which rubbed off on me. My cousin was a Navy pilot and they used to go to the Cleveland Air Races together.

LC: No kidding.

PW: So, I mean, our household heard flying from the time I was little until I got bigger. Probably when I was in third grade, my cousin Bob had gone through I think it was Brownsville, the training command for pilots in Texas. He would come home in his hot Hudson, which was a convertible with vermillion and khaki fenders. They would drive, the guys would drive all night, they’d just keep it going until they got to our house. My dad would roll up that Oriental rug and the hardwood floors underneath would be a great dance place. The fire would be in the fireplace and they’d put on Glenn Miller. The guys would bring their dates and they’d have to share their food with their dates at the table if they wanted to stay for dinner because we were having rationing.

LC: Sure.

PW: So they’d run around the house in their flight suit and be just full of it. I thought, wow, what a way to go.

LC: Yeah.

PW: So that probably was the early spark that got me going.

LC: Excellent. Sounds like a fun house.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Yeah. Just for the record, when do you, if you remember at all or if you have reconstructed it, was your father actually employed out at West Point?

PW: Oh, it was probably in the 1920s.

LC: Okay.
PW: He wasn’t eligible for World War I, so it was probably, you know—he was born in 1904, so he probably would’ve been in his early 20s.

LC: Just for the record Pat, his name, his full name?

PW: His name was—he changed it because of some conflicts. He used the first name as C., the initial, Arnold, A-R-N-O-L-D, Warner, W-A-R-N-E-R. His first name was Cecil, but he just changed it to the initial.

LC: He just didn’t like Cecil?

PW: No. I think there was somebody else in town who had the same name and was causing some grief. By the way, it might be good to put me in as Patricia A. Warner. My middle name is Ann, but I found out here in Florida, there are about seventeen Patricia A. Warner’s and I had to sign an affidavit I wasn’t somebody because it was somebody with my name causing problems. (Laughing)

LC: So, it wasn’t identify theft, but you were being confused with—

PW: No. Well yeah, when I went to get the mortgage for my house, they wanted to make sure I wasn’t a person who could’ve given them trouble.

LC: Right. (Laughing)

PW: I guess it’s a common name.

LC: It’s the early 21st century knocking there.

PW: I guess.

LC: Let me ask a little bit about your mother. Tell me about her background if you can.

PW: My mother was very interesting. She was born in Rochester, New York. She was the middle child of three. My grandfather and grandmother were born in this country. Grandpa worked on the B&O (Baltimore & Ohio) Railroad. He used to take us on the run to Tioga. Each of the grandchildren got to ride with White Smoke Johnny, the engineer on the railroad.

LC: Was that his name?

PW: Yup, White Smoke. We called him White Smoke because he had a full head of white hair.

LC: Cool.

PW: We would sit with the fireboxes right next to him.
LC: Sure.

PW: I got in the engine and looked at the firebox, which was about five feet tall just blazing flames. I said, “I want out.” But that was a big coup to go to Tioga from Rochester on the train with White Smoke. Then grandma used to pack a basket and take us across Lake Ontario. That was all part of the railroad system and we’d go on a big steamer for the day over to Canada. My mother went into nurse’s training. Let’s see, she graduated in 1934, so she would’ve gone in around 1931. She was told she had a cute 1920ish, well, end of the twenties boyish bob. She had an eighteen-inch waist, rosy red cheeks, twinkling blue eyes and coal black hair. They told her that she needed to let her hair grow so she’d look older. She was kicked out of nurse’s training several times.

LC: Because—

PW: Oh, she dated an intern and that was a no-no in those days.

LC: Right, they had rules.

PW: She didn’t do anything really bad.

LC: Sure.

PW: She was just sort of full of it. The superintendent of nurses gave her car fare to get home, beat the mail that said she was being kicked out, that kind of thing.

LC: To beat the mail.

PW: You know, she said, “Your saving grace is you’re a good nurse Miss Schieffelin.” Her name was Schieffelin.

LC: Her first name?

PW: Emily, E-M-I-L-Y.

LC: Okay.

PW: So, I probably caught the bug to travel from Mom because when she graduated, she wanted to go to Cape Town, South Africa.

LC: What was driving that?

PW: She wanted to be a nurse there.

LC: Had she read about it or do you have any idea?

PW: I guess so because she applied. She learned from them that they only took British nurses. So, that stopped that and she started the first emergency room in
Rochester, New York, when she was probably in her twenties. She demanded the same salary as the OR (operating room) nurse. They said, you know, that was pretty cheeky.

LC: I’ll bet.

PW: She said, “Well, if I’m going to take on the responsibility and set up the OR I think I deserve it,” and they gave it to her. So she was spunky is what I’m trying to say.

LC: She definitely had some jets. (Laughing)

PW: Yeah, yeah she did. Then she met my father and they got married in 1936. She continued to be a, before the age of ICUs (intensive care units), she was a private duty nurse. There were a few surgeons that were in Rochester that thought she was top notch, so she was busy most of the time.

LC: Any issues with her continuing to work after she was married?

PW: No, as a matter of fact, my father was in an auto-accident when I was in seventh grade. He had five discs fused and he was in a body cast for six months, so the income was provided by Mom. Mom worked most of the time when I was little.

LC: Did she continue to work as you grew up?

PW: Yes.

LC: Wow.

PW: Yes, she worked through high school. She worked—in fact, she didn’t retire until around 1976 and then she came to live with me.

LC: Wow.

PW: Yeah. She was revered for her, you know, nursing.

LC: She sounds like somebody with some serious grit.

PW: Yeah, she did. She wanted to be on the New York stage. My grandmother was the last of thirteen Irish Catholics in the United States. All the other twelve had been born in Ireland, County Cork area. She said, “No daughter of mine is going to try the boards little hussy.” (Laughing)

LC: (Laughing)

PW: But my grandfather had walked a tight rope across the main street of Tioga, Pennsylvania. He had an operatic voice. He had a flare for music. He was very extroverted and I think he was an influence on my mother. So when the word came down she was not to go to New York and be an actress, my grandfather, she was still in high
school. He sent her for elocution lessons and she was very good. She used to give readings to some of the people in Rochester, some of the clubs. We were best friends and I used to call her Sarah. I’d say to her when she would start to speak or pronounce something or go into some recitation like *Casey at the Bat* and her eyes would twinkle. I’d look to her and I’d say, “Is Sarah coming out?” and that meant Sarah Bernhardt.

LC: Bernhardt, yes.

PW: She’d just nod her head and her eyes would twinkle. She had a great gift of drama. I think some of that rubbed off on me. (Laughing)

LC: Well, it sounds like she had—it probably did and we’ll go there in a little bit, but it sounds like she had a lot of self confidence too.

PW: Yeah, I think she did. I can remember when I was little, we’d be going around the house and she’d teach me songs like “Frere Jacques”, you know. So I was interested in different cultures. When I was old enough to go to the library, she’d take me every two weeks and she’d get books and I’d get books and that continued my whole life. So I’ve been a voracious reader. I read about China and the Far East and everything was fascinating to me and I bet someday I’m going there.

LC: Is that right, you really literally thought that, “Wow, I’d like to go there”?

PW: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Wow.

PW: That whole inquisitive, I guess I’m a generalist, I get turned on by everything.

LC: Right.

PW: I think some people are very focused on one thing and they do extremely well and can’t stand distraction of other things. I’m not one of them. I have to have fifteen balls in the air all the time and then hit a crisis when they’re all due and then it resolves.

LC: So you’re omnivorous.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Okay.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Did that carry through to you as a student?
PW: Yes.

LC: Or were you kind of bored by the plotting, nature of elementary and schoolwork?

PW: I guess I was bored to some extent because the nuns had to sit on three or four of us that were a bit disruptive in class. (Laughing) At one time in I think it was seventh grade, they took all the kids that had a lot of energy and inquisitive and they settled us with learning the minuet. We did it for a June graduation.

LC: You may have been the last people in the western world to have to learn that, I’m just guessing. (Laughing)

PW: (Laughing) Yeah, I think it was all designed to bring our energy down to an acceptable level.

LC: Probably. So, you were attending Catholic schools then?

PW: Yes.

LC: Was this in Rochester?

PW: Yes.

LC: Okay.

PW: Yes, it was Our Lady of Mercy High School. It was Good Counsel, Our Lady of Good Counsel Elementary School. Then I went into Niagara University. So it was Franciscans to Mercy to Vincentians as far as our educators were concerned.

LC: Now, what kind of a student were you?

PW: I was a good student.

LC: What were the best things, what were the things that were—?

PW: I got one hundreds in history and geography. (Laughing)

LC: Okay, so you’re batting that out of the park.

PW: Yeah.

LC: What about science?

PW: Well, I went into nursing, so I was okay in science. I had trouble with chemistry. I liked biology. I used to do the drawings for biology. Let’s see, well, at the same time, my father thought I should be a concert pianist. So I was enrolled at the Eastman School of Music. Monday nights, you know, I would ride the bus into downtown Rochester to the Eastman conservatory. I’d have a half an hour of music
theory and then I’d have an hour wait where I’d go and listen to the philharmonic practicing and then I’d go for my piano lessons. Then on Saturdays, my teacher would bring all her students in and we would play for each other. She would give us a little synopsis of the various composers. Then we would go to—quarterly, we would play for all the faculty and if you came out of that alive, then you went to Kilborn Hall, which was a recital hall, was very beautiful. You played on a concert grand. Then the next semester was the same procedure and if you came out of that okay, then you went to the Eastman theatre and played on a super grand. I remember being in my Mary-Janes in the Patten Leather shoes, my hands sweating going to this enormous grand piano on the Eastman theatre stage and playing. So I mean, that’s sort of how I grew up through grammar school.

LC: You said your dad wanted you to be a performer.
PW: Yes.

LC: A professional.
PW: Yes.

LC: How were you feeling about that?
PW: I liked music, but I didn’t have the goods. I found that out probably very quickly because in third-fourth grade in my theory lessons, there were kids who were—we would get eight measures and be asked to finish it and cord it.

LC: Okay.
PW: They were coming back with classical pieces that were highly advanced, they had perfect pitch. I thought, I’m struggling with this. I’m never going to be what my father wants. So a couple of Saturdays when I was supposed to be at my rehearsals, I walked all the way from downtown Rochester home so I wouldn’t have to go back. My mother took pity on me because I wanted to go ice-skating and whip around the Genesee River on my skates. So I knew pretty early. Other things came easy to me, but that was my first stumbling block where I wasn’t going to be one of the leaders.

LC: It sounds like you had a lot of energy corked up to be doing other things than sitting at a piano.
PW: Yeah, yeah. I can remember when I was probably in fourth grade, I would take my father’s old Remington typewriter. I would sit down at the kitchen table and create short stories. So the writing bug hit me when I was very little.

LC: Still have any of those?

PW: Yeah, no.

LC: No?

PW: No.

LC: Too bad.

PW: I think I have one that I wrote as a freshman in high school. It was sort of an autobiography and I think I got an A on it. It was sort of funny. You know, I wrote about a dance recital that I was in at the Masonic Temple. Of course the nuns threw a holy fit that I was in the Masonic Temple performing.

LC: Yeah, that doesn’t work very well.

PW: No. I had a conga outfit and as I remember, I was in third or fourth grade and I was chubby. I had long brown curls. I had this conga skirt, which was open in the front with ruffles and wild pants. It was a red pattern and this long conga skirt that went down to the floor behind me and then like a bra halter. My father said to me, “Go up to the foot lights Pat,” and he said, “Turn around and shake it for all your worth.” I did that, but it was the closing finale with all the students that went from beginning level up through advanced high school. I stopped the show and everybody was roaring and I was asked not to come back. (Laughing) So that was one of my autobiographical experiences and the nuns gave me an A on it and thought it was funny, but then they talked to me about why I was at the Masonic Temple.

LC: Right, they were sort of caught between a rock and a hard place with that one. That probably provoked discussion, I can imagine. (Laughing)

PW: (Laughing) Yeah.

LC: But a good story nonetheless. Well, were you thinking as you went through high school about what was likely to come next? Were you parents driving for—?

PW: No, my parents weren’t driving it. I was driving it.

LC: Okay.
PW: I was probably in grammar school when I was writing to the US Navy for their brochures and their recruiting information.

LC: Why did you pick the Navy?

PW: Because my cousin was in the Navy.

LC: Sure.

PW: I liked the uniforms. I liked the idea of going to sea because I was a swimmer. I liked being around water.

LC: Okay, okay.

PW: I liked what they had to say and they gave me the requirements. So when I went into high school, I knew what course I should take and what electives I needed to get into a Bachelors of Science degree-nursing program.

LC: So you had this all planned out?

PW: I had it planned. (Laughing)

LC: (Laughing) I can believe it.

PW: Yeah. When I saw the pictures, I knew I was going to be Naval officer as well as a nurse. I knew from being a nurse’s aid in high school at St. Mary’s Hospital that there was no upward mobility for staff nurses to become a charged nurse and supervisor for years. It was boring. You were working with women all the time.

LC: Right.

PW: And I thought, not for me.

LC: Right. So you wanted the officer part of that as well?

PW: I wanted the officer part of it. I wanted to travel. I wanted to be in a system that you didn’t have to learn the paperwork and the rigmarole every time you went someplace. It was all systemized. So, I mean all that drove it.

LC: This is fairly unusual for women and we’re talking about the mid 1950s, even earlier.

PW: Well, it was in the 1940s. I graduated from grammar school in ’51.

LC: You were already writing away to the Navy?

PW: I was writing away to the Navy probably in ’50, ’51.

LC: Wow. When they would send you back material, how did you feel when that package arrived?
PW: Oh, I was excited. I thought, the Navy’s writing to me.
LC: Yeah, that’s right. Were you paying attention to broader world affairs too at all?
PW: Yup.
LC: Were you reading the newspapers and so on?
PW: I wasn’t so much reading the papers, but we listened to the news over dinnertime.
LC: On the radio?
PW: Yeah. My uncle was state commander of the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars). He was the Monroe Country Democratic Party chairman. It was the usual thing when we got together for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Grandma had a long oak table with all kinds of leaves that went all the way into the living room.
LC: Sure.
PW: We would gather together and the fun was arguing politics.
LC: Oh, is that right?
PW: And affairs of the day. There was some—my grandfather was a dyed in the wool democrat. He voted a straight party line. Of course, some of the son-in-laws were not and then we got into it. It got so heated that Grandpa had a huge penny jar and all the grandchildren would play poker after dinner. Eventually somebody lost and would start to cry. So the father’s would take us to a bowling alley to let off steam. Then we’d come back and have sandwiches and argue politics some more. Then about nine o’clock, we’d hug each other, laugh, and go home. So, politics and world affairs were always in my life.
LC: That sounds like a pretty good holiday.
PW: Yeah.
LC: Let me ask a little bit about your uncle. You’ve mentioned him one or two times and his post in the VFW there in Rochester. What was his military background?
PW: He was a Seabee.
LC: Okay.
PW: He was in World War II. He went to Hawaii and I think he was in UDT, Underwater Demolition.
LC: Okay.

PW: He had three little boys that were a year apart and his wife wrote to
President Roosevelt and said, “I can’t do this alone. I want my husband home.” He came
home.

LC: Really?

PW: That’s the story I hear.

LC: (Laughing)

PW: He sent me a grass skirt from Hawaii. I was the oldest girl of the cousins
and I was sort of spunky and he liked me. So I think in a sense I was sort of his little girl.
He always—we had a special relationship.

LC: What was his name Pat?

PW: His name was Leonard L. Shieffelin, S-C-H-I-E-F-F-E-L-I-N.

LC: Did he remain in the Reserves or anything?

PW: No.

LC: Okay.

PW: No, I think he continued his service through the VFW and the Democratic
Partyship and he worked for the post office.

LC: Oh, okay. Did he ever hold elective office?

PW: No.

LC: Okay. So he was like a behind the scenes part of the old school probably.

PW: Yes, yes.

LC: (Laughing)

PW: He was on the radio one day when my mother was working and the patient
said, “Emily, is that your brother?” She said, “Yes.” They said, “Why is he speaking in
dem’s and dos’s?” My mother said, “He’s a very educated and knowledgeable man, but
he knows who he’s talking to. He’s talking to the common folk.”

LC: Interesting.

PW: Yeah.

LC: I think that skill probably continues down to this day.

PW: (Laughing)

LC: People kind of talk down a little because they want the credibility.
PW: Right.

LC: Well, what year did you graduate from high school?

PW: I graduated from high school in 1955.

LC: Let me ask a timeline question. This is something I hope I’ll be able to do as we go along. Were you aware of, for example, the McCarthy issues in Washington and all of that?

PW: Yes.

LC: Did that kind of creep into the discussions that your family would have?

PW: Yes.

LC: Do you remember your take on all that?

PW: I think originally we thought he was doing a good thing because communism was such a bad thing. I don’t know if what I’m saying is hindsight creeping in, but I think his credibility I remember was tarnished and everybody thought, oh, we all fell for that hook line and sinker. I don’t know if my questioning our government and what’s going on took seed then because it does. You know, I have a great deal of difficulty with some of our leaders, which I think is patriotic.

LC: Well, probably healthy anyway.

PW: Yeah, yeah.

LC: I think that’s—isn’t that what the Founders intended, that we all be sort of skeptical?

PW: Yes, I think so.

LC: So, in selecting the college that you went to, what were the driving forces? You’ve talked about that you were interested in getting into the Navy.

PW: Right, but I knew

LC: But what—

PW: Oh, go ahead. I’m sorry.

LC: I was going to ask why you chose Niagara for example?

PW: I chose Niagara because I didn’t want to be home. I wanted to go away.

LC: I see, okay.

PW: I chose it because it was a Catholic school.

LC: This is over by Buffalo? Is it in Buffalo?
PW: Yeah, it’s right on the Niagara gorge, sits right on the gorge. [Nearer to Niagara Falls, NY]

LC: Wow, gorgeous.

PW: Yeah, it was gorgeous.

LC: Absolutely fabulous.

PW: I picked it because I had gone to a girl’s private school. I wanted to be with some boys and the ratio was nine to one, boys.

LC: Yeah, that works.

PW: Yup. So I applied and I got accepted. I wanted to be able to get home when I wanted to get home. Interestingly enough, I also wrote a letter to Georgetown. I wanted to become a foreign correspondent with a minor in, I wanted it in diplomacy and journalism. I wanted to be a foreign correspondent. They wrote me a nice letter back and said there was one scholarship available and it was highly competitive. So I figured I wasn’t going to get that. So, I went with what I thought would be exciting and interesting.

LC: Did the Navy play any role in your first couple of years at the university?

PW: Yes.

LC: Can you tell me about that?

PW: Yeah. You asked me why I picked Niagara and I told you I had done my research. I knew they were an NLN, National League for Nursing, accredited university, college of nursing. So I picked it with that in mind.

LC: Why was that important?

PW: Because the Navy [Nurse Corps] I think required that.

LC: Oh, okay.

PW: As it turned out in my junior year, they started the Navy Nurse Corps candidate program and Dottie Eaton was the Navy Nurse Corps recruiter in Buffalo. She used to come with the aviators from the Niagara Falls or Navy Reserve base. She had been a flight nurse and I thought how exciting. So every time they come on campus, I had to go talk to Dottie. Well, then my junior year, we came up with or the Navy came up with a scholarship program. I applied and got it. I think there were four other kids in my class that applied and got it.
LC: How big was the class?
PW: I think we had twenty-nine nurses that graduated.
LC: All gals?
PW: All gals. I mean, guys didn’t come into nursing until maybe the ‘60s.
LC: Until much later.
PW: Yeah. So we were sort of different and we were all excited. We wanted to get our dress whites and appear at graduation, take off our graduation gown and you know, appear like the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) guys in the Army. But we couldn’t get our uniforms, so they just announced it.
LC: Oh.
PW: We were sort of the first ones in the candidate class.
LC: This would’ve been your graduation year, 195—
PW: June ’59.
LC: ’59. Okay.
PW: So lets see. What’d you ask me before that? Oh, so anyway, I applied in my junior year and got it. I was considered an enlisted person. I think I was in HA when I went, which is a Hospitalman Apprentice. They paid a room and board, books, tuition and gave us a salary of a hospital apprentice. So they started in May of 1958. Then in December of 1959 before we graduated, we were commissioned as Ensigns in the Navy, officers, which created some hard feelings from some of the people that were from three year schools that didn’t get that or weren’t candidate students. They figured that a Bachelors of Science nurses at that time didn’t have enough experience to know what they were doing. Here we were getting a six-month jumpstart on being an officer. So we had that to contend with. There was some reality to the criticism.
LC: Why was the program—I mean, as you think back, what was the utility of structuring the program that way?
PW: They needed nurses.
LC: Okay, so they just wanted you in.
PW: Sure.
LC: Without letting in—
PW: Remember, we had Korea and I guess Vietnam was probably, you know, I think we had some people in Vietnam in the early ‘60s as advisors.

LC: Yes, that’s true.

PW: They needed nurses and the program was your senior year. I mean, I started in my junior year. The agreement was for the scholarship. I did two years on active duty. Well, I would’ve anyway and I knew I was going that direction, so why not apply. So then we were asked what duty stations we want and I got my first choice out in San Diego, which thrilled me. We had eight weeks of officer indoctrination at Newport, Rhode Island, where all the nurses across the United States who’d been candidate students came. I can’t remember, but I think we had a class somewhere around fifty-nine.

LC: Let me stop you there and go back because I want to ask a couple of more questions about your time in the candidate class as a senior. Tell me a little bit more if you do remember Pat about the recruiter, Dottie. What was her last name?

PW: Dottie Eaton.

LC: Eaton.

PW: Yup.

LC: Did she talk about her own career and what kind of things did she light up for you about the Navy? I’m interested in her.

PW: Well, she couldn’t talk too much to me because her role was there to recruit.

LC: You were already kind of in the bag.

PW: I would always talk to her as we were going between classes or to the student center. It was time limited.

LC: Sure.

PW: My cousin was flying with the reserve squadron over [at the Niagara Falls Air Base where she worked in Buffalo]. My father had gone up with the Blue Angels and shot footage, which he gave to Pensacola. My cousin could’ve been court marshalled for that stunt.

LC: Oh, boy.
PW: But I was talking to her about flying [and] her flight nursing and I thought I was going to go towards flight nursing. What interested me was Dottie was probably as tall as I am. I’m 5’10”. She was a very pretty blonde with blue eyes. She was a lady.

LC: Right. Now when you say that, for someone who doesn’t get your reference, can you just explain what you mean?

PW: By lady?

LC: Mm-hmm.

PW: Well, I don’t know, some of it’s hind sight and some of it’s reputation. I think women who went into the military would maybe not such a hot reputation and I think nurses get that prejudice too. You know, they think you’re a nurse and you see everything and so you’re a hot ticket.

LC: Hot ticket, right.

PW: You’ve been around the block so to speak. I don’t think that’s true. I remember one of the things that Dottie said to us when we get our orders to go to Newport and then to San Diego. She said, “Remember, you’re ladies.” She said, “Let the packers pack everything for you and don’t junk up your car.” She said, “Only take what you need and put it in the trunk and travel like ladies.”

LC: Was she trying to tell you to sort of carry yourself as, you know, with pride? Was that part of what she was saying?

PW: Yeah, but she didn’t come out and say that.

LC: Sure.

PW: I mean, she carried herself that way. I’m going to throw this in because it’s in my head now.

LC: Okay.

PW: But in ’63 to ’65, I can get out my book and look at it again, but I was a Navy recruiter in Buffalo. I was going back to my home university at Niagara. At one time, half of the junior class wanted to go into the Navy because they saw me come in with the Marines and their dress uniform. I was in my dress blues. I was driving a silver blue convertible. I, you know—they saw me as being whoa. So they were all applying to go in the Navy.
LC: That’s really interesting. I mean, if you think about that time period and you know, women sort of, you know, looking for ways to kind of self-actualize and have a career and be respected on their own independently.

PW: Right.

LC: Yeah, I could see how that could work. (Laughing)

PW: Yeah, you know. At that time, the scholarship program was increased to two years of education. So they had their junior and senior years paid for and the obligation became three years if you had two years of education. I finally had so many applications to come in the Navy that I had to call a meeting in the student center. I remember talking to the kids and saying, “You know, this sounds very exciting and glamorous and I can see why you think that. I was in your seat, you know, years ago, and I’m only twenty-six or seven years old.” So I said, “You have to think about what’s going to happen in the next two to three to four years.” I said, “You have an obligation to do.” The Navy at that time, if you got married, you couldn’t be in.

PW: I said, “Some of you may want to get married. The Navy won’t have you paying the money back if you don’t do the time,” which a lot of parents thought was absolutely ridiculous. They offered to pay the money back if their kids didn’t, you know, fulfill the obligation.

LC: Right.

PW: But that’s the way it was. Some of the kids withdrew after I had my little heart to heart with them.

LC: Well, and you probably did them a service in some ways.

PW: Yeah, because it was serious business.

LC: Well and also by that time probably Pat, you were also clear that things were likely to occur in Southeast Asia. I don’t know how much of that you had on your mind.

PW: I don’t think I was thinking about that to be honest with you.

LC: Okay, okay. But it’s interesting about the internal regulations.

PW: Right. I was on recruiting duty—lets see, I reported to Buffalo twenty-eight August 1964.

LC: Okay.
PW: I reported to the Sanctuary three January ’67. So it was in the ‘60s when Vietnam was an issue.

LC: Well, let’s go back to Newport and your eight weeks of training there. Now, am right in thinking this is the Women’s Officer School?

PW: It’s called Women Officer School.

LC: Okay.

PW: There was sixteen weeks for the WAVE (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service), Women Auxiliary Voluntary Service is what that came from. They were WAVE officers, but they did eight weeks as officer candidates enlisted, and then they did eight weeks as Ensigns. We couldn’t talk to them.

LC: Why was that?

PW: We couldn’t go beyond the dividing door in the quarters when they were officer candidates.

LC: Because they—

PW: Because of the enlisted officer divide.

LC: Wow.

PW: Yeah. It was serious business and we thought it was kind of stupid, but it’s the way it went.

LC: Right.

PW: So what we did was, and our uniforms were hysterical. They were the old gray and white seersucker. They had a collar, which we put our devices on. Then they had very dark blue, almost black tie, which we tied that went in the front. Then it had blue plastic buttons that went down the front. They had I think an anchor on them. Then we had like a narrow belt and we wore which we called our boon-dockers. They were like granny boots. We called them boon-dockers or granny boots like grandma’s used to wear. They laced up and they had sort of a high clunky heel.

LC: These were not high fashion in 1959. (Laughing)

PW: Oh no, oh, no. You know, and the skirt was somewhat full. Then we had a garrison cap, which was like a fore ‘n aft cap that we wore on our heads. It was like a work uniform. We used to get up in the morning, go to breakfast at the BOQ (bachelor officer’s quarters) and then we’d get in formation on the tarmac by the quarters. We’d
march to school. The school was, I think it was two floors. It was right on Narragansett Bay. So you could see the submarines and the destroyers going in and out. We had class from eight o’clock until I guess eleven thirty.

LC: Okay.

PW: Then we marched for lunch. Then we could fall out and go to the quarters. Then we were marched back to classes and I think classes went one to four. Then after class, you were free to do what you wanted to do unless you had the duty. The duty was in four hour increments and we manned the watch room, which we kept the log, answered the phone, and everything had to be done just right. I mean, if you didn’t write your log right, you got gigs. If your bed didn’t match up, we had those collegiate bedspreads that had stripes and you had to match them up, miter the corners and stripes had to match. I remember the only time in my life I slept without disturbing the covers is when we slid under and didn’t move all night so we wouldn’t have to redo it.

LC: (Laughing) Pat, for someone again who wouldn’t get this reference, what was a gig?

PW: A gig was, it was like a demerit. You accumulated so many gigs over the course of a week and then your staff advisor would add them all up and you would be sanctioned. You couldn’t go on liberty.

LC: Okay.

PW: So nobody wanted to get gigs because we wanted to party on the weekend.

LC: Where would you go on the weekends when you were allowed?

PW: A lot of the times we would go to the junior officer’s club on base which was called the Datum, D-A-T-U-M, and I think that goes back to a piece of information, datum.

LC: Okay.

PW: There was happy hour and we’d sing and meet guys and hope to get a date for the weekend. Oh, sometimes we went into Boston with kids who were from the Boston area and spend a weekend with their families. I don’t think the Newport Jazz Festival was on at that era, but yeah, we’d go downtown for dinner. We’d shop because it was a historic kind of a place.

LC: Sure, yeah.
PW: Sometimes you had the weekend duty. So you didn’t go too many places and we had to study.

LC: I mean, were you, it sounds like you were kind of making friends with the others in the class.

PW: Oh, yeah.

LC: Kind of hanging together.

PW: Oh, we hung together real well.

LC: Do you remember some of those gals?

PW: Yeah, I remember—well Anne Curry Gilfillan is a friend here in Florida. We’ve been friends for over forty-six years.

LC: That’s amazing.

PW: She came from the University of Alabama. Then there were three girls from the University of Hawaii.

LC: Is that right?

PW: They went home on leave with me.

LC: Really?

PW: Because they were going to St. Albans and they couldn’t get back to Hawaii. We only had I think ten days before our first duty station. So I remember Lee Sakai, Ruth Horiuchi and Jana Iwata.

LC: So it sounds like at least two of those women were of Japanese ancestry?

PW: Three.

LC: All three of them?

PW: Yeah.

LC: How did they get along in the group?

PW: Great, because they taught us how to hula.

LC: Okay. So they—(Laughing)

PW: (Laughing)

LC: They pitched right in with that.

PW: They pitched right in. They taught us how to hula. They sent to Sears in Honolulu. Those who wanted to have Hawaiian muu muus ordered them and we went
sloshing around the quarters in our Hawaiian muu muus. They taught us how to sing the
Hawaiian war chant in Hawaiian.

LC: Right.
PW: So they were fun.
LC: Any latent resistance or antagonism toward them on the basis of their
ancestry?
PW: Didn’t feel an iota.
LC: Is that right.
PW: Un-huh.
LC: What about—I mean, not necessarily you, but from the atmosphere of the
environment, any—?
PW: I didn’t sense any of it.
LC: Wow.
PW: They were part of our class and they were fun.
LC: Cool. That’s really quite astounding for that year for this would be 1959.
PW: Yeah, I mean it may have been there, but I didn’t have a sense of it. Then I
took them home on leave. We invited the whole neighborhood in. I mean, we had drinks
and we had food and they did the hula and we played music and it was just funny.
LC: It sounds like a blast.
PW: It was a blast.
LC: (Laughing)
PW: Then Kay Wilhelmy was a friend. She went with me and my parents after
graduation to Boston. We went aboard the USS Constitution and we were in our dress
whites. So we were saluted and got all that razzmatazz.
LC: Your parents felt how when that happened?
PW: Well, I think my father was pretty proud.
LC: I can imagine.
PW: Yeah.
LC: I bet he was.
PW: Yeah.
LC: I just want to clarity Pat, you didn’t have any brothers or sisters?
PW: No. I was an only child.
LC: Right. You were the apple of his eye I’m sure.
PW: Um yeah, but Mom and Dad both worked. I cut the lawn. I painted the garage. I cooked dinner. Yeah, I scrubbed the floors.
LC: Yeah, they got some work out of you.
PW: Well I mean, I don’t think—it was a matter of we all pitched in. I think that’s a good thing. I think that worked. I think I put that on my bio, that work ethic stood me in good stead.
LC: You did mention that and it’s an important piece. I think someone listening to this might extract some of that because you were involved in all kinds of things, you were, you know, doing well in school, you were directed. You know, it sounds like you had a great period of growing up and you were ready for the world when you met it.
PW: Yeah, I think so.
LC: Yeah, yeah.
PW: I think so. My mother used to tell me, “I didn’t worry about you. I didn’t have to discipline you a lot. You knew where you were going, you were self disciplined.” Maybe that came out of the harsh nuns. I mean, in first grade, I loved my first grade nun, but one day, I used to walk four miles back and forth to school everyday and it was no big deal.
LC: That’s just unimaginable now of course you know that.
PW: Yeah, but I mean, we used to walk—the snow banks, the snow piles would push the snow up between the sidewalk and the street and we’d pack it down and make trails to walk to school on top of the snow banks. (Laughing)
LC: (Laughing) Were there any nuns during that period that you particularly remember as tough?
PW: Oh yeah, yeah. There was one nun in second grade we didn’t like at all. I mean, she could be a strict disciplinarian. My first grade teacher I loved, but I came home at noon one day and I had ruler marks on my knuckles.
LC: Ouch.
PW: My mother said, “You walked a mile home and those marks are still there.”

She called Mother Superior and boy, she went to town. She said, “I didn’t send my kids to Catholic school to fear God. I send them to love Him.” I thought, well, good for Mom.

LC: And she stood up for you?

PW: Yeah.

LC: Yeah, that makes a lot of difference.

PW: Of course, my father wasn’t Catholic, so if I did something wrong, he’d go up to my mother, “Well there goes your Catholic education for you.”

LC: Oh, is that right? He was not. What was he?

PW: No, I think his family had been Methodist, but he decided, you know, he was a moral and a good man, but he decided that wasn’t for him, that stuff. Later when I was in eight grade after his back surgery, he became friends with one of our Parish priest that he was going to convert, but he never did.

LC: It sounds like he was interesting thinking guy.

PW: He was. He used to sit down with his typewriter when he was home on the weekend and he would write letters to the editor. It would take him all day with a dictionary right at his side. He would write relevant letters on issues of the day. He didn’t do it all the time, but he did it when he thought it was pertinent.

LC: Do you remember whether any of those were ever published?

PW: Oh, yeah.

LC: Were they really?

PW: Mm-hmm.

LC: Which paper would it have been?

PW: The Democrat & Chronicle, Rochester.

LC: Wow.

PW: We had two papers. We had the morning paper, which was the Democrat and then the evening paper was the Times Union. So I can’t remember which he got published in, but I think it was the Democrat. Yeah. Then he would get on his high horse. I mean, he studied for his naturalization and became a US citizen, but we’d go to Canada in the summers. My Aunty May and Uncle George owned a lot of land, which
was I think six miles worth of concession and they owned a lot. They would—each one
of their children and grandchildren got a farm when they got old enough and got married.

LC: Wow.

PW: Some of that land was flooded during the St. Lawrence Seaway.

LC: Oh, during the construction?

PW: Yeah.

LC: Which would’ve been in the late 1950s, yeah?

PW: Yeah, I think so. I was in college when they opened up the seaway and
Mom and Dad went up and they thought they were going to get to see this big gush of
water and it was a trickle. They were disappointed.

LC: I’ll bet. (Laughing) I’ll bet.

PW: But Aunty May and Uncle George, when we went over, they were talking
about they had just gotten electricity.

LC: Oh, is that right? Wow.

PW: If we wanted to go to the john at night, we’d wait for the Canadian Pacific
to come through and here it rattle and then we’d run out. We’d use the pot underneath
the bed so we didn’t have to use the outhouse. (Laughing)

PW: My father, you know, things went on in the United States he didn’t like
because he’d talk about going back to Canada, that was always—

LC: Oh yeah, yeah. I have a little of that in the family too.

PW: Yeah and he’s buried in Canada. That was his wish.

LC: Oh, up in the family area up there?

PW: Yeah, in Cornwall.

LC: Well, let me ask about going out to San Diego at the end of your training.

Now this was part of the package, you knew this was the next step.

PW: I knew this was coming.

LC: Okay.

PW: One interesting thing that may be relevant.

LC: Sure.

PW: One of the girls and I were talking my senior year when I had orders to San
Diego and they said, “Why did you go in the Navy?” I said, “Why not?” They said,
“Well, to me, it’s like going in the convent. You’re going to be so regimented and
everybody’s going to tell you what to do and it’s all going to be authoritative.” I looked
at them like they were nuts. I said, “It’s a great chance.” I said, “Everywhere you go,
you’re going to have rules and regulations.” I said, “Look at the places I’ll be able to
go.” But that was a mindset for one of my classmates.

LC: Interesting.

PW: You know, and I think some of the guys looked at it like the military’s not a
place for a woman.

LC: Did anybody ever say that to you or something similar?

PW: No, no.

LC: Did they sort of think, hmm, maybe this gal’s a little too high powered and a
little too independent?

PW: Oh, I think that came along later on.

LC: Okay.

PW: But I was always 5’10” and on the heavy side. I always had to fight my way
to meet the Navy criteria.

LC: What was it? I mean, do you remember how stringent it was and—?

PW: It was 5’10”. I had to stay around 170. If I got above that, I could be out.

LC: One hundred and seventy?

PW: Yeah.

LC: Okay.

PW: I was always sweating it.

LC: Yeah, that’s pretty strict. They could actually discharge you?

PW: Yeah.

LC: Hmm. How often did you have to check in on that? Did they give you a
physical every year or how does it—?

PW: Well, we had our initial physical, so that was a sweat. Then December of
our senior year, we were going to be commissioned, so we had to go through all that
rigmarole. We were discharged as enlisted. We came in as an officer. So we had to put
the standards then.

LC: Yes.
PW: Initially, we had to go through a battery of tests. I think they were academic and psychological. My mother told me after I got on active duty; the FBI came around and talked to the neighbors about my character.

LC: Oh, is that right?

PW: Yeah.

LC: So they were doing some kind of security clearing on you.

PW: Yup, yeah. We had, I forget what it was called. It was like minimum-security clearance. We had to know some of that stuff. If we had patients that were going under anesthesia or [receiving mind altering drugs or that] were highly toxic, we had to be careful.

LC: When you went out to San Diego, how did you go?

PW: Oh, that was a lot of fun. We went by car. My roommate, Donna Rehler, went in with me and she was driving. I was the navigator and I most of the time had my feet sticking out the passenger window and a map on my lap. I remember going from Buffalo to Ohio. We went down to Arkansas and over the mountains. I think we went across Route 66.

LC: Route 66.

PW: It was Route 66.

LC: Sure. Did you pick that because you sort of had heard about it or—?

PW: I think it was the combination that we needed to get there, but let’s see stuff.

LC: Okay. (Laughing)

PW: I remember going through, you know, the canyons out west.

LC: Sure.

PW: And the monuments. I was astounded as we went across the border into California. We were in the dunes. There were deserts. There were actual dunes and I didn’t think those existed.

LC: You’d never seen them before.

PW: Never seen them before.

LC: Right. What was it like when you arrived and where exactly did you check in?
PW: We checked in with the officer of the day. Then we went up to see our chief nurse. Well, first of all we got there early enough. Then we had to live off base. So we got a really cool apartment. The hospital was across the canyon and we lived in a development or a neighborhood called North Park. So I had to take the bus. I hadn’t learn to drive yet and Donna had a car. So I could ride with her, you know, if she was on the same shift as me, otherwise I took the bus. We lived on the first floor and we were about ten feet from a gorgeous swimming pool. Then upstairs, some of the other kids lived in upstairs apartments. There were some guys from the University of Michigan who were in the Navy ROTC program and they were taking journalism. So when we were off duty, we’d all congregate in my apartment because it was near the mailbox. We’d have communal breakfast on a Saturday morning and hang around and drink or whatever, college kid stuff.

LC: Do you remember any of those Michigan guys, U of M guys?
PW: Um, I know there was a fellow named Pete. I don’t remember their last names, no.

LC: But they were—where were they in their service? They were ROTC still—
PW: They were still in college.

LC: But they were out there for a semester or something or a summer?
PW: I think they were like say, I don’t know if they were considered officer candidates or what they were considered. But I think they were Navy students getting ready to be officers.

LC: Okay. Nice guys though?
PW: Yeah.

LC: Fun?
PW: Yeah.

LC: Fun to hang around?
PW: Yeah.

LC: I believe it.
PW: Then upstairs was Patty Luenberger and Alice Farrar. They had gone through Newport with us and those two kids were Navy enlisted WAVES before they became officers.
LC: Oh, really?
PW: Yeah. Of course, they were in their thirties. We were twenty-two.
LC: They were in their thirties?
PW: They were in their thirties. They had done that much enlisted time. I think they were late twenties, early thirties.
LC: Wow.
PW: No, maybe I’m wrong, maybe they were mid-twenties.
LC: But they seemed old.
PW: Yeah, I think they were twenty-seven, twenty-eight and we thought that was kind of old.
LC: I’ll bet.
PW: But they were a lot of fun. Now I’m still in touch with Patty. She became a commander in the Navy and got married and had a child.
LC: Wow.
PW: You might want to talk to her.
LC: Sure, absolutely.
PW: She’s a neat person.
LC: Absolutely I would.
PW: I still correspond with her.
LC: Great.
PW: Usually only at Christmas.
LC: Great. What was your work like at San Diego? What did you encounter on a daily basis there?
PW: Well, we had a month of orientation. Then we were cut lose and I was assigned to a general surgery unit. As I remember, it was a census of thirty.
LC: It was a what, I’m sorry?
PW: Census of thirty for the unit.
LC: Okay.
PW: The routine was you admitted patients one day. You did surgery the next, the day of surgery [and it alternated like that.]
LC: Okay.
PW: We sometimes would have twelve surgeries in one day, hernias, appendectomies. We had radical necks. We had gallbladders. We had gunshot wounds.

LC: Now apart from your experience as a nurse’s aid earlier and then probably some practicum work when you were in college, was this really your first go as a nurse?

PW: Oh, absolutely.

LC: Yeah, so this was the learning curve very steep I’m sure.

PW: Very steep. We also knew that some of the nurses who were there thought we were—they didn’t call us ninety day wonders, but it’s the concept of we got to be commissioned early. We didn’t have any experience under us. We didn’t know what we were doing. So there was a certain amount of it. It was the time of the three-year diploma school as versus the Bachelors of Science kids. The Bachelor of Science kids were becoming more numerous and the three-year schools are being phased out.

LC: Did they take any opportunity to kind of stick it to the newbie’s once in a while?

PW: I didn’t feel on duty that they stuck it to us. I just had the feeling that we had to really prove ourselves.

LC: You had to really what, I’m sorry?

PW: Prove ourselves.

LC: Oh, sure, okay.

PW: So my first tour of nights probably was about, well I don’t know, December of that year. We got to San Diego in September.

LC: So this is still in 1959?

PW: Yeah. I had four active units and I had four rehab. Now in the Navy, if you are not able to go back to full duty, then you stay aboard the base in a temporary duty and you’re assigned something at the hospital. So they would be on this rehab unit and they might come over to the main ward to get their medications or they needed a dressing change or something like that. So it was a lot of work.

LC: Yes.

PW: But the four units I had on night duty that were very active were general surgery, plastic and dental, and we had a burn unit with seventy percenters a couple of times.
LC: Wow.

PW: An orthopedic unit and a dirty surgery, which was colon, rectal, and infections.

LC: Okay.

PW: So as a young nurse, I covered all that and there was one corpsman on every unit.

LC: How many nurses when you were on?

PW: Me.

LC: You and one corpsman and that’s it.

PW: Right. I had me for the four units and one corpsman on each of the, we called them wards.

LC: Right.

PW: They were open wards.

LC: Right. So you were pretty much running that whole shift I’m thinking.

PW: Yes.

LC: Yeah, because that’s a lot of intensive hands on stuff.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Wow.

PW: Then we had to watch for officer’s birthdays. I remember walking into the head, which is the Navy lingo for john. They were playing poker and had fifths of whiskey. Yeah, that’s not acceptable behavior. So I just took the whiskey and I poured it down the drain and said, “Back to bed fellows.” They said, “We’re going to report you to the command. You destroyed personal property.” I said, “Be my guest.”

PW: (Laughing) Yeah, probably not a good strategy.

PW: Probably not a good thing for them to do. So they didn’t.

LC: But they were trying to pull one over?

PW: Yeah. Then also there were a couple of incidents as I remember of nurses who were making their rounds and found a corpsman hanging.

LC: Okay, so a suicide?

PW: Yeah.

LC: Okay.
PW: Stress. I don’t know what the reason was, but I know it occurred. So I always made rounds through the heads and around the wards to make sure everything was going smoothly. Part of that was, I had a very astute sense that our corpsmen were younger than we were. I think hospital corps school was sixteen weeks at that time. Then they were doing things that were quite amazing and I have utmost respect for them. Yeah, I didn’t let them get away with stuff.

LC: Right.

PW: But I was also loyal to them.

LC: Did that persist on?

PW: Yes.

LC: As time went on?

PW: Yes.

LC: Yeah, those guys did some amazing things.

PW: Yeah.

LC: I certainly heard.

PW: I mean, we have a lot of Congressional Medal of Honor winners who are Hospital Corps.

LC: Yes, that’s exactly right.

PW: Yeah. I remember—what was going on? I think Vietnam was starting up when I was at San Diego. I remember the kids saying to me, “You know, if we get orders to Vietnam, we’re going to not wear our caduceus,” which was their emblem and they wore it on their uniform. I said, “Why?” They said, “Well, the enemy will single us out. They’ll know who we are. We can save people, but if they get us, a lot of others will get lost.” I thought, hmm, that always stayed in my head.

LC: That’s interesting.

PW: Yeah.

LC: That they were thinking and talking about that even then.

PW: Yeah. Then, I guess it was my second year, Captain Todd who had been a prisoner of war, she was our chief nurse. She sent us an invitation to her wetting down party. Wetting down party in the Navy means you get a new stripe. You’re advanced.
You got a promotion and you wet down your stripes so they’re not so shiny and bright.
You wet them down.

LC: With?
PW: Drinks.

LC: Okay, that’s what I figured. (Laughing)
PW: (Laughing) I mean, you don’t literally put booze on your stripes, but—
LC: Right, but this is a metaphor for having a party.
PW: Yeah, yeah. Her invitation had a chicken coming out of an egg and it said, “My eagle has popped,” or something like that, hatched. She became a full captain. It was very interesting. She was—

LC: What was her first name, Pat?
PW: Edwina. She has some articles that came out about being a prisoner at war.
LC: Now where was she held, any idea? Do you know the background?
PW: I think it was Los Banos [in the Philippines]. Some people used to criticize her. In fact, [they said] she was a drinker, a boozer. She had beriberi and her gate was off, malnutrition. So I thought, you know, sometimes she got a bad rep. She called me in one day I guess after my first year. She said, “Miss Warner, I’m thinking about transferring you out of the surgical building,” which was a thousand patients of surgical people, twelve stories. “I’m thinking about sending you over to medicine.” I looked at her and I said, “Are you asking me Captain or are you telling me?” She looked at me. She said, “I’m asking you, what do you think this is about?” I mean, she was sort of forthright.

LC: Sure.
PW: I said, “I’d rather not go ma’am.” She said, “Okay. Give me a reason.” I said, “Because I did medicine almost exclusively when I was in nurse’s training for some reason.” I said, “I like surgery and I have the opportunity of learning so many different types because it’s such a thousand bed unit.” She says, “All right, then you’ll stay in surgery, but you will become a PRN (practicing registered nurse).” I thought, oh, what did I just do? Because a PRN was a float.

LC: For someone who—
PW: You didn’t have a specific ward. You had the whole building whenever they needed to fill a hole.

LC: So you could be stuck in any ward.

PW: I was.

LC: Okay.

PW: I was. The things that happened to me like I would—I thought, you know, I’m going to let my nails grow long. I’m going to color them. I won’t have to study anymore at night. Well, forget that, because I was studying the books every time I went to a new unit. I remember one day I went in and I was assigned to neurosurgery. The charge nurse was off and she covered two units of neurosurgery. One was the head unit, the craniotomy unit and the other was paraplegic. I thought, holy cow. The doctor was Dr. Fred Jackson who was also a neurosurgeon on the hospital ship with me. It was his routine to get you a quarter to seven at report and just throw the book at you with questions. The nurses would cry some of them. I thought, boy, that’s not going to happen to me. So I went in at six thirty to the unit and I learned the lab work and the meds and all the stuff I needed to know. He started that routine with me and I just fired the answers back at him.

LC: Because you were prepped.

PW: Yeah. He liked that.

LC: I’ll bet he did.

PW: The second day out, he asked me if I’d like to be his charge nurse. So I thought, well, I guess I did my homework and it paid off.

LC: What would charge nurse actually mean?

PW: You would be the nurse who called the shots for all the shifts.

LC: So you would be off the float, is that correct?

PW: Yeah.

LC: Then onto—

PW: We were all considered charge nurses on every shift because we had the ward.

LC: Okay.
PW: But if you were the charged nurse of a unit, it was more prestigious and it usually was reserved for a lieutenant JG (junior grade) or a lieutenant, sometimes a lieutenant commander.

LC: Your rank at this time was—?
PW: Ensign.
LC: Okay.
PW: Well, I guess I made JG pretty soon. So I might have been a JG.
LC: Okay.
PW: We called it JGs, a lieutenant junior grade. So I mean, it was a plum for me to be asked, but I knew I wouldn’t get it because there were people senior to me and also I was starting to request orders overseas. I wanted to move on. I had fun at San Diego, but I wanted to see the world.
LC: About what year was this, ’61?
PW: Well, I went to Guam in ’61. So it was probably ’60.
LC: Okay.
PW: I was also applying for regular Navy, which meant career, which was—
LC: Yeah, let me ask you about that. First of all, why were you asking for overseas placements? I mean, San Diego’s a pretty good assignment.
PW: Oh, it was a fun assignment too.
LC: You just were anxious to get more—
PW: I wanted to see it all. (Laughing) I wanted to do it while I was young enough I guess.
LC: Right. You were pretty young at this point, what, twenty-four or something.
PW: Let’s see. I was twenty-two in September of ’59 when I hit San Diego.
LC: Right.
PW: I left in May of ’61.
LC: Okay.
PW: So I was twenty-three when, yeah, twenty-three when I hit Guam.
LC: When did you get orders for Guam? Did you have them in hand a couple of months or—?
PW: Yeah, I think so. It was probably say April, March, February or March maybe.

LC: What were you going to be doing in Guam?

PW: Well, I didn’t know until I got there.

LC: Okay. How did you get out there?


LC: You and who else?

PW: Just me.

LC: I was going to say. (Laughing)

PW: I mean, I’m trying to think of any other—there were two nurses stationed on the ship. They were older and it was their theory that if you were being transported, you didn’t have to work as part of the ship’s company. So we got to, you know, we went to Hawaii as our first stop. We had a blast in Hawaii. Then we went onto Guam. So that was fun and I met people aboard that I liked. I’m trying to think, I don’t think any other nurses were coming in with me. But before I got my orders to Guam, I’d asked for Formosa. I was going to go to Taiwan with one of the other gals and then she changed her mind. I guess she got her orders and then they weren’t any more billets. Then I was going to go to the Philippines with some other friends and then I don’t know what really happened with that. Then I finally settled on Guam because it was a split tour. You did a year in Guam, a year in Japan. I got my orders to Guam. I think Captain Todd pulled strings for me to get them. She liked me. It was kind of unheard of for young junior officers to apply to go regular Navy and I didn’t know if I’d get it, but I did. I think she helped that process along too.

LC: Oh, is that right?

PW: I think so.

LC: What was involved in making that transition to career?

PW: Well, I mean, I figured that I had been on this course since grammar school. So why fiddle around? Might as well go regular Navy and protect my benefits because later on, there were nurses who came back from Vietnam and had maybe fifteen, sixteen
years in and they were rifted. They were reserve. They weren’t core people and they cut
back and so they were let go.

LC: So you wanted to be on the inside.

PW: Yeah, I wanted to—well, it was prestigious to be regular Navy.

LC: Oh, sure.

PW: To be, you know, one of the key people, but it also was job security.

LC: Was Captain Todd, I mean, she clearly took an interest in your career.

PW: Yup.

LC: But was she also something of a role model for you? Did she function that
way too on your end of it?

PW: Um, no. I thought she was a good chief nurse. I respected her as a prisoner
of war.

LC: Oh, sure.

PW: I thought she was smart. I had her again as a chief nurse in Portsmouth,
Virginia. She probably was instrumental in getting me recruiting duty. She liked me
then too. She was frank. I don’t think she put up with nonsense. I liked her, but there
were things about her that I didn’t think was good leadership.

LC: Was there anybody that you had come across by this point who you really
looked up to and thought, yeah, that’s what I want to do, that’s what I want to be? Did
you come across anyone like that?

PW: Well, um, I wanted to be a flight nurse. I thought because I was 5’10” and
always watching my weight, I wouldn’t get it. The Navy phased out their flight program
and it became an Air Force mission.

LC: Right.

PW: Then there were some nurses that were working in San Diego had been on
hospital ships. I thought that was exciting. So I was always picking their brain.

LC: So you’re running around learning from as many different people as you can.

PW: Yeah, but I was also partying. I mean, I’d go out and party all night and
come back on duty and not have any sleep.

LC: (Laughing)
PW: I mean that wasn’t just me. I mean, a lot of kids did that. There was—we’d get off. Captain Todd used to let us get off at [10:30 PM] on Wednesdays versus eleven so we could go to the Thirty Second Street Officer’s Club because it was nurses night. We could dance for an hour and that was always fun. Then Friday nights we went to MCRD (Marine Corps Recruit Depot), which was the Marine recruiting station. We’d see the sunset parade with the Marines that were graduating from their enlisted programs. Then we’d go to the club and have dinner, you know, and hope we’d meet somebody to go out with and we usually did.

LC: I’m sure.

PW: Then on Tuesday night, if you were off, you could go over to North Island, which was the Naval Air Station. The jets would be coming down the runway, but also the cookers were on the runway. You would pick your steak and they’d cook it for you. Then everybody would get salad and a baked potato and go in and eat together.

LC: Wow.

PW: So going over to North Island was a blast.

LC: It sounds like it.

PW: Then Friday nights after MCRD, we’d go to the Mexican village, which was sort of dubbed the unofficial officer’s club. It was a civilian [bar]. It was across San Diego Harbor and at that time, they didn’t have the San Diego Bridge, the Coronado Bridge. So Coronado was where the Naval Air Station was, you know, and the Hotel Del Coronado was pretty and the aircraft carriers would come in there.

LC: Wow.

PW: We would take the ferry over to Coronado to the Mex Village. Most of us would get a drink and we’d stand up and we’d sing and we’d meet people. It was lots of fun.

LC: It sounds like it. (Laughing)

PW: Then if you closed the place, you would catch the “nickel snatcher” back.

LC: Which was—?

PW: Which was a Navy yard boat and you paid a nickel. That’s why we called it the “nickel snatcher”.

LC: (Laughing)
PW: We’d get back on the other side and hop a ride from someplace. We’d go back on duty.

LC: Did you have check in and out regulations?

PW: No, no, no, no. We lived in private apartments.

LC: Oh, okay. So you were free as a bird outside of duty hours.

PW: Yup, yup. We kept a locker at the hospital where we changed into our uniforms so we weren’t contaminating our uniforms.

LC: Right. So you were prepared in advance again? (Laughing)

PW: Yeah, yeah. Then at that time, I was also taking flying lessons. I would take a bus out to Lindberg Field. Then I’d walk about a mile and there was an [ex] Air Force pilot. He was teaching me flying lessons.

LC: How did you arrange that, Pat?

PW: I just went out there and asked if I could take flying lessons.

LC: (Laughing)

PW: So they assigned me, his name was Dick Walter or something like that, tall, blonde, good looking. I had to study. We’d take off and we’d go out to Montgomery Field. We’d have coffee with the pilots around ten o’clock and that was fun because I was the only girl. Then we’d go out near El Cahon near the mountains and we’d learned to crab. He’d cut off the engine and stall out and I’d have to recover. Then we’d come back in somewhere, oh, I don’t know, around noon. So I was learning, you know, how to control the airplane, how to check it and stuff like that.

LC: Wow.

PW: But I didn’t have radio school and I was going out on the Lindberg Field airstrip in front of—well, the 880 was going. Ryan Aircraft was testing the 880 jet transport plane or not transport, I guess it was an airliner. So I sort of had to know what I was doing.

LC: Yes, so you didn’t kind of like knock into one of those.

PW: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Right. (Laughing)

PW: I didn’t have any radio school, which was a problem. Then I got my orders to Guam and I had to decide, you know, where my money was going. So I had about,
well I don’t know, nine or ten hours. I was getting ready to solo and I called it a day. But I had some patients on the surgical unit who were at North Island and they fixed it up that I would go through the ejection seat and the pressure chamber and the high altitude pressure chamber and be qualified to go up in jets. So I did that.

LC: Did you do it?
PW: Yeah. I got my...they called it an “oh my ass” card, which means you’ve gone through the ejection seat procedure. On the card it shows a pilot with a helmet and his chin strap hanging. His rear end’s up in the air and the seat of the pants is blown out. You color it in red and it’s your “oh my ass” card. It means, well anyway. (Laughing) Then I got my pressure chamber card. They took you up to something like, I don’t know, I think it was forty thousand feet.

LC: Yup.
PW: You sat around a pressurized room and there was a corpsman at the controls, window control, you know, like a see through window and they took you up and they told you to take off your oxygen mask. Then they instructed you to play cards or patty cake with a partner or whatever. That was to demonstrate what happens when you start to have anoxia, when you start to lose oxygen because you become a little bit fuzzy headed.

LC: Right. What happened to you?
PW: Well, I was sitting there and I guess the nurse in me was observing other people and one guy was getting ready to pass out. He was really getting goofy. So I got up out of my seat and went over and put the oxygen mask on him and signaled to the corpsman. The corpsman gave me a [signal] to go and I went back and they called—I mean, we went as far as we could go. I did fine. I didn’t have any problem. So that was that.

LC: Wow.
PW: Then when I got to Guam, I finagled a way up in an A3D2P, which was a heavy photographic bomber. (Laughing) I took up off from Guam and that was a whole funny incident.

LC: How many rides did you go on, the one?
PW: One. I was lucky to get one.

LC: Uh yeah, I’m thinking this wasn’t standard operating.
PW: No, no.

LC: You finagled this.

PW: The skipper might have been court marshaled. I mean, Navy nurses widdled their way to the top.

LC: Oh sure, absolutely.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Well at Guam, what was your living situation?

PW: We lived in quarters. I had one room. It had a connecting bath and there was a nurse on the other side of me. Then there was a nice big living room on the first floor with a bar. You stock your own.

LC: Sure.

PW: Then there was an ironing room and we had a Guamanian maid. She did up our uniforms for us. We ate in the hospital dining room. Then I used to go over to NAS, the Naval Air Station, because they had an Olympic pool. I used to do twenty-five laps over there to keep in shape.

LC: Sure.

PW: Then Friday night was happy hour at the Naval Air Station and most of us were dating pilots, so you know fun again.

LC: Yeah. (Laughing)

PW: (Laughing)

LC: How many gals were stationed there?

PW: Oh, I don’t remember. I would say twenty or thirty.

LC: Is that right?

PW: Yeah.

LC: How big was the facility that you were working at?

PW: It was a five-story hospital.

LC: So it was a serious instillation.

PW: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Who else was working there, Navy corpsmen?
PW: Oh yeah. Navy doctors, Medical Service Corps, corpsmen, lab techs. On Guam, I was assigned to work OB (obstetrics) in the nursery. So by the time I got out of there, I had delivered five babies myself.

LC: Is that right?

PW: Yeah. Typhoons, yeah typhoons occur in the Pacific.

LC: Yes.

PW: Typhoon Karen came through just after I left and devastated the island worse than World War II. So whenever we went into a typhoon condition, we’d go in condition one, two, three, four, like we do with hurricanes here.

LC: Yes.

PW: We would open up a unit at the hospital that was closed because women in their ninth month of pregnancy would go into early labor. So then I’d go over if somebody was admitted and I saw them through their delivery.

LC: So you would have a special unit ready for—?

PW: Created.

LC: Okay, whenever there was a typhoon warning?

PW: Yes. We had a regular OB unit with delivery rooms and everything, but if they were filled, we needed another unit for women to come in and be watched in case they went into early labor. Some of them could be, you know, before their babies were viable. So they needed watching.

LC: Sure, absolutely. I’m assuming that the patient population included civilians from Guam.

PW: Yes.

LC: Okay.

PW: Yes. I don’t remember if he was a civilian or if he was—I think maybe he was one of our sailors. But the corpsman called me on night duty and then again, once in a while, I would do a tour on the military wards at night. I had something like four or five units that I was following. The corpsman called me up and he said, “I think you need to come. Something’s going on.” So I went and here is this long twelve-inch roundworm, very alive, crawling out of a nasal gastric tube down in some guys [throat]. So you’re going to hear this in Vietnam, worms were part of the deal.
LC: Was this your first—?
PW: Overseas tour.
LC: Yeah, and your first encounter with such a beasty?
PW: Yeah.
LC: Yeah, that must’ve been pretty shocking.
PW: Yeah. I mean, we had an excellent public health instructor, Biddy Marshall at Niagara. Man, she knew her public health and her diseases. I mean, we knew this stuff.
LC: You knew it existed.
PW: Yeah.
LC: Right.
PW: Then our OB instructor was a kick. It was Sister Patty-Ann who later got out and got married. But she had been a mid-wife in New Mexico.
LC: Oh, boy.
PW: So she taught us OB and we knew OB. I mean, I delivered five babies and I wasn’t too scared.
LC: No big deal.
PW: Well, it was a big deal, but you’ve never done it and you always have the baby and the mother at risk.
LC: Right, but you were confident as you went through more or less.
PW: Yeah.
LC: Gaining confidence.
PW: Yeah, yeah. I was lucky to have her.
LC: Was your year at Guam basically a good year?
PW: Yeah, it was a neat year. I mean, I dated and I had cute clothes that I took over with me. We used to go up to an officer’s club, which was at the top of the island. It was called Top of the Mar. In order to get there, I had a convertible. So sometimes my date would take my car instead of his. We’d go a winding road up to the top of the mar and it would be sort of through jungles. You’d see goats and you’d also smell these wonderful wild gardenias. We’d go up there and we’d have, you know, daiquiris and
we’d dance. It was fun. [“Top of the Mar”—looking over Guam in the Marianas Islands]

LC: At some point then, you had learned to drive and acquired a car?
PW: Yes.
LC: Okay. (Laughing) Those are both essential features I’m sure.
PW: Yes. I always wanted a convertible. I wanted it to be silver blue with red leather seats, but it turned out to be blue blue.
LC: That’s not bad. That’s pretty close.
PW: No.
LC: How did you get it? Was it second hand? Did you get it from someone else?
PW: No, my father got it for me and drove it out to California when I was finishing in San Diego. I had payments. I paid them to my dad instead of the bank.
LC: I see. He had it shipped out to you.
PW: No. He drove it out, he and Mom.
LC: Oh, I see. Okay.
PW: They left in the winter of ’60 I guess. They were so gung-ho about this convertible that they—oh, it was thirty degrees and the top was down. (Laughing)
LC: Well, sure. (Laughing)
PW: They quickly put it up. (Laughing)
LC: (Laughing) But it’s the idea of it.
PW: It was the idea of it. You know, my father had flown and my mother was adventurous. I took them over to North Island and they met pilots. That segued into them going aboard an aircraft carrier and they watched their daughter get saluted going over the gangway and you know, all that razzmatazz. It was fun. We had fun.
LC: Now when you were leaving Guam, you knew that you were going to Japan?
PW: Yes.
LC: Did you know where?
PW: Yes.
LC: Where?
PW: I was going to Yokosuka, which is interesting tour, but I did fourteen months on Guam and nine on Japan. It just worked out that way.

LC: Okay.

PW: I flew to Japan. We all partied at the O Club. I guess I took off about two or three in the morning. I remember as I flew into Japan, it was breaking daylight and I could see Mount Fuji with the perfect cone and sunlight behind it and I thought, wow. While I was in Guam, I reacquainted myself with a Navy doctor who had been aboard the *Mitchell*, the ship I went to Guam on.

LC: Yes.

PW: He was stationed at Atsugi, which was an air station.

LC: Yes.

PW: He was teaching English to the Japanese. He was a pediatrician and we started dating. So he met me my first weekend in Tokyo. Oh, we went dancing. We went to an afternoon three-story kiosk type of a building that had an orchestra that played Argentine and Viennese waltzes. We went to a bookstore and looked at books. We went to Chizanzo Garden, which is a beautiful park. I mean, we just had a blast. Then he went back to Atsugi and I took a tour of Tokyo. Then I went down I think on the train and checked into Yokosuka. That’s how that happened.

LC: Your billet looked like what there, your quarters?

PW: Oh, we were in an old Japanese enlisted two story concrete type of affair. I had one room with a little sitting room attached. We had a little kitchen. We ate at the hospital. You know, being on OB, there were a lot of times when I wasn’t able to get to dinner. And so Ed Bagley, he was the pediatrician and he used to get a case of baby food. We’d get a tongue depressor and eat the baby food of the month for dinner.

LC: Oh, jeez.

PW: (Laughing)

LC: Whatever you got to do, right?

PW: Right. Well, we had good peaches and pears. It was okay.

LC: (Laughing) So you continued to be on OB?

PW: Yeah and in the nursery. Occasionally I worked the urology clinic.

Sometimes I’d work the military wards as a fill in, but most of the time I worked on
obstetrics. I had the chance to take Japanese language lessons. They offered that and I took up on it. So I could get through a labor and delivery in Japanese. It’s sort of pigeony.

LC: But you were picking up some language anyway.
PW: Yes.

LC: Did you feel good about that; was it a good—?
PW: Yes, yes. I mean, I could answer the phone and take a message and go through a labor and delivery pretty much in Japanese, which helped because some of our guys were married to Japanese.

LC: Sure, sure. Those women obviously would be into the hospital for maternity services and care.
PW: Yes, yes.

LC: Were there any memorable incidents on the ward while you were in Japan that year?
PW: I remember one Japanese lady came in, I think she was Japanese. She was married to an American. She’d come up from Yokohama. The doctor, the OB doctor, it was going to be a difficult delivery because her baby was dead.

LC: Oh, boy.
PW: There was something about her husband had died and I think the baby died in utero when her husband died. So it was a very emotional delivery. The corpsmen were funny. They generally had a little more education if they were in OB. I can remember standing at a gurney putting up OB packs, which were the basins we used in the delivery room and you know, the stuff we needed to do the delivery. Included in the package were like big Kotex. We called them perineal pads, peri pads. We’d laugh and I’d say, “What would your girl back home know if you were over here packing peri pads?” We’d laugh.

LC: Right, right.
PW: Oh, and sometimes on night duty we’d make cookies or we’d make salads and around midnight when the mothers were asleep and the babies were all taken care of, if there weren’t any deliveries, we’d have a midnight lunch. I mean, it was kind of nice.

Then the aircraft carriers, I met a pilot off the “Bon Homme Richard”, which we called
the “Bonny Dick”. Either I was getting off duty to hurry home to get [his] phone call through the Fucshu switch in Japan or I was waiting for the carrier to come in so I could go out. That kind of stuff was going on.

LC: What was the Fucshu switch?
PW: The Fucshu switch was the telephone line. I guess it came out of, I think there was a place called Fucshu where it emanated. So it became known as the Fucshu switch.

LC: So that’s how you would get your calls in and out?
PW: Yeah.

LC: Were you able to call home?
PW: Yeah, I called home once. At the time, the nuke boats were coming in, the nuclear subs and the Japanese were going crazy.

LC: Did you call them the nuke boats?
PW: I guess we called them the nukes.

LC: The nukes. So these were the nuclear power—
PW: Or the subs. Huh?

LC: Nuclear powered ships.
PW: Yes. There were demonstrations outside our gate by the Japanese because they didn’t want them coming in. Well, with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that’s understandable. So sometimes I would hope—well I only called my family once. It was the day of wire recorders and I sent my dad a wire recorder. We used to wire back and forth. I had the mic up and you could hear the people chanting. We had a battalion of Marines on base ready to storm the gate if anybody crashed. It was sort of a, you know, it wasn’t really dangerous, but it was a time of unrest.

LC: A little tense.
PW: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Did you ever feel any of that when you, you know, went into civilian areas off the base when you’d go shopping for example?
PW: I used to shop at a place called Theive’s Alley, which was the bar, bar route. The squadrons would have a bar that they frequented. It was sort of their place. I had a really neat store that I used to go to. I was collecting some cloisonné and I couldn’t
afford a lot of it. So they let me, you know, do lay away. I could speak a little Japanese, so I got to know the people. I picked up a couple of lamps and I picked up some bowls and I picked up some Hakata dolls, things like that. Then one night I went out and it was winter. Maybe it was around four thirty. I went into this florist shop and a man was in his kimono and he was carving a piece of cherry driftwood. I fell in love with it and I wanted it. So as I was coming out, I’m dragging this heavy big hunk of cherry driftwood. I thought it might make a good base for our cocktail table. The shore patrol stopped me and asked me what I was doing out there because by now it was dark. I told him I was a Navy nurse and I was out shopping. He said, “Well, go back to base because it’s off limits after dark.” I said, “Okay.” So at that time, you could get a hundred, two hundred, or three hundred yen cab. The more you paid, the bigger the cab. So there was a hundred yen cab came along. I remember we had to wrestle the cherry driftwood into the cab to get it back to quarters.

LC: Right.

PW: When I was lugging it up the stairs to the second floor, one of my good friends said to me, “I see you’ve been out with the Japs again.”

LC: Really?

PW: Yeah.

LC: That’s odd.

PW: Well, you know, it was 1962 or 3, 3 I guess. The war ended in 1945, so feelings were still there.

LC: Was it a surprise remark to you coming from someone you knew?

PW: Yes, yes. I took the part of the Japanese. It made me angry. I thought she was very narrow.

LC: Did you say so?

PW: I think I did. Then we all had maids that did up our uniforms like in Guam.

LC: Sure.

PW: Suzy Son was my maid and I remember I had bought a bonsai, a very pretty plum bonsai. It was in flower. When it went out of flower, I decided I was going to be the big bonsai artist. I was trimming the limbs and the roots underneath and I killed it. I remember coming home at lunch and seeing that it was dead and running down the steps.
yelling, “Bonsai.” All the maids came flying out because they thought that was the call of the World War II kamikaze. They didn’t know what was going on.

LC: It shook them up a little.

PW: I mispronounced bonsai. So that was sort of funny. They used to iron our nylons until we caught them. (Laughing)

LC: (Laughing) How did that get resolved?

PW: Well, we just nicely said, “You know, you don’t need to do that.”

(Laughing)

LC: Sure. (Laughing)

PW: Funny things like that.

LC: Did you make friends with the— I mean, were you on cordial terms with the women that were—?

PW: I had some really nice friends up at Cho Hill. Cho Hill might’ve been ten blocks from the main gate of Yokosuka Naval Hospital. The girl who did my hair was Asai, Asai-Chan we called her. Chan, C-H-A-N, is like a diminutive [for a] girl. She was unmarried. Yokosan was the owner. She was elegant and she probably was close to forty. Every chance we got, we’d go out there and have our hair done. Now mind you, it’s the ‘60s and bouffant hair was in.

LC: Absolutely.

PW: I had curly hair. So if I had it done it kind of straightened it and smoothed it out.

LC: Right.

PW: So I go out and have my hair done. If I was really feeling like I had the time and it was a Saturday morning, they’d do my nails. They’d massage your arms all the way up to your elbows. Then they’d wrap me up in a futon, which is like a comforter and they’d put my feet near a hibachi pot to keep me warm because it was winter. Then they’d do a pedicure. Then they’d rub your neck. I mean, it was a big deal for ten bucks.

LC: Heck yeah.

PW: I mean it was a big deal. Of course, I could speak some Japanese and I’d be asking questions. So toward the end of my tour, Yokosan invited me and the wife of the chief of psychiatry to her home. I had learned when I went over how not to be an ugly
American, Navy stuff. I studied up on what is the proper protocol for going into a
Japanese home. I went in and of course, you take your shoes off. They’d [have an eight
or ten] tatami room or house. The tatami mats are bound with black and they’re like a
woven straw.

LC: Yes.

PW: You flip them over every six months and turn them over and then you get new ones. So I went into the home and there was a place of honor called the tokonoma, it was like an alcove with a step up and they might have a vase in there with cremated remains. They might have a beautiful flower arrangement of ikebana. Then they would have a scroll, which they changed according to the seasons. It was called a kakimono. When you went into a home, you know, you weren’t like—I tended to be extroverted. You were kind of quiet and respectful. You always commented on the beautiful arrangement and the kakimono and how lovely it was and all that. I mean, that was the protocol. Polite people did that.

LC: Yes, sure.

PW: So then she had saki and she had I think some sort of like—we’d call it trail-mixy kind of stuff, but for them it’s like little crackers that had been baked with soy sauce. Then the real treat and the real honor was she dressed me up as a Japanese bride. Now I’m 5’10” and the bridal costumes in Japan are rented. They cost a couple of thousand dollars to rent them for a wedding. They’re expensive.

LC: Wow.

PW: First came the under slip and it was sewed in place. Then came the powdering of my neck with a white rice powder. Then came the kimono and then came the obi, which is a brocade, really wide, maybe four inches wide sash, and then the fan that went into it and then the head dress with the dangly danglies and the pink at the peak. Let’s see, what else went into it, oh, and then the tabi socks, you know, one big toe and the rest of the toes are in.

LC: Yes.

PW: Then the zoris [wooden thong shoes]. We took photographs in the garden of me as a Japanese bride.

LC: Why did she go to this trouble for you?
PW: She liked me. I liked her. She knew I was interested in Japanese culture and I had tried to learn the language.

LC: That seems to have made a big difference.

PW: Yeah.

LC: That you made an effort to try—

PW: Yup, huge difference, huge difference.

LC: Wow.

PW: The interesting part about it Laura is she showed me around the house, you know, and it’s as you see in the Japanese movies. There were shoji doors with rice paper that slid back and forth. We walked down a short corridor and there was a picture of a Naval officer on the wall. I said, “Yokosan, who’s that?” She said, “That is my father, Patsan.” I said, “Is he alive?” She said, “No, he was killed by the Americans.” I wasn’t sure what to say. I just said, “I’m sorry.” She said, “It was our fault.”

LC: She said it was our fault, meaning the Japanese.

PW: Yeah.

LC: That’s very interesting.

PW: I thought it was very interesting too.

LC: Did she say anymore?

PW: No. I kind of felt like it was touchy, so I didn’t. I felt like I was being nosy. It was sort of an upscale day, you know, we were there to have fun, so we went on with it.

LC: Sure, sure, but that’s very revealing.

PW: Yeah. Since then, I have learned that, you know, the Americans were anti-Japanese, but the Japanese were starving. A book that you might want to get is the story Flyboy. It’s about George Bush, the aviator, who was picked up in the waters [off the coast of] Chichi Jima.

LC: Yes.

PW: It starts out telling about the Japanese government prior to World War II and the American [government] and how their troops were trained. The Japanese troops were beaten. It was very cruel. Some of the pilots that landed on Chichi, I mean, Paul Lazon
had a documentary about it last month, were eaten. They were cannibalized. George Bush lucked out. He got picked up by a sub and he landed in the ocean.

LC: Yes, it’s really quite a remarkable story what I know about it, but it’s interesting you mention this book.

PW: Yeah.

LC: When you—

PW: I guess it figures into when I was there, I think I put in my scoop sheet.

They might not have agreed with the war as a lot of the Germans didn’t agree with it, but they were sort of stuck. While they didn’t agree with it and they were starving and some of them were encinderized in the streets with our bombs. I’m not making it out like they were good guys, I’m just saying it happened. We need to get on with life and to keep it going doesn’t help, to keep the hatred going doesn’t help. But I understood families back in the States who had lost a loved one. They might’ve been severely treated in prison camps. They have that hatred just as some of the Vietnam vets can’t stand Jane Fonda. They still carry that with them today. They have no use of her.

LC: Oh, yes.

PW: “Hanoi Jane”.

LC: That’s very true.

PW: Yeah. I’ve heard her—well, we’re getting off the track.

LC: Well, but you’re—go ahead. I mean, it’s interesting, your take on that.

PW: There must be something operating in me and I think it was because I was a fat kid, that I always felt like people didn’t think of me as smart or pretty. I was always fighting the battle of the bulge, always. I’d have black coffee and go that way all day long and have some meat and veggies and exercise and other kids were, you know, trim and didn’t have to go through all that.

LC: Sure.

PW: I guess I always had a feeling for the underdog because of it. So maybe I was a little more in tune and also my reading as a youngster, wanting to get inside the other cultures. You know, I’d wear Japanese kimonos around the quarters. So did some of the other kids. Then when I hopped from Guam on the embassy flight and went to India, I wore saris in New Delhi. So, I mean, I always tried to get inside the culture
because it fascinated me. If I could, I tried to learn some of the language. Then when I,
lets see, when was it…oh, when I was at the Naval Regional Medical Center in the ‘70s,
when I’d come out of grad school, I had [taken a course] in race relations.

LC: Right.

PW: I guess it was called minority and race or something like that [“minority race relations”]. Sexton Graham taught the course. He had written a textbook on it and
he was quite a guru. The Navy I guess felt like we were going through a tremendous
upheaval of racial unrest in the United States. While I was aboard the Sanctuary, my
mother sent me a newspaper and it had tanks going down the main street of Rochester,
New York, and bullet holes in the windows. I thought, what is this? You know, we
didn’t get newspapers on a regular basis aboard ship. I couldn’t believe it. I thought,
what is going on at home?

LC: Yeah, that’s pretty shocking.

PW: Yeah, and my mother was [working] in the hospital, my father had died. She was working and she said some of the black nurse’s assistants would not go home.
They asked her if she could go home with [her] because they were afraid to go back to
their area.

LC: That part of town.

PW: Yeah. So when I got to Philly, this was still going on. It was, oh, I guess
somewhere around ’72 or 3 maybe. The chief nurse called me in and she said, “We need
a majority race facilitator to work with a minority chief who’s black and we wonder if
you’d be interested.” I said, “Yes.” I was the OPD (outpatient department) supervisor.
It was because I had taken race relations in grad school. I guess I’d always had this
interest. So the chief I worked with had ten kids and he was a lab tech, very smart. I
think he was commanding something like eighty bucks an hour moonlighting at night to
support the kids.

LC: Wow.

PW: He was the senior chief of the command, but he was also very flamboyant
and very assertive. They wanted somebody who could match up with him. So they
figured, well I had some background and I was a lieutenant commander by then. No, I
was a full commander. So they sent me to Newport for race, it was called Racial
Awareness Facilitator School and I was up there I think five weeks. We got immersed in prejudice and discrimination and racism and we saw films and then we learned how to run a group because when we went back to our commands, we were going to do that three days a week for eight hours a day.

LC: Run groups.
PW: Yeah, one group would go through every week. Then the chief came up to Newport with me and that was very interesting and we trained together for a week. I remember the Friday night school was over, I went for dinner at the BOQ. Some of the guys in the War College were my friends and they wanted to know how I was getting back to New Jersey. That’s where I lived.

LC: Right.
PW: I said, “I’m going with the chief.” He says, “You’re going to drive with a black man to New Jersey in the dark?” I said, “Yeah.” I go, “We’re working with him.” Well, they didn’t like that. They asked me if I would come up to one of their BOQ rooms one night and brief them on this whole race relations course and what was going on. I said, “Why?” They said, “Because we’re going as company commanders, senior officers to lead the troops in Vietnam and we want to know what this is all about. What is all this about?” So I went up and I told them about fragging and I told them about racial unrest. It was very interesting to do that, sitting on the floor and brief these senior officers.

LC: This was informal.
PW: Yeah.
LC: They had to seek it out.
PW: Yeah. I mean, they knew I was going through because I ate dinner, breakfast, or lunch with them.
LC: Oh, sure.
PW: That I was sort of one of a kind. So if they were going to go over and they were going to face all this stuff, they wanted to know a little background. So I briefed them and it was fun. I mean, we went out and partied together too.
LC: Right.
PW: So I mean, it was a little work and play.
LC: But you were, you know, meeting a need that they were expressing in terms of their need for information about how to—
PW: Right, right, because you know, the media here at home was talking about fragging.
LC: Yes.
PW: I don’t know if you remember what that was all about, but it was our troops using weaponry on their own senior officers.
LC: Right. There was, in some cases, reported anyways of racial elements of that.
PW: Yeah.
LC: These guys had no—they really didn’t have any information about that at all?
PW: I don’t know. I don’t think they were that unaware.
LC: Right, but they were trying to—
PW: They wanted to know from somebody who was going through Naval training what my take on it was.
LC: Right.
PW: So I told them. Then when I got back to—well on the way home, we stopped at the Jersey—there was, you know, that turnpike restaurant and we stopped and had coffee. We talked about what the reaction of the people would be in the restaurant to a white woman coming in with a black man. I don’t remember if we traveled in—I guess we were out of uniform. We were traveling in civies. We deliberately watched the reactions of people, you know.
LC: Right.
PW: Then when we got back to the command in Philly, the commanding officer ordered people from E2 enlisted to lieutenant commander O4 officers, twenty a week, ordered them to racial awareness facilitator training sessions. We would get them on a Tuesday morning at eight o’clock. They would sit in a circle and our job was to make them comfortable, get them talking about themselves. So we’d talk about why they came
in the Navy and were they regular or were they reserves, where was their hometown, what was their national background, what was their ancestry. We were trying to flush out any people who might have ethnic issues. Then after that hour and a half, we would get into breakouts. If there were twenty, we’d have four groups of five. They’d have oh, what do you call, a flipchart and we’d ask them to define what prejudice was. They’d come back and their definitions would be put up on the wall. We had a special room and it was covered with wood and we’d put them up. Then we’d pick a common definition of prejudice that everybody could live with and that one would stay on the wall, the others would come down. Then we’d break for lunch and come back and they’d be in a circle again. The only time they could get out of the circle was go to the john. Of course, enlisted were in with officers and that came out as prejudice during the sessions, “Why am I in with enlisted? Why are regulars in with reserve?” They used every excuse in the book not to talk about race.

LC: Right.
PW: That was interesting.
LC: Yeah, a diversion.
PW: The dance, the dance. Then we got into discrimination. We did the breakouts again and the definitions and put the common one up on the wall, but we showed a movie called *Eye of the Storm*. I don’t know if you remember, I think it was CBS News that picked it up, but there was a teacher. I think it was fourth graders and it was in the Midwest where there weren’t any people of different racial characteristics.

LC: Sure.
PW: The kids came into school. It was when Martin Luther King was assassinated and they said, “Why’d they shoot a king?” meaning royalty. She started thinking about these kids didn’t have any conception of racial awareness or prejudice or anything like that. So she constructed I think it was three days. For the first one and a half days, the brown eyed kids were the best kids in class. They were the kids that were smartest. They were the kids that could put up their hands first. Those were the kids that went to lunch first. The kids that were blue eyed had to be in the back of the school bus. They had to be in the back of the line waiting to go to the john. They had to be in the
back of the line going to the water thing. If the blue eyed kid put their hand up, she’d
say, “I’m going to call on the brown eyed kids because they’re smarter than you are.”

LC: Wow.

PW: Well, the families—and then she reversed it for the other one and a half
days or whatever it was.

LC: Right.

PW: The families went nuts.

LC: I’ll bet.

PW: They went nuts. Well, then CBS picked up on it and asked her to repeat it.
They filmed it and it became *Eye of the Storm*. You could see the reaction on the high
achieving kids when they were told they were stupid.

LC: Yeah.

PW: They had to sit down and go to the back of the bus and all this stuff. Their
heads started to droop. They started getting introverted. They started to act funny. Then
she reversed it and they were tearing, I mean, it wasn’t armbands, but the whole reaction
was jubilant. We used that film. There were Navy people who had never seen it or
experienced prejudice and they just walked away like wow. So that was pretty much four
o’clock. Then they had to report back eight o’clock the next day and we talked racism.

We started racism. We had materials that came from the Bureau of Naval Personnel
Human Resource Command and it was on Indians and blacks and statistics. We had stuff
from a Racial Awareness School in Newport. We had movies. We broke them out again
to talk about race and some people had a really tough time with that. We had one guy in
security who wanted to keep his billy club and his belt. He wouldn’t give it up. He
wouldn’t give up his walkie-talkies. He was really bent out of shape. We finally
prevailed that he had to, but he didn’t like it. There were people in the group who were
black. We tried to have a racial mix. We had a Jewish doctor who I had to facilitate for a
class when we had no people who were minority status except him, he was Jewish. Man,
he threw a fit.

LC: Because—

PW: I was dating him.

LC: Oh.
PW: He threw a fit. Who was I to put him through a class, take him out of his
practice, dah, dah dah, dah, dah, dah.

LC: Oh, boy.

PW: At the end of the three days, he came up and he said, “I needed that. You
did a good job.” I mean, it was intense. So then after we talked about racism in the
morning, we broke for lunch and then as I remember, there were more movies. There
were stuff on the Ku Klux Klan. There was stuff on Indians. Then we broke and did the
same procedure. The next morning, we did more sort of closure type stuff on racism.
Then in the afternoon, we tried to bring them back down and recap it and say what this is
all about and then they did evaluation and they left. Then I had two nights of supervision
to fill out my week, five days. I had night duty for twelve floors of the hospital, main
hospital. I was the only supervisor. Then I had five dependent units and I had five psych
units. So I had twelve [units in the] main hospital and then ten units [besides the main
building’s twelve floors]. I was a supervisor from seven to seven on the weekend.

LC: I mean, how many days would you pull that duty in addition to the three
days of teaching?

PW: Every week.

LC: Wow. How long did this go on?

PW: A year.

LC: One year. This was in Philadelphia?

PW: Yeah.

LC: Okay.

PW: It was heated. I mean, some of the people would come through and they’d
be talking about it at lunch and they’d say, “How can you possibly do this?” and, “I’m
not sure how I feel about this,” and, “Some of my friends started to look at me as black I
think. I was siding with those people.”

LC: Right.

PW: It was quite a trip. Then one day I came to work. The senior chief of the
command had a special parking spot. It was by the backdoor of the hospital right next to
the oxygen pens. By oxygen pens, I mean a chain linked area that had the nitrous oxide
and the oxygen big heavy canister they used for surgery and on the units. Somebody blew [the chief’s car up].

LC: Okay, using what, do you have any idea?
PW: I don’t remember what they used, but it was pretty well incinerated and it’s lucky it didn’t blow up the oxygen [tanks and] the hospital with it.

LC: For sure.
PW: So that was a big deal.

LC: What was the implication? I mean, clearly there was a message there.
PW: The implication might be they were getting a black chief and they were going to stop this program. However, there’s another side to that. He was very flamboyant, very smart. Sometimes he’d come in to get his mail in civie clothes and those civie clothes would be pink hot pants.

LC: Now by flamboyant, do you mean he was assertive of black consciousness at that time or something else, anything else?
PW: Sure, sure. One day I remember we were critiquing how we had done, it was just the two of us. I said, “Chief, you’re acting like a jive ass nigger.” He looked at me and his eyes flew open and he says, “You’ve got a hell of a lot of guts to say that to me.” I said, “Well, you know as well as I do it’s true.” We both laughed. You know, I had called it. He was strong, you know. He needed somebody to come back at him like that and not put up with it because that was part of the racial problem.

LC: That this was sort of an accelerant in some way to—
PW: Yeah. Yeah, “We can’t do that chief. Knock it off.”
LC: Right. What did he—after that initial response, did he change his behavior any?
PW: Yeah, every once in a while it would come out because it was part of his self. Then, I don’t know how long after that, I was going to a Nurse Corps off duty party. Our chief nurse was Captain Conder who later became Admiral of the Corps. I was late. I explained I was sorry I was late, but I stopped to get gas and the attendant told me I had sugar in my gas tank. I was able to get it in and get it flushed and taken care of; but the chief nurse then called the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation).

LC: Really?
PW: Yeah, because they weren’t sure if they were after me too. I’m not sure that
that was accurate because I lived in a condo and there were people that were coming in
and out and somebody could’ve done some of this stuff at the condo too. I don’t know.
LC: Did anything ever occur?
PW: No, nothing ever came of it. But you know, if the FBI was in on it, it
could’ve been handled very quietly.
LC: Yeah, without you even knowing.
PW: So my feeling was, did the chief’s car get blown up because he was a black
chief doing race relations or just he was a flamboyant leader and people were tired of
him? I mean, he was smart. He did his work.
LC: Sure.
PW: But I never had a sense of which one it was. But I can tell you this, when I
would park my car in the parking lot, I used to watch the roofs of the hospital to see if
anybody had a gun on me.
LC: Really?
PW: Yeah.
LC: I just want to clarify for people so they’ll get a sense that this is probably,
what, 1972 or so?
PW: I think I went to Philly in ’71.
LC: Yeah, those were rough times.
PW: I think it was somewhere around ’73.
LC: Okay.
PW: I think it was somewhere around there.
LC: Wow.
PW: Yeah, I mean, so sometimes I’d wind up, we’d have a particularly heated
group of twenty. There would be a good mix of blacks and whites and there’d be people
who were street smart. It would get very heated and very tense. Sometimes I would
leave on a, let’s see, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday night, and my knees would be
shaking. They would get that, you know, the pressure was keep a lid on this, instruct
them, bring them down.
LC: Right.
PW: Don’t screw up the program.
LC: Right.
PW: Be the best you can be. But sometimes you felt like, oh boy, did I open up a
can of worms here? How are they going to react? What’s going to happen?
LC: Right, what’s going to happen when the group breaks up and they go their
own way?
PW: Yeah, yeah.
LC: You were sensing some of that could come at you.
PW: Yeah. Then the command structure, the senior people didn’t go to that until
the very end and then they brought in some people to Newport who were [senior officers
who] did them. But they didn’t know what it was all about. My commanding officer
called me in when I got back from Newport and he said, “What is this all about?” He
was white. I said, “Well, Captain, I look at it as a public health problem.” He looked at
me like I was going completely nuts. He didn’t understand it at all. He didn’t understand
ghettos. He didn’t understand poverty. He didn’t understand malnutrition and I had done
public health in the ghetto. I thought it was a public health problem. You know, he
denied people education and dah, dah, dah, dah.
LC: Right.
PW: Some people can pull themselves up by the bootstraps and make it and some
can’t. They’re into drugs. They just can’t. He didn’t get it.
LC: He thought you were crazy.
PW: Yeah.
LC: That doesn’t help your career.
PW: No.
LC: If the commanding officer thinks you’re just—
PW: No, no, no. It was during the—I mean, I think he liked me. We were on
Guam together, but I don’t think it helped my career.
LC: Sure.
PW: I’m not sure it helped it in Washington either because [Rear] Admiral Duerk
was director of the Nurse Corps.
LC: [Rear] Admiral Duerk was what?
PW: [Rear] Admiral Duerk.
LC: Yes.
PW: I made some noise about changing to become a line officer to go with the Human Resource Command in Washington and do race relations and command analysis through leadership. That did not make her happy. She said, “I can’t let you go, Pat. The reason is, if I let you, there’ll be a following. (Laughing)
LC: If what?
PW: “If I broke you lose to go [be a line officer] and do that, I’m sure you’d have a following. Other nurses would want to go in your footsteps.”
LC: Right, so I can’t—
PW: Couldn’t afford to lose nurses that way.
LC: Can’t let it happen.
PW: Yeah, interesting.
LC: Very. Pat, lets take a break there for today.
Interview with Patricia Warner  
Date: July 1, 2005

Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University continuing the oral history interview with Cdr. Patricia A. Warner. Today’s date is the first of July 2005. I am on the campus of Texas Tech in the Special Collections Building interview room and Pat is speaking to me by telephone from Florida. Good morning again Pat.

Patricia Warner: Good morning Laura.

LC: Let’s pick it up with your departure from Japan. You had told us a great deal about some of the intriguing experiences you had there. I wonder what your next posting was and was it as exciting?

PW: My next posting was to Naval Regional Medical Center in Portsmouth, Virginia. The trip home was exciting because it was on another MSTS ship. We hit some pretty bad weather and they had to string ropes so that people could walk down the passageways. We got to it with almost a forty-five degree tilt and it was a little frightening coming back. But anyway, I got to Portsmouth and they made me charge nurse of two thirty-five bed units of orthopedics. That’s what I did for about, I don’t know, a couple of years. The interesting part was Captain Edwina Todd was my chief nurse again. She was the one that was a POW (prisoner of war) in the Philippines.

LC: And had been very supportive of you earlier.

PW: Yes, yes. So she called me in one day and she wanted to know if I’d be interested in becoming an OR nurse and I said no. I didn’t want to be that isolated like that. If I went that tack that would be a career move and I didn’t want to do that.

LC: Why was it not for you at that point?

PW: I had done some OR nursing, not a lot when I was in training. We all had to go through a rotation. It was interesting, but I thought in terms of broadening my experience and my career, I would be locked into the OR probably for the rest of my career. There are some OR nurses who went on and did very well for themselves. One was Fran Shea who was the admiral, rear admiral. I just didn’t see myself in that milieu.
So anyway, then she suggested some other things and I said something about graduate school. She was amenable to that. Then she said, “Have you ever thought about recruiting duty?” I said, “Yes, but I don’t think I’d get it.” She said, “Why not?” I didn’t think I was pretty enough, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. I was, but—(Laughing) the next thing I know, I had orders to recruiting duty in my home state.

LC: So this would’ve been 1964 that you started up in Buffalo?

PW: Yeah, I think so, yeah, yeah. So I mean, Portsmouth was exciting. I took horseback riding lessons and my ward doctor asked to marry me and something like that. (Laughing) But that didn’t work out. So my orders came for recruiting duty and I was excited about that because I was going to be recruiting at Niagara University, which was my home college and everything. Do I go on with that?

LC: Sure.

PW: So I came home and I got a cute little apartment in sort of a Bohemian area of Buffalo. The Army nurse and I became good friends. We went to the Army-Navy games and that was a heck of a lot of fun down at West Point. I had, let’s see, thirty-six schools of nursing that I needed to talk to in a given year.

LC: Okay.

PW: Most of them were diploma schools and I went with the Air Force nurse and the Army nurse, it was called a tri-military visit. Then there were five or six colleges of nursing that I also went and visited—the students who became Navy Nurse Corps candidates. I was sort of the administrator of that program. I mean, the chief and personnel certainly ran most of it, but I was the, you know, the officer going with the kids. We had quite a few kids that were in the program. So, that’s what I did for those three years and I did a lot of radio and TV.

LC: You mentioned earlier when we were just kind of quickly going over this that you just had, you were just absolutely mobbed with interested students.

PW: I was.

LC: Can you talk a little bit about why you think that was? Was it that it was a good deal?

PW: Well, I think number one, let’s see, I think I was around twenty-seven years old. I looked nice in my dress blues. They were tailored, you know. I had a silver blue
convertible. I walked into the student center on the arms of Marine officers in their
dressed Marine uniforms. We set up displays and talked to the kids. So I think they saw
it as glamorous. When it got down to the nitty gritty of really applying for the program,
there was some hoops I had to go through, which was fun. There were many fathers who
had been in World War II. While they respected nurses, women in the military, they
were a little concerned about their daughters being one. So there were many a night
when I took my projector and my slide gear and sat at kitchen tables in the evening and
showed slides and told them what Navy life was like and got to know them. [The fathers
were protective of their girls, but they were interested in the Navy program.]

LC: Once you got to them.
PW: Once I got to them. Of course, I was from Rochester so I was a local gal.
LC: Sure, that helped no doubt.
PW: Yeah. Then, you know, after the kids got in the program, I took carloads of
them. We went down to the Syracuse-Navy games and that was fun. But one of the
interesting things, one day I went up to Watertown, it was during the Vietnam War. I
hadn’t been to Vietnam yet. I walked into Watertown, New York, and the chief was in
the office. I said, “Is there any way I can appear on a local radio or television show. I
need to get some airtime about our—we need nurses for Vietnam.” Now mind you, Navy
nurses do not go overseas on their first tour of duty. We always stay home in the States
until we get our feet under us. So the chief looked at me, he says, “Well, there’s an old
curmudgeon,” he said, “out on the radio tower.” He said, “Lots of luck.” I said, “Well,
how do I get there?” So he told me and he wasn’t kidding. It was out in the middle of
like a cornfield with a big radio tower. So I walked up and I asked if I could have some
airtime or make some tapes with them. He said, “You go on live or forget it.”
LC: Oh, jeez.
PW: So I had my purse over my shoulder. I didn’t have any of my material at all.
So he took me in and there was this long room and all the room had in it was a long table,
like an oak table and a microphone on it. There was a wide window, which looked out
where he was. He closed the door and the light went on red and he said, “You’re on the
air for half an hour.”
LC: Just start talking.
PW: Start talking. So I talked about everything I knew. (Laughing) When it was over, he opened the door and he says, “Come on in the kitchen with me.” He had a kitchen at the radio tower. He said, “You’re okay.” So here I am in my dress blues with this curmudgeon guy who actually was quite nice as it worked out. We had—you know, those old speckled enameled bowls that grandma’s had?

LC: Yes.

PW: Well, he had one of those and it was filled with dandelion salad. He wanted me to share it with him. So I sat at his kitchen table, stool, not table, stool, and ate dandelion salad with him to celebrate the broadcast. (Laughing) That was funny.

LC: It is funny and very sweet. A lot of people wouldn’t know what dandelion salad is anymore.

PW: Right.

LC: That you can actually eat them.

PW: Right.

LC: The right parts anyway.

PW: The greens I think is what you eat.

LC: That’s right, that’s right.

PW: So, you know, and then another interesting part was going down to West Point and that becomes like high peak excitement. The Thayer Hotel is sort of like a gothic hotel, civilian hotel, but it’s on the ground of West Point. We were all at happy hour. I guess I had a couple of drinks and they were all talking about, you know, Navy was going to get skunked the next day. So I walked into the main dining room, which was huge and on the wall it said, “Beat Navy.” I tore off the “Beat” part and when everybody went in there it said “Navy.” (Laughing) So that’s sort of how the weekend goes. Then we went down the Garden State Parkway and everybody had, you know, banners flying. So the Army-Navy game’s a big deal.

LC: Oh, absolutely.

PW: You know. They’d steal the goat and we’d steal the mule and you know.

LC: Do you have any idea who won that year?

PW: I think Army did. (Laughing) I’m not sure, but I think Army did.

LC: Yeah.
PW: Anyway, that was fun. Then the Army nurse and I became friends and she used to stay with me up in Buffalo. We’d go on trips together because they had a collegiate program like we did the scholarship. The Air Force didn’t.

LC: Yes.

PW: So we became good friends and that was fun.

LC: Was there much talk, did you get questions do you remember about Vietnam?

PW: Oh, yeah. No, I guess I didn’t. I don’t know why, but I don’t remember that was an issue of families. Now let’s see, that was not ’61 to ’62, I think it was ’64. I can’t remember, but I think the advisors were in Vietnam at that time. It wasn’t on the news every single night with people being shot and killed and that kind of thing.

LC: That’s right, yeah, that comes later. We sent in troops later.

PW: Yeah, so I think maybe the concern wasn’t so terrible.

LC: Right, right, not so immediate.

PW: Yeah, yeah. Of course, the kids were interested in the scholarships. The juniors were interested in two years of education and the seniors, their one. Some of them were all gung-ho and looking forward to being a Naval officer. Some of them knew they were getting their tuition paid for and you know, it was means to an end. But we did have some kids that got married and one of them. I think one of them got pregnant. So she was out of the program. Her family called me up and wanted to pay back the amount the Navy had paid. I said, “There’s no provisions for that.” I even called through to Washington and you know, and they said, “Nope, that’s not the way it goes.”

LC: Right.

PW: So I just, you know, I said to the kids, “Make the most of your nursing career so you know, people get the benefit of it.”

LC: What did you think Pat yourself about those strictures on the program, those pieces that said you can’t be a Naval officer and be married?

PW: Well, I’m answering you in hind sight.

LC: Sure.

PW: Because when I got to the school’s command at Newport, I was teaching 120 graduates of these candidate programs every month. We put 120 through every
summer about three or four months. I was the public affairs officer, so I went through all their backgrounds and most of them were in *Who’s Who*.

LC: What do you mean by that?


LC: Okay, so they had already been high flying students?

PW: Oh, yeah, most of them were, most of them were. Some of the kids were married and I thought to myself—one of the nurses, Ann Langley and I, she was on a ship with me. I said, “You know what, I’m seeing the kids that are married and they’re doing exceptionally well here.” I said, “They seem to be settled down. They’re not looking for dates. They’re looking for their future.” I said, “I think it’s a good thing.” I didn’t know what to think before then. She kind of agreed with me that they were settled down and focused and it was okay. Then later on, the nurses came in and they had children. Of course, the Navy said we didn’t issue you a husband and children into your sea bags. I mean, that was kind of flip way of dealing with families at that time.

LC: Sure.

PW: The gals who had children, they knew that they had to be on duty and they needed to find somebody to take care of their kids if they got sick or something. I thought they were very responsible. So my experience with all that was fine.

LC: That it was not an interference.

PW: No. I mean, there may have been isolated situations of it.

LC: Sure.

PW: But by and large, I thought they were very responsible high caliber people.

LC: Overall, would you say that the time you spent recruiting was a good time for your career?

PW: Oh, yeah, that was a career move, no doubt about it.

LC: Why is that? For someone who doesn’t really get the structure and what the different pieces are that contribute to—

PW: Well, I think in hind sight now, the public speaking development was very important. You were speaking for the Navy. You were—the eyes of the Navy were on you because in upstate New York, there wasn’t a lot of military flying around. I mean, there were missile bases. I was doing a lot of television. I was doing a lot of radio. One
of the interesting things if I might I went down to Rochester one day and I went into the
doors of WHEC TV and Radio. Warren Doremus was one of the on-air personalities
and I said, “Warren,” I said, “I really need to have some airtime.” He looked at me and
he said, “My brother is a POW over in Hanoi.” He said, “You will get it.” So he put me
on the air and I had good exposure from that. Later on when I was at Philadelphia, years
later, I was wearing a copper armband, you know, like they did for the prisoners.

LC: The POW/MIA (missing in action) bracelets?

PW: Yes, yes.

LC: Sure.

PW: Mine said, oh, I forget his—it was Warren Doremus’ brother and I keep
forgetting what his first name was, but when I got to Philly, I was going across the
quarterdeck one day, which is the lobby. Warren was there with his brother. He had
come back and he was up on SOQ (senior officer quarters) and they were debriefing him.
I had a chance to take my bracelet off and give it to him. I just thought that was kind of
an interesting story.

LC: Wow.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Very powerful.

PW: Yeah.

LC: How do you spell Warren’s last name?

PW: I think it’s D-O-R-E-M-U-S, Doremus.

LC: Yeah, I think—he’s fairly well known, is he not, I mean, beyond even that
local region?

PW: Not sure, not sure.

LC: That sounds familiar to me.

PW: Not sure. But he was very nice to me and there was sort of that bond there
where he understood. I mean, Rochester I think sort of had a four hundred mentality.
There were certain families and it was, you know, a lot of socializing at home and that
kind of thing. He asked me a question. (Laughing) He said, “Why do you think it’s hard
to recruit in Rochester?” You know, impetuous me says, “Well, it’s sort of a blue-nosed
town, you know the four hundred.” I said, “I think people are afraid their daughter’s
going into the military.” Somebody caught that and said to my mother, “Oh my god, her
career’s over.” (Laughing) But it was okay.

LC: You managed to sneak through.

PW: I scraped through.

LC: Yeah. Did you actually get to meet Warren’s brother who had been a POW?

PW: Yeah, that’s what I’m saying. When he was repatriated to the United States,
I was stationed at the Regional Medical Center in Philadelphia. He came down through
the quarterdeck one day when I was going through. That’s the lobby of the hospital, we
called it the quarterdeck. Warren saw me and he said, “Pat.” He said, “I’d like you to
meet my brother.” So that’s when I took my bracelet off and handed it to his brother and
said, “Well, I’m glad you’re home.”

LC: Did he have any reaction that you saw, I’m sure he did, but—?

PW: Not a lot.

LC: Did he thank you?

PW: Yeah, he did thank me and you know, I had to keep going because I had
things to do and he had a circle of people around him. While they were being debriefed, I
think we were kind of being very careful not to interfere.

LC: Did those debriefings tend to—I mean, do you know anything about how
those were arranged such that they would be near a hospital?

PW: Well I know—they might have been near a hospital closest to their
hometown. I’m not sure.

LC: I see.

PW: There was one of the nurses, she was a lieutenant commander who was
assigned to that unit. It was all very hush hush. We didn’t talk about it because they
were being debriefed about their experiences. They were going through physicals to
make sure they were okay and all that kind of stuff. So there wasn’t a lot of discussion.
You know, we didn’t want to put the nurses on the spot that were up there by asking
either.

LC: Probably being, was that out of respect for him and them and probably a
very intense situation?
PW: Yeah, and it might’ve been some classified information that was being exchanged.

LC: Right.

PW: You know, like what was going on. But one of the things I did know were some of the guys who came back wound up with divorces. They were gone for so long and it was such a tense thing, I think maybe—my theory is that maybe the marriages weren’t real strong to begin with and that was the breaker.

LC: Well, it’s more than understandable on both sides. I can’t imagine any more pressure on a relationship than that.

PW: Right, right.

LC: Tell me what happened when you transitioned out of the recruiting station at Buffalo.

PW: Oh, that was very interesting. I called her my Aunty Mame. It was Cpt. Elizabeth Murray in the recruiting division. She was very focused. Some of the kids were afraid of her because she would call you up or we would call her up and she had very specific things she wanted to know. She was busy. If you couldn’t answer the question, she got pretty annoyed.

LC: She wanted it fast and furious, right?

PW: She wanted it fast and accurate, but she had a lot of personality. I knew that and I was always prepared when I called her. We developed a nice relationship. So I used to call her, I was getting up on my third year of recruiting duty and while I liked it, those of us that were on recruiting duty used to say we have face aches because you had the perpetual smile, you know, the PR (public relations) business and it was starting to get old. We were getting flak from the two-year schools. The two-year schools were opening and we wouldn’t take them, the Navy wouldn’t take them.

LC: Why was that?

PW: Well, because most of our officers were college graduates and we are a teaching branch. We teach our corpsmen and we felt like we needed to have that four-year education. So some of the dean’s of two year schools, when I’d go to the conventions would say, “Yeah, but Pat, you know, we’re acing the State Boards, higher than some of the baccalaureate people.” I said, “I can’t help that. You know, the
educational material is still there.” Well, then I talked to one of the gals who was on the
State Board examining and she said those State Boards are geared for common sense.
LC: Interesting.
PW: I mean, that was a hassle. Two years while I was on recruiting duty, they
sent me to San Francisco. All the recruiters went, Army-Navy. We stayed at the Marine
Memorial Hotel, which was right in downtown San Francisco. All of us when we got
through with the convention day would board the Powell Street line, the streetcar, the
cable car.
LC: Sure, sure.
PW: Here we are in our dress blues and [the brakeman would] bang, bang, ring
the bell, and then we’d get up to the top of the hill. He’d jump off and he’d pick flowers
from gardens and give them to us. (Laughing) Then we’d go down the hill to Ghirardelli
Square and at the end of Ghirardelli Square, it’s customary for you to get off and push the
trolley around the circular tracks and go back up into town. So I mean, that was kind of
fun to do that while I was on recruiting duty.
LC: It’s a blast.
PW: Yeah. I got to do it two years in a row, one with the American Nurses
Association and the other one was for a National League for Nursing.
LC: Were you recruiting while you were at the conventions?
PW: [No. It was mostly educational—informing the public and being briefed by
our seniors.] I also got to go to the World’s Fair in New York during my tour.
LC: Wow.
PW: That was kind of fun. I mean, they had a submersible rescue sub and we
were at that booth. Of course, we didn’t know too much about rescue subs, but we found
out. It was sort of fun to meet the public and do that kind of stuff.
LC: Sure.
PW: So you know, and some of my kids [that I recruited] went on to become
Navy captains and do very well. Some of them, you know, did their tour and did their
time and got out.
LC: Right, right.
PW: So where are we going now? (Laughing)
LC: Well generally though, you thought it was a purposeful expenditure of your time within the Navy.

PW: Oh, yeah.

LC: You were saying that you had given a ring to Elizabeth Murray, that you had spoken to her.

PW: Oh, yes, that’s right, where my next duty station. I kept saying to her, “I want to go to Vietnam. I want a tour.” I was asking for Da Nang, which was the Naval hospital over there. She finally, one day, she said to me, “Well,” she said, “What do you think about going on a hospital ship? The USS Sanctuary is going out on their first tour and you could be on the first crew.” I said, “Yes!” The reason behind this Laura was I was regular Navy. I went regular Navy very early that meant career. I thought, you know, if anybody should be going, it should be me. I thought, you know, I guess that was an adventure too. Everything seemed to be an adventure to me. So next thing I know, I guess that was around October, November—

LC: Of ’66?

PW: [’66]. So it was a very gray day and Buffalo’s snowy. I walked into my office and everybody was standing in my office. I thought, “What are they doing in my office?” Well, there was a speed letter, like a telegram and it was scotch taped to the window. It was my speed letter orders to report to the USS Sanctuary and that was like early December and I was to be there on the third of January. I thought, whoa, whoa. I mean, that was good, but my father had died in ’65. My mother was home. I’m the only child and I thought, well, she should go across country with me. That would be fun. I had to get all my stuff packed out and get to storage. There were things I wanted to do, you know, with people, say goodbye. So it was sort of a hectic time. I remember having this huge party in my second floor bohemian type apartment. I made some wine. I got a recipe for banana raisin—it was supposed to be champagne. When I tried to pull out the sediment, it didn’t work. So it wasn’t fizzy anymore. It was like this syrupy after dinner drink. So I had that available. I made French seventy-fives and I don’t know if you know what they were.

LC: No tell us.
PW: French seventy-fives as I remember was champagne, sauterne, and brandy and powerful, very powerful.

LC: Yeah.

PW: So the wire recorder was going in the living room and the CO (commanding officer) and the XO (executive officer) and officer programs officers and the Marine Corps contingent all were coming in. One of the fellows, a young JG, he had had a couple of drinks and he started doing pushups. Well, he did one hundred and after every one, he would tell a joke. He was hysterical. I tried to make lumpia, which is like a little egg roll from the Philippines. Well, I’d been up all night the night before. I hadn’t been to bed. I met the Marine recruiter who had been eyeing me for a long time and all of a sudden we hit it off. So that started a romance and all of this going on. So anyway, that was a fun night. We had a nice party. Then the candidates, you know, came over and said goodbye. We made some packages for some of the guys on the aircraft carrier that I had met when I was in San Francisco. Then the Marine came down to Rochester and saw me. He drove like fourteen hours [from Camp Lejeune where he was on temporary duty] to get back to see me. Anyway, that was kind of a hectic time.

LC: Sounds like it.

PW: Yeah. Then I went home to Rochester. Mom and I piled in the car and we drove to San Diego where I caught the ship. She was able to come aboard and see everything.

LC: Wow. That must’ve been incredible.

PW: Yeah it was. It was fun for her.

LC: What did she make of all that? Was she proud of you or what?

PW: Oh, yeah. I mean, she probably would’ve done the same thing. Remember, I said she wanted to go to Cape Town.

LC: Yes.

PW: I think she was a little on nerve that I was going to war. I mean, the ship was going to Vietnam. There was no question of that.

LC: Right.

PW: So yeah, we went out to dinner and the kids I knew that were on the ship with me, you know, we went out to La Jolla and we had dinner. Then things got serious
and I put my mother on the plane. I took my car to the car dealer and they sold it for me.

We spent, oh, I don’t know, I guess we spent about a month in San Diego. The ship was going through ABC warfare, which is biologic, chemical, atomic type warfare. You learn to decontaminate in case we hit nukes and stuff like that. So we were going to those schools. Then the ship was going through what they had to do, their various exercises.

LC: Now let me just stop you for a second. This was the first tour out to Vietnam for the Sanctuary?

PW: Yes, it had been in mothballs.

LC: Okay, since World War II, am I right?

PW: Yes. I think it was, I don’t know if it was activated in Korea or not, but it was—I’ve got my cruise book in front of me, 1945 Hoboken, tied shipyard. It was a merchant Marine vessel that was reconverted for a hospital ship. There was a whole bunch of them.

LC: Yes.

PW: Let me just, you know, it would be a lot to go on, but there’s a picture in Wakayama Harbor Japan on the fifteenth of September 1945 loading patients who had been prisoners of war. There wasn’t a helicopter platform on the back, which we had.

LC: That had been added.

PW: Yeah.

LC: As part of the—

PW: Yeah, and it probably was added for Korea, but I’m not sure if she was in Korea. I think she was. Anyway, then we went up to Mare Island, which was in California.

LC: Yes.

PW: We used to—I mean, it was very hard. How do you prepare for something you’ve never done before? So the doctors would have lectures for us on tropical medicine and heat stroke and malaria and bubonic plague and all that kind of stuff. Then we would have classes for the corpsmen. We shopped for crash carts for the ICUs. Then we went into San Francisco one day and went to a positive pressure breathing machine place and learned all about that, you know, ventilators.

LC: Yes.
PW: We went to restaurants in San Francisco. Then Eleanor Sullivan who is now dead, she was on recruiting duty in Boston when I was in Buffalo. We became friends over the phone. So she and I thought we needed to have a re-introduction to nursing, so we asked for temporary duty, TAD (temporary additional duty), to Oak Knoll in Oakland. We were billeted at Treasure Island. We got a ride in every morning to Oak Knoll and we spent as I remember two weeks on the orthopedic unit and two weeks in psychiatry. Just to bone up on our nursing and see what was going on. The period of time we spent on the orthopedic unit was a real eye opener because there were numerous young Navy corpsmen who were back as amputees. One kid had gone through his seventeenth stump revision. That was very sobering. 

LC: For someone who has no idea what that actually means, can you just, you know, lay some nurse type lingo on us and tell me what a revision is?

PW: Oh, a revision?

LC: Yeah.

PW: Oh, okay. Well, you know, sometimes these kids had stepped on bouncing Betty landmines, which really chew up your leg. Some of the kids had been shot and depending on the velocity of the bullet, it really tore their leg apart. So instead of having a clean amputation, you know, with clean sterile equipment, this was a wound that was jagged and the flesh was not approximated. So picture trying to sew up a seam when everything’s all over the place.

LC: Right.

PW: They would do the initial surgery, sometimes it was life saving surgery, knowing they would go back later on when they were in better shape.

LC: Yes.

PW: But sometimes there were infections. They’d have to go in and take more. So the revisions were every time they went in, they were revising that stump so it could take a prosthesis, an artificial leg.

LC: This young man, this was the seventeenth time?

PW: It was his seventeenth.

LC: Yeah, that’s—
PW: I guess my point in all of this Laura, I’ve been asked to speak at a couple of, well, one Veteran’s Day and Memorial Day be the speaker. My point in all of this is the military, when somebody gets shot up or gets hurt, you know, they come home and people say, “Oh, well, they came home and they got better.” Well, sometimes these are lifelong wounds. There are still guys from World War II that are picking shrapnel out of their backs, still.

LC: Yes.

PW: These kids, you know, it’s an alteration in their employment, in their social life. Aboard ship, we had one young man, I stood by the OR table as Fred Jackson, the neurosurgeon was repairing his head. He had had a bullet wound to his head. Essentially half of his brain was gone. So he cleaned him all out and then he stuffed his head with gel foam, which is, you know, it’s like a foam jelly to keep his brain in place, what was left of it. He sewed him back up and a couple of days later, I went down to ICU—no, he was on the surgical unit to see how he was doing. It was a very poignant moment because he was calling his fiancé at home. His speech pattern was off and he couldn’t think like he had before. I thought, oh my gosh, I wonder what she’s thinking on the other end of the line and what his family’s thinking. I thought, that was just one that was just one. I thought for years after, these families may be visiting veteran’s hospitals or they may have these kids at home or they married the girls and their families are gonna live with this for the rest of their life. You know, visits to the doctor, maybe more stump revisions, just all kinds of things.

LC: Right.

PW: Then, you know, it wasn’t until I got home and was down here in the ‘80s when I found out from somebody who was an officer of the day one of the enlisted guys, that our ship had been sprayed with napalm [Agent Orange?]. Of course, I worked triage, which means the helicopters come in to the helicopter deck and then they went right into triage. They were classified as to whether they were well enough to go to their unit, I mean ward, or whether they were going to recovery room to go into the operating room for immediate surgery or whether they were holding patients. There was nothing we could do, you know, just keep them comfortable. It was—some of these kids came back and had Agent Orange problems, which I believe affects children, their children were
affected. I didn’t learn until the ‘80s that I was eligible for disability and I felt really funny about that.

LC: Why, why?

PW: Well, Fran Shea, our admiral, she was retired and she wrote an article in our Navy Nurse Corps newsletter. She said, “If you were in Vietnam and you were exposed to Agent Orange go see your VA (veteran’s affairs) representative.” So I did. The rep said, “Do you have your DD214, which is your discharge papers?” I said, “Yes.” She said, “Does it give the dates you were in Vietnam?” I said, “Yes.” She said, “Bring it in because,” she said, “the VA has done a study and they have proven a link between Diabetes Type II and Agent Orange.” Well, I had been diagnosed with diabetes. I thought, well, I’m an only child. I was not eligible for long term care insurance. I thought, well, they have a nursing home over on the east coast in Daytona. You know, I would be eligible for that and I would be eligible for VA care. So maybe I better do this. I applied for it and I got disability and it was because of Agent Orange. I’m just thinking how many others and there were a whole ream of things, cancers, a whole ream of things that they have linked to Agent Orange. People are not thinking about what the repercussions are for the families and it’s a lifelong thing they’re going through. This isn’t just, “Oh, well, you’re back from Vietnam. We fixed you up and away you go.”

LC: Right.

PW: Anyway.

LC: Well, Pat, let’s take a break there for a minute.

PW: Okay. To the school’s command at Newport for eight weeks on the first of July 1959. I graduated, you know, a month or so before.

LC: Okay.

PW: Then I went to San Diego in September of ‘59, reported to Guam in July of ’61, reported to Yokosuka, Japan three September ’62, reported to Portsmouth, Virginia, twenty-two July ’63, recruiting station, main station Buffalo, New York, twenty-eight August ’64, USS Sanctuary three January ’67, Naval School’s Command, Women Officer School five April ’68, grad school September ’70, Naval Regional Medical Center Philadelphia ’72, Naval Hospital Morocco, Kenitra Morocco, June ’77 to May
'78, and Philadelphia Regional Medical Center in June ’78 and retired Navy. So I was busy.

LC: Okay, I got it.
PW: Have you?
LC: Yup.
PW: Okay.
LC: Let me ask Pat about your voyage out to Vietnam. What was the mood like?
PW: Oh, I think the mood was sort of, we were high. We were looking forward to adventure. While we were up in Mare Island, we went out with the PB or the patrol boats, you know, like were down in the Delta. We drove those and they said you can’t tip them over and we tried. (Laughing)
LC: You drove a PBR (patrol boat/river)?
PW: Yeah, I don’t think they were called PBR. They were, you know, like swift boats.
LC: Oh, swift boats. Okay, sure.
LC: (Laughing) You tried to tip them over?
PW: Yeah.
LC: Any luck, no?
PW: No, no. I mean, you know, we had Naval officers with us if we got too wild.
LC: Sure.
PW: But, they said you can’t tip them over. We said, “Well, can we drive them?” They said yeah and so we did. Then, you know, the one experience I told you about, Oak Knoll with the corpsmen that were amputees.
LC: Yes.
PW: Okay, then we went to Hawaii and Hawaii was fun because we had what was called the nurse of the day, the NOD, so if we had the nurse of the day aboard ship, we couldn’t leave in case there was anything that needed to be done. But then when we were off duty, we went to the, I stayed at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel a couple nights.
LC: Sweet.
PW: We all went over to the Mauna Hotel, which had a humungous banyan tree. We all sang under the banyan tree and had a few drinks and sang. Then my roommate and I, we got a Hawaiian jitney. It was like a jeep with a canopy on the top and we went all over Hawaii. We got pretty muu muus to wear because we thought we could wear them aboard ship if there was some formal occasion. I don’t know what we were thinking. We stayed at Ft. Derussy, the officer’s club right on Waikiki and that kind of stuff.

LC: Wow.

PW: I remember one of the dentists and I went out and we tried surfing with a surfboard. Then the ship took off again to the Philippines and we got in to Subic Bay and that was for replenishment, taking on stores. Oh, some of the kids went water skiing and we could get massages. There was nice O club to party in. There was a barbeque place where you could go to eat, you know. What may be interesting is where you are parked, where the boat is tied up depends on the seniority of the commanding officer.

LC: Oh, is that right? I didn’t know that.

PW: Yeah. So I believe our CO—and on a hospital ship, it’s structured differently. You have the commanding officer of the ship who is a line officer, but you have another command embarked on that ship and that was the hospital. So we had another CO who was the hospital skipper. So there was two commands on this ship.

LC: With separate chains of command for their employees?

PW: Yes. But Medical Corps is always subordinate to the line, the line that takes precedence. So our skipper, Captain Collingswood who was a real love, he was the senior officer, so we got to tie up right at the pier and get off. Other times when we went into ports, we were not the seniors and we had to cross over all the other ships to get ashore. So that’s, you know, a little about that.

LC: That was a nice perk.

PW: Yeah.

LC: To be right there.

PW: Yeah. Then we went on to Vietnam and we arrived in DaNang on the tenth of April 1967. It was as I remember, a sunny day and the harbor was huge and there were tankers and commercial ships in the harbor. We were parked out at the entrance.
We put our anchor down and I can’t remember how long we were there, but we were there for three or four days. The Seabees would come out at night and they would check our hull for any kind of explosives, make sure we’re not going to get blown up.

LC: Did you know that was going on?
PW: Yes.

LC: Did they brief you or—?
PW: Yes, yes. The very first patients we got aboard were Marines. They came in by chopper. The corpsmen that were off duty also stood watch and so they would announce over the IMC, which was the loudspeaker system, “Patient handling, report to your, man your patient handling stations.” I would report to triage if I was on duty. I wasn’t that day, so I was standing up on the B Deck looking down as the casualties were taken off the helicopters and came into triage. I remember one Marine, handsome, he was on a litter and he had an IV (intravenous) going and he was holding his own IV bag up in the air. He looked up to see where the nurses were and he said, “Yay, round eyes.” Meaning, they were in an oriental culture and were seeing a lot of people that had oriental eyes and we were the round eyes from home. Then on one of my first nights on duty, we had a patient who was an Army sergeant come in from Saigon with an Army nurse. He had a bullet in his heart or near his heart. It was sort of bitter sweet. She came aboard and got off the chopper. There was a second class [corpsman] whose job was to frisk everybody who came aboard and he started frisking her and noticed that the curves were going a little differently. She came aboard and I was going to go on duty I guess three to eleven or nights or whatever. She didn’t have a bed. She was going to spend the night. So we hot bedded it, and that term is you share a bed. So she went to my cabin and slept and I went on duty. Let’s see, then do you want me to tell you about some of the patients and what we did or—?

LC: Oh sure, absolutely. I mean, if you want to start, if you want to go ahead, that’s fine, yeah.

PW: Okay, it may be as it comes to my head.

LC: That’s totally fine. It doesn’t have to be in any order.
PW: Okay.

LC: Just whatever you think of that you’d like to say.
PW: Okay. I worked on B Deck, which was, let’s see, I think it was two decks above main deck. We had another deck above that. The deck I worked on had, I was the charge nurse of eye, ear, nose, and throat. Then across from that was orthopedics and I worked there too. They had upper bunks and lower bunks where the patients were. Then down the corridor was urology and some of the patients were on dialysis, went on dialysis. Then across from that was the, well, it changed depending on what was going on, but it was like the Vietnamese ward. We had Vietnamese people that came in. Sometimes we’d have a POW. Sometimes we’d have—I mean, enemy, Vietcong. Then we’d have people, guards posted. Then there was another children’s Vietnamese unit. Then across from that was triage and triage was empty and they had a bunch of litters on it or they had gurneys. Gurneys is a wheeled stretcher.

LC: Sure.

PW: When the guys came in on their litters, they put the litter down in triage and if they didn’t have an IV, we’d start an IV and assess them for how many units of blood they were going to need and on if they need to be medicated. Our job was not to take care of them, but to do immediate things that needed to be done that hadn’t been done by the corpsmen in the field and then get them to where they needed to go.

LC: Essentially to stabilize them somehow if they weren’t already?

PW: Pretty much they were stabilized by the corpsmen in the field. We were getting them right from the field.

LC: Okay.

PW: If they were as stable as they could be, we would assess them, order blood, get them admitted and ship them right down to their clinical units or to the OR. So they moved through rapidly and sometimes we were processing twenty or thirty at a whack, depending on how many choppers were landing.

LC: Was the pad capable of taking only one chopper at a time?

PW: Yes.

LC: Okay. So they had to come in, get those guys off those choppers and then get out of there.

PW: Right.

LC: Okay.
PW: The corpsmen that were off duty, you know, whenever there’d be a patient handling, they’d have to come up on deck and get the kids, the wounded off the choppers and get them into triage, take them down to the recovery room until somebody else could take over. So I mean, the kids were working a lot. By kids, I mean our corpsmen.

LC: Oh, sure. I think it sounds like they were busy a lot.

PW: Yeah. On some occasions, we ran into a whole pocket of wounded who had malaria. I remember a surgical unit with about twenty-eight beds going from surgical to medical malaria. We had a young doctor who wanted vital signs every five minutes and there was no way we could do vital signs every five minutes on everybody. It just was impossible. So we kind of had to educate him, you know. You can’t load up the IVs with drugs that are very serious and a high dosage because we can’t keep up with it.

LC: We don’t have the personnel to monitor—

PW: Right, right, it’s too scary. So then, you know, some of the guys would go back to duty or they’d be air vac’ed home or whatever. Then, you know, the unit would become a surgical Vietnamese unit again. We had two missions on the ship. One was obviously to take care of our wounded and we also took care of Australians or [Vietnamese] and Canadians. Our secondary mission was the People to People program, taking care of Vietnamese. We learned some Repose that was out there with us on the hospital ship that in the beginning, the Marines would pick up wounded children or Vietnamese and the whole family would get on the chopper with them. Then they would set up housekeeping on the bottom bunk and they’d have their little cooking utensils. We quickly learned you can’t do that.

LC: Right.

PW: There wasn’t room for that. But there was one little boy who was a Montagnard who came from up in the Highlands near Pleiku and he came aboard by boat. He was riding piggyback on the back of his dad. The best I can explain it is he was hit by napalm, which is burning jelly. His face and his chest were badly, badly burned. When he healed, his [facial] scars stuck to his chest. In other words, he was permanently hooked on as he healed with scar tissue to his chest. So the right side of his mouth was pulled down like a stroke patient and he was slobbering. His eye was pulled down. From
not being able to stand up straight, his posture was off. He had horrible halitosis. His
family brought him aboard and he buried his face in his father’s neck.

LC: I’m sorry. I didn’t get the last part.

PW: His face was buried in his dad’s neck so people wouldn’t see him. One of
our doctors was a plastic surgeon and he had seen him in DaNang. He decided he could
help him. So he had him admitted and he was there for admission. I took him into the
little Vietnamese children’s unit and I put him in a top bunk. He turned his face to the
wall so nobody would see him. His name was Phai. Phai, we’d put his tray there and at
night he’d eat it. Gradually he started to come around and we could socialize a little bit
more with him. His dad went home. Then we built him up with enough nutrition that he
could have his surgery. The doctor cut his neck so that the scar tissue wasn’t holding him
down anymore. He had to do skin grafts, you know, and replacement. Then he put him
in what we called a Minerva jacket, which was a cast that went from his ears down to
about his hips so that he would be stabilized in condition that couldn’t break any of that
through.

LC: And couldn’t what?

PW: He couldn’t break any of the grafts or anything.

LC: Yes.

PW: Well, when his head was in an upright position, he became a little devil. I
would say to them, “Okay now, make your bed.” They’d make their beds and they’d lift
their child tray and they’d eat and they’d help around the ward. I can’t remember, I think
it was the Di-Di Mau. Somebody told me, “Well, that’s how to get them going in the
morning.” So I said, “Phai, Di-Di Mau, Di-Di Mau.” And, really busy, but it was still
fun. Phai would look at me and one of the Marines, the Marines used to come up and
play with the kids if they were getting better. One of the Marines said, “Do you know
what you’re saying?” I said, “I’m trying to get going.” He said, “No ma’am, you’re not
saying that at all. You’re telling him to get the hell going and everything.” It was way
worse.

LC: Right.

PW: So then Phai got so that he could play more. One of the things he liked to
do was he would get down, he would sit down by the gurney wheels out in the hall, that’s
where we stored our stretchers with wheels. I noticed he was very attuned to the wheels, like hubcaps. One of the Marines said, “You know what he’s doing?” I said, “No.” He said, “He was leading the Marines through the mine fields, the Montagnard’s were involved helping us.” He’s looking at his play toy as a mine and I often thought, oh my gosh, I hope he doesn’t go back and do that some more. So I thought that was kind of a powerful story.

LC: Well it is.
PW: Then we had a little girl who had osteo. She had been hit. She was only about four. She had big brown eyes and she had a wound in her thigh and I dubbed her button.

LC: You dubbed her what, I’m sorry?
PW: Button because of her big brown eyes.
LC: You’re breaking up a little bit.
PW: Am I?
LC: Yeah.
PW: Should I get another phone?
LC: Umm…
PW: Am I okay now?
LC: You’re getting better.
PW: Okay, maybe my mouth wasn’t close enough. I’ll switch phones.
LC: Okay.
PW: I’ll walk and talk at the same time.
LC: Okay, sure.
PW: Then we had a brother and sister that were maybe six and seven years old. I guess we called those Donnie and Marie. When they came aboard, they didn’t know their names. They were [Vietnamese] and we found out about them as we could. Is this better?
LC: Actually yes.
PW: Okay.
LC: Yeah, much better.
PW: All right, so—
LC: So you would just kind of assign them names to—?
PW: Yeah.
LC: So that you could—?
PW: Then eventually somebody would come aboard and tell us who they were.
LC: Right.
PW: So, we had a sister and brother that were darling and that was the situation they were in. Then one night around eleven o’clock, I was off duty and my roommate and I were writing letters. We heard this 1MC announcement, “This is not a drill, this is not a drill. Report to your—”we couldn’t say we were at battle stations because we were noncombatant, but it was like go to your boat stations. That wasn’t what it was, I can’t remember. There was a fire in the paint locker up in the bow. The ship was in danger and it was eleven o’clock at night. I thought, oh God, I don’t want to go in the drink tonight.”
LC: Right.
PW: So we had, you know, we had our dog tags on and we were all ready. Then they came through and said, “Fire is out. Everything’s okay.” That was a little scary.
LC: Yes, I would think, very, very much so.
PW: Yeah. I forgot to tell you, but we went, when we got in Da Nang, we had zero patients. We went to 710 patients in ten days. We had patients actually, ones that were recovering and able, they were sleeping on the top decks because we didn’t have enough beds for them.
LC: Really?
PW: Then the Marines would use the helicopters in support of an operation, you know, battle.
LC: Yes.
PW: Sometimes we had a hard time getting a helicopter to offload our wounded. The corpsmen would get up like at three o’clock in the morning and they would dress wounds, window a cast, which is cutting a hole in it over the wound, and then doing a dressing, then sealing it back up, and then getting all their belongings and their medical records and all their medicines had to be put up. Then we’d put them on litters and they’d be lining the decks waiting to be put on helicopters. Well, then some operation
would occur and they couldn’t get the choppers. So we’d have to put them back to bed and start all over again. We got some word that the hospitals at home were upset with us. They thought we were giving lousy nursing care and it made us very upset. But you know, these windows that had just been dressed before they left, by the time they went through the travel procedure and got to Oak Knoll or wherever they were, those wounds had gotten a little soupy. So when they looked at them, they thought well we weren’t doing anything, but they didn’t see the tropics and the kids lying out on stretchers. I was up in the middle of the night doing the dressings. It was the corpsmen that did them. So I mean, that was a little something to think about.

LC: How did word sort of filter back that there was some upset? I mean, how did you actually find out about that, the grapevine or officially?

PW: I don’t know, probably kids who had friends at Oak Knoll that, you know, were writing back and forth, but the word came down to us and it was upsetting. LC: I’ll bet.

PW: Because we were trying hard to do the right thing. Then—

LC: Where were the patients likely to go—if you had very serious cases like neurological trauma, those kinds of cases that weren’t stable enough to, that needed more care before they could actually be transferred all the way back to the States, was there any other outlets, did they go to Japan or—?

PW: You know, I don’t really know, but I assume that some of them went to Japan. They probably went to the Air Force bases and maybe down to Tan Son Nhut and were air evac’ed home and they had air evac Air Force nurses on the planes. So I really don’t have a sense of that. I think they tried to send the kids to a hospital nearest their home, but if it was a big trauma, like San Diego had neurosurgical center, Portsmouth, I guess Oak Knoll, I’m not sure. So that’s how that went. Maybe some went to Tripler, which was an Army hospital in Hawaii.

LC: Right.

PW: Let’s see, some other things. One of our nurses, Mary Street, she was funny. She wrote a little book. It was like a little five by seven or four by six book and it said, “Misery is reporting aboard” and it was cartoons. One was, ‘Hold all trash on
station,” which meant you couldn’t get any of our trash off. Of course, with our dressing
changes, we had a lot of trash.

LC: I’ll bet.

PW: Another one was, “GI (government issue) showers.” They told us that we
had to—water rationing went into effect in that when you went into the shower and the
head, you had to turn the water on, shut it off, lather up, and just rinse it off. So that
became comical. Then we decided we were going to order buttons from home and it was
going to say, “Save water, shower with a line officer,” and we thought that was
hysterical. Before we really got there, the nurses were flying kites off the helicopter deck
and you know, riding their bicycles, being crazy. Then we went into Singapore and you
know, we had a full load of patients onboard. The British Navy hosted us at a formal
Tattoo, which is their taking down of the flag ceremony.

LC: Right.

PW: It was dark. We were in our formal dress uniforms with cummerbunds and
tiaras and ruffles and blouses. The guys were in their cummerbunds and their big medals
and all that stuff. And the British Navy [women] were in gorgeous long, sort of princess
style formal, it was a uniform, but it was like dark blue as I remember. They had like the
symbol of the crown of England on it, very elegant.

LC: Wow.

PW: A band with drummers came through and they were beating the tattoo, the
drum sound and the insides of the drums were lit. They took down the flag and we were
part of that. Then we were invited to various ships, you know, that were in British-
Australian ships and we had fun doing that. I had a friend who knew the Kodak
representative in Singapore, so they took us in their big car all around. Then I forgot to
tell you about going across the equator, which was hysterical.

LC: Wow.

PW: When we got into Singapore, some of us went to the Singapore Hotel and
got a room. We went swimming and ate in the restaurants. Then two of the doctors and
my roommate and I, we sat up on the balcony all night long singing in harmony. It was
sort of an outlet. Then the next day I took some pictures and here’s one of the second-
class corpsman. I’m backtracking.
LC: That’s okay.

PW: We had gone across the equator on our way to Singapore. There were pollywogs who had never been across. They were going to be initiated. Then there were the shellbacks who had been across and they did the initiation.

LC: What did that consist of? Can you say?

PW: Yes. We had gotten, the nurses had gotten orange flight suits from the *USS Intrepid*, a jeep carrier, small carrier, the pilot sent them over. We were ordered to wear our flight suits. They were bright orange and go-aheads and we could wear no makeup and shower hats on our head. Ann Langley was a pollywog and she was assigned as the slave to one of the Red Cross workers who was a shellback, she was the princess. I remember waking up and somebody poured a bucket of water over the slave’s head.

Then we went to breakfast and of course, the Filipino stewards had been across the equator, they’d gone back and forth. So we’d give them our order, we might like bacon and eggs or something like that. We’d get sloppy looking oatmeal and maybe there’d be ketchup on it, you know.

LC: (Laughing) Right.

PW: Then we went out on deck and we had to go through this line. Well, the first thing we had to do is bend down and kiss the royal baby. Well, the royal baby was a senior chief with a big belly. He had a kerchief over his head and he had diapers on and nothing else. They had taken engine grease and ketchup and mustard and horseradish, whatever they could find. Somebody had been keeping a diary of all of our infractions. When it came to be my turn, I was clowning around with one of the line officers at breakfast one day and he said something to me and I squirted him with my ketchup. So I was, yeah, I had to pay the penalty.

LC: I’m sure.

PW: The penalty was kneeling down and kissing the royal baby’s stomach with all this goop on it. Once your head was down there, they just shoved your face in it. Then we went on and the royal judge was a senior chief, oh what’d they call him, he was like a mess attendant, a real nice guy. He had a white wig on, which was a mop head. He was reading out all our infractions and then there was like a stretcher and you sat in that and they cracked eggs over your head. Then they took the fire hose and let you have
it. All this was televised for the patients. We had probably over five hundred patients onboard and they thought it was hysterical.

LC: So somebody was out there with a camera and it was feeding live into the patient’s rooms and the wards?

PW: Yeah. Well, yeah, because we had televisions on the units.

LC: Cool. Brilliant. (Laughing)

PW: The doctors had to wear their khakis backwards. In other words, they zipped up the back. That went on all day long. Then you know, if you had the duty, of course, you stood the duty, but that was sort of fun. Then the pollywogs took revenge. We sent up the flag, you know, with the skull and crossbones up the mast because we were underway. We were on our way to Singapore, so we weren’t taking on patients.

LC: Right.

PW: But we had a whole load and we took the commanding officer of the hospital ship who had never been aboard and we put him in the brig. He got bread and water. Then we took the corpsmen, the corpsman who I said—well, there was a second-class corpsman who would work with me once in a while up in triage. He came up to me one day and he said, “Miss Pat, I have something to ask you.” I said, “What?” He acted funny. He said, “Well, I don’t quite know how to say this,” but he said, “I’m a shellback.” He said, “Could you give me one of your bras?” I said, “What are you going to use it for?” He says, “Well, I’m going to dye it and then I’m going to put sweet and sour on my chest.” So he dyed it purple. He put sweet and sour on his chest.

LC: He wrote out sweet and sour?

PW: Yes, with a marker.

LC: Sure.

PW: He was put in a full body spica cast, casted from his shoulders down.

LC: How long did you leave him in it?

PW: I think he was a couple of days like that.

LC: Oh.

PW: He got panicky.

LC: Oh, yeah.
PW: He got really panicky. Then the nurses doled out a whole bunch of pyridium tablets, which is a urinary disinfectant and they turn your urine cherry red. We put that in the chief petty officer’s coffee urn, so they were all peeing red for awhile. (Laughing) They were upset. I mean, that’s kind of the—

LC: So the revenge of the pollywogs was actually quite serious that year.

PW: (Laughing) Yeah.

LC: You shook them up a little I think. (Laughing)

PW: Yeah, but it was sort of fun. The COs went along with it. I mean, they were pretty cool with it. Then we went into Hong Kong a couple of times and we had a lot of patients onboard. Our chief nurse was Cdr. Sally Smith and she was a love. She was just 4’10” and she always wore a blonde wig. She said, “Well, if you’re willing to work twelve hour days, I can work it so that you can have three days off in Hong Kong.” Well, of course, we all wanted to do that.

LC: Yeah.

PW: So Sully and I got a room at the Hong Kong Hilton. Of course, we all went to a tailor. We all had, you know, we had designed clothes. That was sort of a fun thing to do. So we had clothes made up and I had a black lace chungsam made with a Chiang Kai Shek, Madame Chiang Kai Shek collar, you know, with frogs on the side and split.

LC: Wow.

PW: So I put on my black lace chungsam and I went down and had my hair done. I had a wiglet, and so that was done. Then I got some false eyelashes at the pharmacy or at the gift store. I had spikes on and we proceeded into the Dragon Bar. Some of the corpsmen caught us and said, “Oh my God, you’re awesome.” (Laughing)

LC: I bet that.

PW: That was fun.

LC: Probably worked.

PW: Then I went ashore and I bought a blonde wig and I don’t know if you can remember back, you can’t, but there was a movie star, Veronica Lake. She wore blonde hair and it was parted on the side and it draped over one eye and it was sort of like a flip pageboy.

LC: Right.
PW: Well, I got this blonde wig and thought it would be fun. I was going to have it cut and shaped to my head. But before that, I just wore it as it was and I went down to dinner one day with this wig on. Of course, everybody was laughing and we had lots of fun doing that kind of stuff.

LC: Sure.

PW: Then on the way to the ship, I stopped in New Orleans and one of my Navy nurse corps friend who was married to an air intelligence type, she said, “Do you want to take some friendly fruit with you aboard?” I said, “I don’t even know what it is.” Well, you take peaches, canned peaches or canned pineapple or maraschino cherries, that kind of stuff, and you put a cup of that with a cup of sugar and then you leave it for two weeks. What happens is it starts to ferment and bubble.

LC: Oh, okay.

PW: Then you can add more. Well, I had this stuff bubbling in my safe because you’re not allowed to drink aboard a Navy ship.

LC: Okay.

PW: Josephus Daniels was one of the chief of Naval operations and he declared that back in the 1800s, but I had this stuff bubbling. We got to a point where we’re online for sixty days. We didn’t have any liberty and nobody was complaining, but we got silent. We had just seen a lot of trauma and a lot of kids in really bad shape. The way we dealt with it was to say nothing. So all of a sudden I thought, we got ice cream. I guess about six months out, we got an ice cream maker and the stewards brought ice cream. All of a sudden, I looked around the table and I said, “Friendly fruit.” They said, “What’s that?” I said, “It’s fermenting fruit.” They said, “Go get it.” Our table, the first seating was the junior seating, lieutenant commanders and below.

LC: Yes.

PW: The second seating was commanders and above and captains. We called ours the kiddy hour and there’s was the senior hour. So I was at the junior hour because I was a lieutenant aboard and I became a lieutenant commander before I got off. We were seated according to date of rank. Now what that means is, if you’re the junior officer at your table, you sit at the end. So when the ship rolls and pitches, if there’s any soup to be
gotten in somebody’s lap, it’s the junior officer who gets it and this is all part of the Navy way of doing things.

LC: Right, Navy tradition.

PW: Right. So I brought the friendly fruit down and we all put it in our ice cream. Of course, all the other tables wanted to know why they couldn’t have it. Well, there wasn’t enough. It was just for us. So then it went back in my safe and when we went into Subic or one of the other ports, I’d go to the commissary and I’d buy fruit and replenish.

LC: Sure.

PW: It became a morale thing. Well, when I got to the Naval school’s command at Newport, my next duty station, I got a letter one day from the commanding officer of the Sanctuary and it was a new one. He said, “It has come to my attention that you had a morale thing going aboard,” and he said, “It was called friendly fruit. Can you get me some?” So one of my friends, a Navy nurse, she was dating a helicopter pilot and he had orders to Vietnam. So he took the friendly fruit to the Sanctuary to perpetuate the tradition.

LC: Wow. So it went all the way back?

PW: Went all the way back. (Laughing)

LC: That’s very cool.

PW: Yeah. Then there was a day when, I guess we were on our way to Hong Kong or the Philippines and we were doing about eighteen knots and there’s two stories that go with that. The command called a dress blue inspection, which means high heels, medals, full medals, your bucket hat on. The guys were in their full dress uniforms and you stood out on the helicopter deck in the sun being inspected. It was a uniform inspection. We had another one that was a dress whites and we had a terrible time because I guess the guys in the line didn’t think about it, but they blew the tubes, which means they blow any soot out of the stacks. They blew the tubes during our dress white inspection and of course, our uniforms were all full of soot.

LC: Sure.

PW: So then after our dress blue inspection, the enlisted people had their inspection. Well, it was before Easter and the officers decided that we’re off duty.
We’re going to have an Easter egg coloring detail. So all of a sudden you hear this announcement in the middle of the inspection for the enlisted people. “Will the officers on the Easter egg coloring detailed lay to the steward’s pantry,” and the guys just fell to their knees, cracked up. The whole thing went out the window. The whole ship was just roaring. So I mean, that was some of the nutsy-fagan stuff we did.

LC: I mean, when you were off duty and by yourself, did you have downtime? I mean, what did you do for your own sanity apart from having fun with—?

PW: Well, we wrote letters in our cabin’s home. We had a movie every night and that was funny because one of the movies was Henry the VIII. I guess the sailor that was announcing what the movie would be for the evening said, “Henry the V-I-I-I,” and everybody laughed. Then when we got aboard the first night in San Diego, I guess it was just thirteen nurses, but we were getting underway for ABC warfare drills or something like that. It was TAPS, TAPS, TAPS, which means time to put the lights out. “TAPS, TAPS, lights out. All hands in your own bunks.” As soon as it got that out with nurses aboard, everybody started to roar again. You could hear this ripple of laughter go throughout.

LC: Right.

PW: Then we woke up in morning to “Reveille, reveille, heave out and trice up.” Well, heave out back in the old days of the sailing ships, the sailors were in hammocks. So heave out meant heave yourself out of the hammock, trice up the hammock along the wall so you have the space to walk in. So that still carried on, heave out and trice up. Let’s see, I’m trying to think. Oh, so then what other things did we do? We played Risk.

The University of Oregon came out with a game called Risk. It was a political science game.

LC: Yeah, I remember it.

PW: Okay, well, when we came off duty, we would go to the wardroom and we’d start to play Risk. Well, there were engineers and there were line officers and medical service corps and nurses. Those games would go on for days.

LC: Oh, boy.

PW: It would be like the game just kept on and if you were going on duty, then an engineer took your seat and it just kept going. We did that a lot. Then Christmas, we
were allowed to wear civilian clothes. We knew we were going to have occasions when
we could do that and when we were in Hawaii, we bought hula muus, you know, the long
formal Hawaiian dress with trains and stuff.

PW: So we did that. Then the officers in the wardroom contributed so much of
their pay every month to the Mess and then the president of Mess would define the menus
and give those to stewards. So that’s what we ate. But one of the officers was a diver
and so he got langouste and we had lobster sometimes.

PW: Then a lot of the—some of the people played Bridge or Poker.

PW: You know, once the ice cream machine started, we’d line up the length of
the ship just to get ice cream. Then we’d go back and we’d play with the kids, walk them
along the decks or play games with them, that kind of stuff.

PW: The only tension was funny. When we got aboard, and we didn’t have any
patients, you know, the guys sort of felt like, “Why do we got these women aboard our
ship for? What did we do?” We had one handsome warrant officer, chief warrant
officer, he was an officer, but he was warrant from enlisted and he was part Mexican and
part Greek. Swarthy complexion, black eyes, handsome and he used to say, “I’m coming
off submarines and what did I do to deserve being on a ship with a bunch of petticoats?”
really bent out of shape. We heard about this until we got to Da Nang. Once we started
taking patients on, the whole thing switched around. All of a sudden, we could do no
wrong. We used to vie to come to first seating and sit with the engineers. They had their
whole table, well, it was all men. They were all engineers. If we had triage or a patient
handling and we might come late to dinner, well, people from second seating would sit in
our seats sometimes just so they could get the work done.
PW: I remember one day, I came and we tried to avoid not coming to the wardroom with any blood on our uniforms, but I had a few spatters. When I walked in, the only seats that were available were at the engineering table, which I thought great because we could sit with the guys. When I got to the table, the chief warrant officer stood up and he had a small harmonica. He played this tune. He said, “Gentlemen,” and he gestured for them to all rise. He hit the tune again and they all went, “Hmmm (singing),” and he said, “A princess eats with us tonight.” So that’s cool.

LC: Wow.

PW: I mean, it was that kind of silliness. Then, you know, I sat next to an anesthesiologist and across from some of the surgeons at dinnertime. Sometimes we’d put peanut butter in somebody’s salad, I mean, childish, but fun things like that.

LC: Right, harmless but—

PW: Yeah.

LC: Yeah.

PW: Then one night one of the surgeons, he was a father of I don’t know, three or four kids, happily married and I was just feeling devilish. I took my shoe off and ran my toe up his pant leg. (Laughing) He started to grin and then he started to laugh and everybody wanted to know what was going on. We were just being funny. So we got a very sort of straight-laced surgeon aboard. He sat next to this doctor that I was teasing. He gave me the nod, “Try that on him.” So I did that and everybody knew what was going on. It was just to get him off center a little.

LC: I think you were quite the spark here to a lot of these—

PW: Pranks.

LC: Yeah, mischievous doings.

PW: (Laughing) Sort of.

LC: It sounds like you were pretty important in that way, which is a very, very important way of coping, you know.

PW: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Let me ask a little bit about patient care. You’ve mentioned that you were working triage on some shifts.

PW: Uh-huh.
LC: Can you go back over the rules of triage as you understood them at that time? I mean, what you were supposed to do and what decisions you were supposed to make?

PW: Actually, I just helped. We all pitched in together. We had a corpsman who was a second class petty officer and he kept the whole triage unit supplied with IVs and IV sets and blood units and things like that. Then when the stretchers would come in, the stretcher bearers would put them on the rolling gurneys, the wheels were locked. Then the doctors would be there and they’d check them over. I’d say, “How many units?” They’d say, “Two, four, whatever,” and then we’d get the paperwork out and get that going. Then I’d help with the admission corpsmen if they needed things or I’d help with cutting away uniforms so we could get a good idea of what the wounds were. We just all pitched in together. It really was the doctor who was the captain of the team who decided where they were going to go and I just assisted as I could, I was there. I think really the doctors and the corpsmen did more than I did.

LC: Were there some patients who might’ve made it through the Medevac process and all the way to the hospital, but there was really not anything you were going to be able to do for them?

PW: Yes.

LC: Would you actually go through surgery with a patient that you knew was probably in that condition or not?

PW: No, no. If I had the duty and I was working on a ward and they called patient handling, then I would go to triage. I would go from triage down to recovery room with the patients. Then I would take care of them in the recovery room until they called them into the OR. Once they got in the OR, then I was off duty.

LC: Okay.

PW: I had one night where I just kept going all night long because we had patients. You know, if there was blood work or IVs to be monitored or drugs to be given, that kind of thing. The patients who were not going to make it, they perceived they were going to die and there was nothing to do for them, they would go to a clinical unit. They would be given pain medications and taken care of.

LC: Right.
PW: But I think we were talking high ninety percentile everybody made it. That’s because of the excellent care they got from the corpsmen in the field and then at Da Nang and on the ships. So we saved most of the people we had. If somebody came aboard dead on a chopper, they didn’t even come through the triage system. They went down to the morgue.

LC: So there was a morgue. Were there graves registration people on the ship?
PW: Yes.

LC: Were they as integrated into all of the shenanigans and funnings and all the rest that’s been going on as everybody else?
PW: Yes.

LC: No differences there?
PW: No.

LC: Really? Okay.
PW: No. They were part of the team. There was one night, it was after dinner. It was still daylight and a bunch of us were up, you know, just looking out what was going on. A helicopter came over and we could hear the banter between the [navigator on the bridge] and the helicopter pilot and they had been hit. The navigator was telling him or whoever was up on the bridge to go around. He didn’t have enough I guess hydraulic fluid to go around, so some of it leaked on the ship, but he wound up ditching in the ocean, I think it was his third ditch. There were thirteen patients onboard. We had boats in the water all night long and search lights trying to find them, but we got the pilot and we got a couple of the patients. The rest drowned. And that was kind of sobering.

LC: That’s very sad.
PW: Yeah, yeah. It was the pilot—I think it was his third time that he had to ditch. Then I was told when I got home, I don’t know, for some reason I was in the paper. I used to volunteer with Angel Flight, which was volunteer pilots helping people in need. I was written up in the paper and one of the guys who had been on the ship who was enlisted said, he said, “Do you know that we were sprayed with Agent Orange?” I said, “No.” He said, “Well, we were and I put it on the log.” He said, “That Agent Orange,” he said, “I have a lot of sickness.” He had a whole bunch of stuff wrong with him. I started to tune into that and I thought, well, we had one nurse who died of multiple
sclerosis. We had a nurse who had brain surgery, a brain tumor. We had a doctor who
died of a brain tumor and nobody officially ever said anything to us about that. That kind
of made me distrustful.

LC: But he had entered it on the ship’s log?
PW: He said he did. He said he did.
LC: What year did you two kind of have this conversation roughly, I mean, in the
‘80s?
PW: I think probably in the ‘80s. I wrote a letter to Senator Graham, our state
senator about it, no answer.

LC: Ever?
PW: No, no. So I don’t know if he thought I was a kook or what, but you know,
you hear stories about when they had the atomic bombs testing and there was some
movies being made and Susan Hayward had a brain tumor. John Wayne in that movie
developed lung cancer. Now maybe that would’ve happened anyway, you know, just the
luck of the draw, but I thought, you know, then when we came back, there was all this,
“Well, is Agent Orange really creating all these problems?” Now you’ve got what is
happening with the Gulf Syndrome, you know, what’s going on with all that and a lot of
people are sick and people started treating them like malingerers.

LC: Right. Then there’s the controversies over all the vaccinations and so forth,
that the current guys have had that.
PW: Yeah and people getting disciplined if they won’t take them.
LC: Yeah. It’s definitely worrying.
PW: It is worrying. So I can understand why, you know, people are scared. I
don’t, you know—maybe it’s because they don’t get enough data together, but I think
sometimes our government is not very truthful with us.

LC: Well. It certainly cost them money.
PW: Yup.
LC: That’s for sure.
PW: Yeah, and that may drive it, you know, the disabilities they have to pay.
LC: Well, let me ask a little bit about a couple other things that you mentioned Pat on the paperwork that you completed for us. These were incidents around the security of the ship that you mentioned that occasionally you were on, on at least one occasion, one of or more of the patients were found to have weapons on them as they came onto the ship.

PW: Yes.

LC: Do you remember anything about that?

PW: It wasn’t—well, they were coming from the field.

LC: Yes.

PW: It was the duty of the second class petty officer on the helicopter landing deck to collect all that. I don’t know if this is true, but I was told that one of the Marines came aboard the Repose and had a grenade and he lobbed it up into the stack of the ship. It could’ve blown up the ship, but I guess nothing really serious happened. So I mean, some of the pranks were serious pranks.

LC: That’s actually pretty scary.

PW: Yeah. That gave us some pause for concern.

LC: I think you mentioned also that you saw a destroyer getting—this would not be your ship, but obviously a destroyer off in the distance or perhaps closer to shore that got a depth charge or some kind of underwater explosion or something? Do you know?

PW: One night after dinner, some of us walked out on the main deck. We looked and we were only about a thousand yards from the beach—

LC: This is at Da Nang?

PW: No. I think we were going towards Chu Lai. We were some place up in I Corps, which was south of Chu Lai to the Demilitarized Zone was our steaming area.

LC: Okay, yes.

PW: Somewhere along there, I don’t remember. But we were only about a thousand yards off the shore. You could see the beach.

LC: Right.

PW: You could see people running around. There was a destroyer between us and the shore and it was blowing smoke really big time. It was trying to outrun another ship that was trying to depth charge it. When they depth charged, they have like
hedgehogs, they’re called hedgehogs. It’s like a big oil drum full of detonating material. They rolled it over the back of the ship and it will go out and set off an explosion. The destroyer was trying to run away from all this. It was, I don’t know, the word surreal is kind of overdone, but it was like, “Is this real? Are we really watching this?”

LC: Who was the pursuing vessel, do you know?
PW: I guess it was Vietcong. I mean, there was so much going on, we were just, you know—

LC: Yeah.
PW: It was sort of dangerous. We didn’t stay out there too long. You know, because if you stood out on deck, there sometimes would be sampans. They’d be fishing and they’d be around the ship. We never knew who was Viet Cong and who was the good guys. Sometimes, Mary Cannon, I think gave you her address, was a chief nurse in Da Nang and some of the maids that would do laundry and stuff, they didn’t know whether they were Vietcong at night or spies or not. That was prevalent in the war. You didn’t know who you were dealing with. We had some excellent interpreters aboard the ship, Vietnamese.

LC: Right.
PW: But we sometimes wondered, were they Cong and were we at risk because nobody knew.

LC: Did you ever hear of or know about the ship actually taking maybe some rifle fire or something like that?
PW: To my knowledge, I don’t remember any of that. But they checked our hull.

LC: Yes, absolutely, yeah.
PW: When we went into Da Nang, we usually parked, anchored between two high hills, mountains. We didn’t go right into the harbor itself so we’d be at risk. Under the Geneva Convention, a hospital ship cannot travel in convoy with armed vessels.

LC: Okay.
PW: But one night, oh I guess about 4 or 4:30 in the morning, we heard this tremendous like explosion and I thought the ship had been blown up. We had what was called a port light in our stateroom. I jumped out of the top bunk. I went over and I looked out. The cruiser, battleship, not cruiser, the Battleship New Jersey was right
beside us. She was lobbing [sixteen inchers] over Marble Mountain past the hospital at
the enemy. I thought, holy cow, you know, if the enemy gets a bead on them, we may be
goners.

LC: Because you’re sitting right next to them essentially?
PW: Well, we were sitting close enough that—I’d say a couple of city blocks as I
remember. Then somebody on the crew explained to us that when they’re big, I guess
they’re eighteen inchers. They’re either sixteen or eighteen. When those guns fire, it’s
the equivalent of sending a Volkswagen from Philadelphia to Delaware.

LC: Yes, yes. I’ve heard similar things.
PW: Yeah, tremendous amount of power.
LC: Yeah.
PW: So it was like it was a stealth ship. It would come in under darkness. We’d
get up to go on duty and she’d be gone. But you know, it was there.

LC: Pat, let me ask you about the Tet Offensive. Can you tell me what the
experience was like for you on the ship when that was going on and I mean the first Tet
Offensive, big Tet?
PW: As I remember, it was early in the morning and the Chu Lai ammo dump I
think went up.

LC: Yes, I think so.
PW: The Tet meant the Chinese Lunar New Year. It was in February. It was
towards the end of my tour. We started taking on casualties like gangbusters. They just
kept coming and coming. By that time I’d had a couple JGs, nurses, who had done their
first duty station and were working with me on the tail end of the ship. We couldn’t—at
the beginning of a shift, you usually stand at the desk at a kardex. It has the medications
and the treatments and all that’d been done of each patient. You go through each one and
give a report. Things were so busy we couldn’t do that. We were working twelve on and
twelve off and sometimes more. We’d have to go around to each one of the beds and
assess what they were doing because things were happening so fast. I remember walking
from one ward to another, ward meaning clinical unit and I saw these fresh face
corpsmen coming at me. I said, “Who are you?” They said, “We were told to come up
here and help you.” I said, “Where are you coming from?” They said, “Corps school.” I
think at that time they were getting eight weeks of Corps School. Now these kids, many
of them were fresh out of high school. I thought, oh my God, they’re sending us people
from Corps School, no seasoning. So I said, “Okay, this is the situation.” I said, “Take
vital signs on all the patients.” I said, “Wipe their collar to make sure it doesn’t change.
If the IVs are running and they stop, let me know right away. Just keep going around to
all the patients and checking them and come and get me if there’s any changes.’

PW: They were wonderful. PW: They were wonderful. That’s how it was for the three days we were taking
LC: Right. on patients. There’s one story I wrote, it’s called the Tet Offensive. If you want, I’ll
PW: They were wonderful. LC: No kidding?
send it to you.

PW: But it’s about the Marines putting a very young girl in an Ao Dai. An Ao
LC: Okay. Dai was the Vietnamese dress, you know, a long tunic that went down to the knees and
PW: But it’s about the Marines putting a very young girl in an Ao Dai. An Ao
LC: Yes. pants.

PW: She had coal black hair. They brought her in with the wounded through
triage. She came to the Vietnamese unit where I was and I assessed her and decided she
had a chest full of blood and needed a chest tube. So I got on the telephone, which we
called the horn. That goes back to old sailing days when a horns from the bridge would
go down to the lower decks. It would be like a pipeline.

PW: I got on the horn and I asked Shirley Brown in the OR if Captain Milnes, the
thoracic surgeon was scrubbed in. She said, “He’s just getting ready to close.” I said,
“Would you tell him to please come up here with a chest set and some underwater seal? I
think we need a chest tube. I’ve got a hemothorax up here.” I knew I was giving orders
to a four striper and I was JG or I was a full lieutenant. He came up with all the
equipment, put the chest tube in and was very gracious about the whole thing. We saved
her life. So, I mean, the turn of patients was just constant. All we did was keep the blood
going, the IVs. I didn’t have time to take vital signs on everybody and the neurosurgeon
came in with the chief nurse. She said, “Miss Warner, doctor so and so said you’re not taking vital signs on his head wound patients.” I said, “That’s right.” She said, “Well, why not?” I said, “Because their color is good, they’re breathing good, their IV lines are good, the wounds are being taken care and that’s all the time I have to do.” I said, “Everybody’s okay and I am watching them, but I can’t stop and take vital signs.” She looked at the doctor and she said, “She’s right.” He took off on his heel.

LC: So he was a little perturbed.

PW: Yeah, but you know, we just didn’t have time. I mean, if somebody’s color was good and their IVs were running and the blood was running and they weren’t bleeding, you know, it was pretty much a no-brainer that they were doing okay.

LC: There was somebody else who probably wasn’t and you needed to get on that.

PW: Yeah. I mean, we had to do what was important, not that that wasn’t, I’m not downplaying it.

LC: Sure, but you have to prioritize.

PW: But she stood by me, which I thought was pretty cool.

LC: Her rank was—?

PW: She was a full commander.

LC: Okay. You by this time were a lieutenant commander?

PW: I was a, I don’t know. I was either a lieutenant or a lieutenant commander.

LC: Okay.

PW: Then we had another little boy who came aboard. He may have been maybe about nine years old, darling, Vietnamese. He had come from the German hospital ship, Helgoland. They gave that little boy—he had a heart condition, pure digitalis, the leaf and he had some heart problems. I was on my way to chow and they called an arrest. So I went back and got the crash cart with the junior nurses and assisted the doctor. We couldn’t bring him back, but we tried. As I got off the ship, I was invited to the junior nurses cabin and they had what was called a jolly green. It was creamed de mints and cream de coco mixed.

LC: Oh, jeez.
PW: They raised their glasses and toasted me for, you know, helping them out in that crisis. So that was kind of nice.

LC: Did you have any more interactions of any kind that you remember with the German hospital ship?

PW: No.

LC: Where were they moored? Were they up on the shore?

PW: I think they were moored in Da Nang.

LC: Okay. Were they—?

PW: I can’t remember if they cruised or not.

LC: Oh, okay.

PW: I mean, I don’t know a lot. Then one day in triage, Cathy LeRoy worked with Paris Match, she came through. As I remember, she had an M on her forehead in marker for morphine. As I remember, her jaw was broken and she had some other wounds and she was up in sick officer’s quarters for quite a while. I’ve got a newspaper article about that.

LC: Now she was a civilian performer?

PW: No, she was a journalist.

LC: A journalist, okay.

PW: She was a writer. I’ve got an article in my scrapbook about her. Jim Beaty’s been in touch with her.

LC: Oh, is that right? Okay.

PW: So that might be of interest.

LC: Very much so.

PW: Cathy LeRoy is her name.

LC: Okay. Well Pat, let’s take a break there for right now.
Interview with Patricia Warner
Date: July 18, 2005

Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University continuing the oral history interview with Cdr. Patricia A. Warner. Today’s date is the eighteenth of July 2005. I am on the campus of Texas Tech in the Special Collections Building in the interview room and Pat is speaking to me by telephone from Florida. Good morning again Pat.

Patricia Warner: Good morning Laura.

LC: Again, thanks for your time. Pat, we were talking about your tour last time on the USS Sanctuary. I wonder, among all the stories that you have already shared with us about different incidents that took place, I wonder what you can tell us in terms of the types of injuries that you most commonly saw. What kinds of injuries did you only see once or twice and both your sort of appreciation of how to treat those injured people technically and also kind of emotionally? I mean, can you kind of run over some of that material?

PW: Sure. Some of the most common wounds we had were bullet holes to the head. During the Tet Offensive, we had a lot of those. We had two neurosurgeons on board. They went immediately to the OR. Some of them had to be maintained until they could get to the OR and they were supported with, you know, drugs and IV fluids and what not. I worked up on B Deck, which was one above main deck. That was where the helicopter pad was and triage. So I was the triage nurse when I was on duty. We had some Vietnamese people that came on board that had bullet wounds to the head and we sustained them. Sometimes it was three or four or five days before they could get to surgery. One of the neurosurgeons had a corpsman who worked with him who was excellent. He would go around everyday and take the head wounds off and check and if there was any gangrene growing, he would, you know, cut it out, redress until they could get to surgery. I thought, oh, these people are going to be vegetables. Nothing’s going to work with this.

LC: Right.
PW: But they walked off the ship laughing. I thought, boy, the resiliency of these people in our young Marines was fantastic. We did have some Army people and Navy people—most of the casualties were Marines. As I said before, our ship was operating from the DMZ (demilitarized zone) down to a little below Chu Lai. It was known as I Corps. Other kinds of wounds we had were bouncing Betty landmine wounds where a Marine would stand on a landmine and it would take a leg off, maybe up to thigh level. It would be very jagged and look like raw meat. They would go to surgery and they would do an amputation. Then depending on how dirty it was and the nature of it, sometimes it would have to be revised. I think I said in a prior interview, when these kids went home, I had one of the corpsman in Oak Knoll who was on his seventeenth wound amputee revision.

LC: Right.

PW: So again, I think the thing that strikes me most is when people come home and they hear about the wounded and they think, oh, they’re going to get better and that’s the end of that.” It’s not. It’s a lifelong deal for these people and their families.

LC: Undoubtedly, undoubtedly.

PW: An unusual wound that happened, I was in triage and I had to prep a lady for surgery. She was Vietnamese in her probably twenties and I don’t know how it happened, but the skin from her forehead had been detached. It was flipped down over her nose so you could see the raw eye orbit and I thought, how am I going to prep this lady’s hair? I did it, but it was kind of a horrendous wound. We had another kid on the ENT (ear, nose and throat) who came through triage with his tongue hanging out. They had to reattach his tongue. He had gotten wounded in the face. We also had a lot of shrapnel where mortar attacks and things would strike people. There are veterans from World War II that I know that are still picking shrapnel out of their backs, you know, where it’s easing its way to the surface and out. So these wounds go on sometimes for a long, long time. Another interesting thing that happened in triage was a little boy, Ha Phon, who came through. The story we got, he was the son of a Vietnamese major and I don’t know for sure, but when he came through triage, he had an arm wound, upper arm. He was hiding out in a cave and somebody had stuffed his upper arm with leaves to stop the bleeding. So, he was onboard with us for a long time. Dr. Carl Brighton who was a
well known orthopedic surgeon, I believe he's in Philadelphia, he worked tediously to put
his arm back together. I think he had to do some nerve re-working and muscle and skin
grafts. That little kid was with us for quite awhile and he became very dear to all of us.
We had a little boy we called the Buddha baby, Charlie. He had a cute little Buddha
belly. He liked to get into the cookie jars when he got better, but he had an enormous
tumor in his throat. They did a tracheotomy and removed the tumor. He stayed with us
to recover. We had several kids who had eye injuries. This is part of the People to
People Program.

LC: Sure.

PW: They had eye surgery. Some of them had tumors and had those removed.
Some of our children had gotten mortar fragments. One had ruptured a girl’s bladder.
She was about four. Her little brother had a femur fracture from mortar. We had both of
them together and they were anonymous. We didn’t know who they were. The Marines
picked them up and we took care of them. We called them Donny and Marie because we
didn’t know their names.

LC: Which is a reference to the Osmond’s, yes?

PW: Yeah, awful cute. Then there was another little girl. I think she was about
four. She looked like not much more than an infant when we got her. We called her
spider baby. Her arms and legs were just spindly. She was emaciated. Somebody had
done a colostomy on her. They had taken the bowel and brought it out through the skin
because of some problem. So we had her for quite awhile building her up nutritionally.
Then one of the doctors went in. He couldn’t see why there was any reason for her to
have it. So he reattached her and she had a really good outcome with that.

LC: Wow.

PW: Then another day, a young Paris Match photographer came aboard. Her
name was Cathy LeRoy. I have an article on her. I think Jim Beaty can put you in touch
with her. But she was wounded, she had her jaw wired and she had a lot of other
wounds. She was onboard with us awhile recovering. I think she was twenty-two, a
petite little blonde girl.

LC: What kind of wound was it, I’m sorry?
PW: Her jaw was fractured and then she had, I think it was shrapnel, but I’ve got
the article here if you want me to tell you more.

LC: Um, yes, you can either, I mean, if you have it at hand Pat, you could read
some of it into the record here or—

PW: Yeah I do. Hold on a minute.

LC: Okay, sure.

PW: I got to figure out. This is an article about French photographer, Catherine,
C-A-T-H-E-R-I-N-E, LeRoy who came aboard. This article is from the Rochester
Democrat & Chronicle. My mother sent it to me. It’s dated Tuesday May 30, 1967. It’s
written by John Nance of the Associated Press. It says, “Minor Headline, Mortar Fire
Wounds Petite Photographer” and there’s a picture of her. “She was wounded in a mortar
barrage near Con Thien, looked like a beaten child against the fluffy white sheets and
pillows on this hospital ship. Face was swollen, bandages covered face wounds, neck,
both upper arms, her left hand, her chest and her legs. She was only twenty-two. She
says, ‘I was scared and it was awful.’ The words came awkwardly because her teeth
were wired and her jaw was fractured. May nineteenth, more than three-dozen pieces of
steel had ripped into her ninety-five pound body while she traveled with US Marines
advancing on the DMZ. ‘When I think about the mortars, I see it all over again,’ Kathy
said. ‘I can hear them. I didn’t hear the one that hit me though. A helicopter was leaving
and made too much noise. I thought I was falling apart.’” I’m taking snippets of it now.
“‘I realized I’d been hit, but I didn’t know where. The sun felt hot. My cameras were all
covered with blood and I tried to clean them off. I saw my fatigues were all bloody. My
teeth felt like they were going to pieces. A corpsman cut off my bloody clothes. When
he reached my bra, it was new and had been pure white, now it was pure red. He started
to cut it off and I stopped him. He said, “Come on, come on, this is no time to be
embarrassed. We’ve got to look.” More men were running and shouting and they called
for more bandages. I realized I had many wounds. They bandaged both legs and
wrapped me in a poncho and a Marine lieutenant from Staten Island kept telling me,
“We’ll get you out, we’ll get you out okay.”’” They did and I encountered her in triage.
Of course, she went onto the OR and was taken care of and then was on one of our units
recovering until she could leave.
LC: How was her English? I get that she was—
PW: You know, when she came through, I think she had a grease pencil mark and black on her forehead that had an M for morphine. I think she was sort of shocky, so we didn’t have much conversation. We just got her stabilized and got her down to the OR. Then after that I didn’t see her because she stayed up on the unit and I was working on B Deck, she was up on A Deck.

LC: Pat, can you tell a little bit more about this system of field marking on the forehead, what were the different markings and what did they mean?
PW: I didn’t see a lot of field markings that I can remember other than that. When the troops came in, if they had a bandage on their leg, we took the bandage off and looked at the wound. I think there was some notes that came in from the fleet Marine corpsmen and they usually started an IV. So we checked them over and saw how serious the wounds are and immediately decided if they needed blood, how many units, got them type and cross matched, stabilized them, the vital signs were good and we sort of went with that. She stands out with the M for morphine on her, you know. If somebody else came aboard and they had pinpoint pupils, we’d look at that and try to assess that way, if their vital signs were good.

LC: Now pinpoint pupils, okay, for the medically unaware, which would include myself.
PW: Well, we were checking for their pupils to see whether or not we felt they were on morphine or had been given any drugs.
LC: Okay.
PW: So we kind of went by, you know, that.
LC: Oh, okay.
PW: And their vital signs.
LC: When field corpsmen would hang an IV, was that a saline support solution or what was generally available out there?
PW: I’m trying to think. I think they used Ringer’s lactate, which was more like body fluid.
LC: Like electrolytes and that kind of thing?
PW: Yeah, yeah. Then after the doctors had a better idea of what their chemistries and their blood work was and we got a little profile on them, then they would decide. Post up, they would get some, we called it D5W (dextrose 5% in water), which was five percent glucose, which would give them calories.

LC: Sure.

PW: Until they could eat. Sometimes they got normal saline if their salt level was low. It just depended on what the reports came back and how they were doing. I’m not sure. I think they probably hung Ringer’s lactate on them. Some of them came aboard and didn’t have IVs. They just picked them up from the field and got them to us.

LC: Right. In cases like that, can you guesstimate as to how long between, how long the evacuation process would take before they would actually get to the ship? I mean, did it vary widely?

PW: Oh, I think they picked them right off the ship, I mean, picked them right off the battlefield.

LC: So you might get them in twenty minutes?

PW: Oh, yeah.

LC: No kidding?

PW: Yeah. Then we had consults that came aboard, you know, guys that were pilots or Seals or Marines who went into Da Nang and were seen and they just determined they needed to come out to us on a consult if they needed surgery or some other treatment, and then they went back to duty. So, they came aboard by launch. They came aboard by helicopter. Most of them came by helicopter and those were the seriously wounded.

LC: Sure.

PW: Our job was to assess in triage whether—and it wasn’t my job, I supported the doctors. They decided whether this guy could wait a while with a pneumatic splint on his leg if he had a fracture and go down to orthopedics or he went to surgery. We kept him comfortable and maintained the vital signs until we could get him to the OR. Then there were others who had crucial injuries and had to go to OR right away.

LC: Now those would be for example the—

PW: Head wounds.
LC: Yeah, men who’d been hit in the—
PW: Amputees.
LC: Right.
PW: Chest wounds.
LC: Now Pat, this is—
PW: Open fractures.
LC: Yeah. This is obviously a difficult area, but I think it’s one that’s historically of importance because the Vietnam War was different, better medications and better treatment, better evacuation and all were available than in previous American conflicts of this scale.
PW: Right.
LC: But for those men who were injured with the head wounds, bullet wounds, were there cases where you in triage just had to make an assessment, say during the Tet push when you had so many people coming in that there were some people that just couldn’t occupy the OR reasonably?
PW: People like that went down to their wards and they were supported with medicine until we could determine if they needed to be evacuated or they died.
LC: Okay.
PW: Quite a few had serious head wounds and if they made it to the ship and they were as we called them DOA (dead on arrival)—
LC: Yes.
PW: We never saw them. They went right down to the morgue.
LC: Okay. I’m sure you must’ve gone down there at some point. What kind of facilities did they have down in the morgue?
PW: I never went down to the morgue.
LC: You never did?
PW: Nope, we were busy. (Laughing)
LC: Well, I know that. That’s for sure.
PW: I had placed people in the morgue when I was a nurse. I didn’t really have a need to go down and see more of it.
LC: I’m sure. Were there graves registration people on the ship?
PW: Yes, yes.

LC: I may have asked you this before, but did they kind of just get treated like everybody else, I mean, integrated socially into all the different fun things that you talked about that happened on the ship?

PW: What do you mean, people who were working with the dead?

LC: Yeah, those enlisted folks.

PW: Oh, sure. But see, we didn’t have a lot of dead. We got them off quickly.

LC: Yeah.

PW: I can’t remember how many refrigerated units we had for the dead. I often wondered if we were ever going to have a burial at sea, but we didn’t.

LC: Let me ask about special equipment. You mentioned to me—

PW: You know, you asked me about graves registration people. I don’t know if they—I mean, we admitted people so I’m sure they had all the data on them, but when they went home, they might’ve gone to Dover, Delaware, if they were unidentifiable for that kind of stuff.

LC: Right, which was the entry po For—

PW: Yeah. You know that part of it I wasn’t involved with.

LC: Yeah, you had a few other things going on.

PW: Yeah.

LC: (Laughing) Well, let me ask about some of those things that we didn’t quite get to last time. I’m interested in what then must’ve been very advanced equipment for things like kidney support.

PW: Yup. We had a kidney dialysis machine.

LC: That’s just amazing. I mean, that’s really quite astounding that you had one.

PW: We had patients on it. We had a decompression machine. They were [for the] bends or anybody who had a, oh, I’m searching here, anybody who had an infection that required oxygen therapy. We could use a decompression chamber for that. Anybody who was working under water demolition that may have gotten the bends, we could put them in the pressure chamber. We didn’t use it very much, but we did use it. We had a frozen blood bank.
LC: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that. Tell me about the blood bank. Do you know its capacity? Did you ever run out?

PW: I don’t know its capacity, but I can read you stuff on statistics if you want it in the record.

LC: Oh, sure.

PW: Okay, this is coming from my cruise book.

LC: Okay.

PW: “Sanctuary arrived in the South China Sea off Da Nang, Vietnam, on the tenth of April 1967 and quickly went to work treating wounded casualties from the Vietnam conflict. On the very day of her arrival, she received her first battle casualties—ten burn cases resulting when a land mine exploded under an amphib’ tractor. From ten April to twenty-nine April, Sanctuary’s normal operating schedule provided medical support along the coast of South Vietnam including the areas of Chu Lai, Phu Bai, Dong Ha and Da Nang. On twenty-nine April, Sanctuary received orders to report to an area off Tam Ky to provide medical support for Operation Beaver Cage, part of a larger operation named Union II. She arrived on station one May and within two days received 130 casualties of whom 110 were Marines wounded in action. After supporting Beaver Cage,” now this is going to go into statistics, “Sanctuary resumed her normal operating schedule. On eighteen May, she was off station just off the coast of the 17th Parallel or DMZ to support Operation Beau Charger, which was part of a larger operation named Hickory. Also on this day, her thirty-ninth day online, Sanctuary accepted her one-thousandth patient. On twenty-one May, Sanctuary reached her highest daily patient census, 634 patients onboard. On twenty-three May, Sanctuary was relieved at the DMZ by her sister ship Repose and steamed to Da Nang where she stayed for ten more days providing additional medical support for the Da Nang area. By the end of her first period online, in fifty-four days, Sanctuary had admitted 1,368 patients, discharged 698 back to duty, transferred 117 by medical air evacuation, 800 surgical operations were performed, 1,950 units of whole blood administered and 8,387 x-rays were taken. There had been 625 helicopter landings on Sanctuary’s helicopter deck during the same figure period.”

Now, I seem to remember one time, our capacity was something like 750 patients. We took the beds out of one of the units, which probably would’ve been about twenty-five,
so we could turn it into triage with just stretchers. I remember at one period where we
were at capacity and over and the Marines were sleeping on the top decks under the stars.
I mean, they were people that had gotten better and were able to navigate around.

LC: Sure.

PW: The problem for us was we’d have a helicopter scheduled to come in and
evacuate wounded. There’d be some big push by the Vietcong and our helicopters would
be all involved with battle. I can’t remember. I think I told you once before that the
corpsmen would be coming on duty at three and four in the morning.

LC: Yes.

PW: They would take all the casts, you know, and window them and change
dressings. Then have the guys all laid out with their valuables and their meds and all that
kind of stuff and have to put them back to bed and start all over again because there
weren’t any helicopters. So I mean, that happened during some of the big campaigns
fairly frequently. Then after a while, it kind of leveled off. I also remember a huge flat
barge that came alongside the ship and we were offloading patients in their camies going
back to duty. They had their orders in their hand and I thought, boy, they’ve been
wounded and they’re going back in to the thick of it.

LC: That’s tough.

PW: Then the stretchers went down and patients were strapped on in their Navy
pajamas and their valuables and everything and they’re waving up to us. There was
repartee going on between the staff and the patients and it was fun. Then the body bags
went down. They went down the ladder and were passed over onto this barge and they
were lined up. As I remember, they were green body bags. Silence went the whole
length of the ship. It was just like, oh, awful. After that, it seems like the normal
conversation and what went on in the ship just stopped. I think one of the telling things
were after we had been online for over fifty days without a break, we were working long
hours, things started to get silent at the table. Normally it was a lot of fooling around and
kidding and stuff like that. I think that was the way of everybody’s handling it. It had
just gotten to us. Rather than bitch and complain, silence prevailed. We just sort of
withdrew.

LC: Was that pretty much uniform?
PW: I don’t know. I mean, I think after we had some liberty and you know—
LC: Yeah.
PW: Went to Hong Kong or Singapore or whatever, Philippines or whatever we were going to do for replenishment, we got our sense of humor back. And I won’t say we lost it, we just got very serious about things. No complaining, just serious.
LC: Well, I mean—
PW: Like this is heavy.
LC: Very, the gravity of what you were involved with.
PW: Yeah. I mean, I remember one kid, when I had the duty, I went down to the recovery room and I stayed with him and that was part of triage. When we cleared triage, [the triage nurse] went down to the recovery room and kept everybody going until they went into surgery. There was one kid who had a really bad head wound. I followed him on into surgery to see the gravity of that. The neurosurgeon had to remove half his brain because he had a bullet wound and the bullet was of a velocity, just tore up the tissue. It was nothing.
LC: Yeah.
PW: So he removed his brain and filled his head with what I remember being gel foam. It was like an absorbable filler. Later on I went up to the unit where he was and I visited him. He was giving a call to his girlfriend who he was engaged to and his speech pattern was off. He wasn’t thinking like he, you know, a normal kid was. I thought, oh brother, that’s going to be so hard on that family and I wonder if he’s going to go to a VA hospital and I wonder if she sticks by him and marries him. I mean, I could just see the years ahead and think, this is going to go on forever. You know, when I came home and I saw the Vietnam War and the casualties and people laying on the fields and people were eating their dinner and watching it like what’s new. It really made me, I think it made me angry. I thought, you know—it’s happening now with Iraq. You know, it’s sort of like, “Well, it’s the way it goes. It’s the way it goes everyday.” People are being killed and people are being wounded and I guess we never learn. That’s the tragedy of it, we don’t learn.
LC: We, the United States?
PW: Well, I think any country. I mean, history, it’s history no matter who’s engaged in it. We don’t learn. But you know, as I’ve gotten older, we have a very violent history, the United States. We’ve solved a lot of debacles with wars. Maybe we had to, I don’t know. I’m talking about the Civil War and the Revolutionary War. I mean, we became free, but look the price we’re paying and isn’t there another way.

LC: Yeah, some absolutely ghastly prices.

PW: Yeah.

LC: I mean, and particularly when one thinks about the, I mean, for me anyway, I don’t know what your response would be, but the Civil War with the amazing brutality of the weapons that were used.

PW: Well, yeah. It was brothers and brothers and fathers and sons.

LC: Yeah. Very few people like Patricia Warner around to kind of put people back together, you know, and to—

PW: Yeah, it was pretty primitive.

LC: Yeah, very primitive.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Well, Pat, let me ask you about one area that probably wasn’t too primitive, that there were certainly some technical advances and that has to do with the lab. Was there a medical laboratory on the ship?

PW: Oh, absolutely. Lt. Cdr. Dick Poley was a pathologist and ran the lab.

LC: How do you spell his last name?

PW: I think it was P-O-L-E-Y, nice guy.

LC: Were the folks working on the lab, those med techs, were they enlisted people primarily?

PW: Oh, yeah, yeah. I mean, we had officers down there in charge of the lab.

[Medical Service Corps Officers also were in the lab.]

LC: Sure.

PW: Then Patsy Robinson was a Medical Service Corps officer. She was in charge of the blood bank. When I quoted those statistics of how much we, blood, it said whole blood in the cruise book—

LC: Yes.
PW: I think it was frozen.

LC: Where would it have come from? Do you know?

PW: I don’t know. I don’t know if they came from the Red Cross or what. I can’t remember, but I think there were some occasions where some of the corpsmen were donors.

LC: Did you ever have to donate?

PW: Take fresh blood.

LC: Did you have to do that at any point?

PW: No, I would’ve, but I didn’t have to.

LC: So it seems though that some corpsmen may have at different points—

PW: I seem to remember, it wasn’t very frequent, but I think it did happen.

LC: Yeah, yeah. Was everybody’s blood type registered?

PW: Oh yeah, we all had dog tags we wore.

LC: Okay.

PW: It was on our dog tags.

LC: Would there also have been some kind of central file, “Hey look, we need O neg. Here are the six people on the ship. Let’s go find them.” I mean, was that possible?

PW: It probably was, but I don’t know the logistics of that. If they were in a real hurry and they might ask for off duty personnel that were such and such a blood type to show up at that blood bank.

LC: Right. Where was the blood bank on the ship? Was it downstairs somewhere?

PW: Yeah.

LC: The lab would’ve been down there too?

PW: I think it was down near the OR and the ORs were below deck.

LC: How many operating rooms were there? You may have said this before, but—

PW: I can’t remember. I think there were three, but I’m not sure. What’s interesting about this, Jan Allen was in charge of the OR. When a ship is steaming and there is delicate surgery going on—

LC: Right.
PW: A Navy nurse can call the bridge and tell them not to change course. A Navy nurse can give orders to the bridge. That’s an unusual situation.

LC: When it’s a medical necessity because of procedures?

PW: Yeah, when things need to be very steady and they need to keep the course and they’re not turning around and causing any—a ship does several things. It goes from side to side. It dips up and down in the waves, but it also yaws, sort of like make half turns. So there’s three motions it makes. If it was monsoon season and it was raining, it may be a little choppy. We were headed toward the DMZ. It may be brain surgery where things needed to be as stable as possible, Jan might call the bridge and say, “We need to maintain course.”

LC: What was her name again? Jan—?

PW: Jan Allen. Jan Allen. She lives in Newport. I can give her your name.

LC: Okay, sure, absolutely.

PW: I think a better interview would be Fran Shea, who was an admiral and was on recruiting duty in Virginia when I was in Buffalo. She’s more outgoing and she was the OR supervisor on the Repose.

LC: We’ll definitely try to invite her too.

PW: Jan’s more laid back and quiet. She may be able to give you a really good interview, I just don’t know. I think Fran would do better.

LC: Pat, did Jan ever have occasion where because of something happening in the OR and the ship having to be moved that she actually had to make that call, do you remember?

PW: Yeah, I think she did.

LC: No kidding? Wow.

PW: Yeah. She was a very professional low-key good nurse. I’m not disparaging her in any way.

LC: No, it sounds like she was the—

PW: She just wasn’t as gregarious as some others.

LC: Right. Sometimes that’s not, that’s who you want in charge.

PW: It’s a good trade.

LC: That’s right. Somebody’s who’s not too excitable.
PW: Right, right.

LC: Were there any other—you mentioned the photographer, Catherine LeRoy. I wonder if other VIPs and certainly she could be considered that, but she arrived obviously as an injury case, but did VIPs come to visit the ship, kind of show off or—?

PW: Yes, we—oh, I’m trying to remember his name. We had some of the generals who were, you know, big wigs, Marine generals that would come aboard periodically. We would have stacks and stacks of purple hearts. They would go to each one of the units and they would talk to the men and give them their purple hearts and pin them on their pajamas. I’m not, I don’t—well, it was like giving out candy, there were so many. I mean, everybody on the ship had been wounded, so—

LC: Oh, yeah.

PW: There was one situation, we didn’t know what to do. I don’t know how it was resolved, but one of the Marines who was coming up over his foxhole one morning. He was looking into the eyes of a tiger and the tiger bit him in the arm, took a chunk out of it.

LC: Oh.

PW: He came aboard the ship and we treated him, but the word went around the ship, he was on the deck below where I was working, “Well, I wonder if he’s going to get a purple heart for that because he wasn’t hit by the enemy. He was eaten by a tiger.”

LC: Do you know what happened?

PW: No.

LC: That’s an interesting case though.

PW: As far as I’m concerned, he should’ve gotten a purple heart. He was in ward. He was hospitalized with a bad injury. I don’t know how it resolved.

LC: It sounds like it was probably pretty serious.

PW: Yeah. It was a pretty good chunk as I recall the story.

LC: Gosh, gosh.

PW: I didn’t see the wound, but that was interesting.

LC: Wow. Any congressmen or other civilian people ever come to the ship?

PW: I don’t remember any political people. I do remember Christmastime, Bob Hope came aboard.
LC: Is that right?
PW: Yup. Bob Hope came aboard and he had Raquel Welch with him and she
was a stunner. She wore like a miniskirt. As I remember, it was white and she had big
white boots up to her knee and a cute little hat and long hair. She was a knockout.
LC: Did they do a performance or a walk through or—?
PW: They did a walk through. We didn’t really have a place for performance,
but everybody knew they were coming and had their cameras ready and it was exciting.
The word I heard when she got down to intensive care unit, we used betadine, which was
a dressing solution on the wounds.
LC: Yes.
PW: When it dries, it turns sort of a deep brown color. Of course, when you go
through ICU, it’s, you know, there’s a lot of brown dressings all over the place. People
were strung up in traction and were in bad shape. The story I heard, she walked through
there and she was very good, but she almost fainted. So, you know, it was hard on them
and they were in a very dangerous territory when they came aboard ship in a helicopter or
they were going out to the fields. They could’ve been hurt.
LC: Did it make a difference do you think to some of the injured personnel to
have someone who obviously did not have to be there?
PW: Yes, it was a tremendous morale factor.
LC: Really?
PW: Yeah, big time.
LC: Wow.
PW: Another big morale factor was quite, I don’t know, maybe it was six months
or so, the ship got an ice cream machine and that was a huge morale factor. They used to
open up the window to sell ice cream around, I don’t know, eleven o’clock or two and
there would be lines all the way around the ship for ice cream. It was a huge deal. Then
there was a point where, you know, we were all working different shifts. They decided
that they were going to let the people who were working three to eleven or going on night
duty have hamburgers at eleven o’clock. The stewards would make up hamburgers and
we thought that was tremendous.
LC: That is pretty cool.
PW: If we could have hamburgers, we thought, you know, Americans, we were in heaven.

LC: A little bit of home in a way.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Yeah.

PW: I mean, our food was good as officers. I didn’t hear the corpsmen complaining in the enlisted mess, but we had a mess treasurer and he was the neurosurgeon, Fred Jackson. We paid, I don’t know, something like forty dollars a month for our mess bill. Then he would work out what the menu was going to be for the next month, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. When we got into the Philippines, he went scuba diving and he got a lot of langouste. We had langouste for dinner one night.

(Laughing)

LC: Not bad.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Not bad. Well, Pat, let’s take a break there for a second. So Pat, you were telling me that you had some additional information.

PW: Right, you asked me about some important people who came aboard and on July 15, 1967, we were visited by V.Adm. Robert B. Brown, Medical Corps. He was a surgeon general of the United States Navy. Then you asked me about, you know, some other aspects of the ship.

LC: Sure.

PW: I tried to find in my cruise book how many staff we had onboard and I can’t find it. But we had twenty-nine nurses in the hospital, twenty-four doctors. As I remember, it was 252 corpsmen, two Navy chaplains, one Jewish, one Catholic. We had two Red Cross workers. That’s as much as I remember of that.

LC: The Red Cross workers, what was their function?

PW: Beth Carpenter was a senior Red Cross worker and Sue Ritchie was her associate. They did recreational activities with the troops. They got off messages to families. Some of it was social work, some of it was recreational.

LC: Were they sort of the donut dollies if you will of the ship?
PW: I never looked at them as a donut dolly. I had Korean Veterans. I don’t know. I just thought that was a disparaging term.

LC: Really?

PW: Yeah, sort of like they’re airheads, they weren’t.

LC: Did they feel that way? Do you know?

PW: I don’t know. I don’t know, but I would’ve never referred to them that way.

LC: That’s interesting. That’s very interesting.

PW: I mean, it may be a term that’s flung around out there because they gave out donuts and coffee to troopers, but the Red Cross workers on our ship worked really hard. They were communicating between the wounded and their families and getting off messages like that or if somebody died and they need to go on emergency leave, they’d take care of that. They had activities going on all the time.

LC: So they had proper responsibilities.

PW: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. They were highly respected.

LC: I’m actually shocked at the number of nurses, only twenty-nine?

PW: Yes.

LC: You guys must’ve run. I can’t imagine the amount of work, with the casualty figures that you provided earlier, that’s just astounding.

PW: This is one of the characteristics of a Navy nurse. I think I have already said when I was on recruiting duty, I used to get into it with the deans of the associate degree nurses because we wouldn’t take them.

LC: Yes, they had to be full four-year degrees.

PW: Yeah. The name of the game is, the nurses teach the corpsmen in Corps School and onboard the ship. Then they go to Fleet Marine School and education of our corpsmen is important.

LC: Yes.

PW: When I was in San Diego, I think I said as a young Ensign, on night duty, I had eight wards, four of them were active with really sick people and four were people, they were waiting to go back to duty, we just gave pills to. But on each one of those wards at night, there was one corpsman. I carried four decks. It was the same way on the hospital ship. During the daytime, I carried urology, the people to people unit, triage, on
the forward part of the deck I might on days have the ENT unit and somebody else would have orthopedics. On three to eleven, we’d have both the ENT and orthopedics and answer triage, be deck nurses, answer triage. Yeah, the corpsmen were wonderful.

LC: They had to be.

PW: Yeah. I have great respect for our corpsmen.

LC: Yeah, absolutely.

PW: So that sort of is the difference where I think the Army nurses are more hands on. There’s a place for all of us. I mean, they’re in forward units and MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) units. Now our Navy nurses are going out in camies and boots out in the field. Last year, the Navy Nurse Corps luncheon had a commander from Jacksonville. She was head of the clinic. I think she was CO and she had just come back from Iraq. When we walked in for the luncheon, she had a PowerPoint presentation all ready to go with colored slides and statistics. She was as tall as I am. I was 5’10” and she was in camies with jungle boots or combat boots. I’d never seen a Navy nurse like that in my life. Now it’s common, they’re going out with the Marines.

LC: What do you make of that, progress or—?

PW: Yeah, it’s what we’re all about. You know, I think we should be out there with the Marines. We’re aboard aircraft carriers. We’re on other ships besides hospital ships. She was with the Devil Dogs and I think there was a presentation with CNN about the Devil Dogs. I’m not sure if Sanjay Gupta wasn’t part of that, you know, the CNN medical correspondent, he’s a neurosurgeon. I think he was in Vietnam.

LC: Yeah.

PW: But she told us that there was a bigger contingent of doctors and Marines and corpsmen that were supposed to go out with the Fleet Marines. The Marines said, “Hey, this is too much, too much, too heavy. We can’t take all of you.” So they narrowed it down to something like two or three nurses and I don’t know how many doctors and then the corpsmen. They were on the frontlines in Iraq. I mean, in the frontlines in the desert and she said they were issued shovels, little shovels. If they had to go out to have a BM (bowel movement), they’d go out and scoop a hole and bend over it. She said, you know, it was all-flat. The convoys were going by and here we are mooning them and there’s not much we can do about it.
LC: Yeah, pretty much. (Laughing)

PW: (Laughing) So I mean, you know, it was tough. Sometimes they didn’t get showers for weeks. There was no water.

LC: I mean, it’s astounding what they’re actually doing over there.

PW: Yeah, yeah. One of my friends here in Florida has a son who’s an Army major. He’s going into the countries to help build up the civilian sector. He wears his civilian clothes, but he’s working with the local economy. I think he was in Bosnia.

He’s been in Iraq, Afghanistan.

LC: So some kind of advisor to the civilians.

PW: Well, he’s helping them get their economy back. Their plan’s working.

LC: Wow.

PW: Yeah. Of course, he can’t wear his uniform because he’s trying to help the people. He might get picked off.

LC: Sure.

PW: So he’s kind of, you know, not too much is said about that.

LC: Well, the Navy nurse luncheon was that that you mentioned, was that the one in Florida?

PW: Yes.

LC: Okay.

PW: Twice a year.

LC: Yeah. Let’s go back to the tour, the end of your tour actually.

PW: You want to hear how the seawaters turned into regular?

LC: Oh, sure, yeah, I completely forgot about that. You were going to toss that in too.

PW: I’m just trying to read a little bit.

LC: No, that’s very good.

PW: This is coming from my cruise book. “Seawater from the harbor is brought in by the feed water suction system located at Frame 138 to the evaporator where one third of the water is converted to fresh water by the first effective evaporation, followed by the second effect of condensation and cooling. The big Grissom and Russell evaporator can turn out twenty thousand gallons of fresh water a day. From here, a
retained drop of water, now fresh water devoid of its saline contact is piped to the
distillate pump into the feed water storage tank, then pulled along as makeup feed and
vacuum dragged into the main condenser. Here the drop travels to the main air ejector
where excess oxygen is pulled out to a venturi nozzle. Passing through shredded coconut
shells or copra, the water’s decreased, brought to the first stage heater and the deaeration
tank where by this time the drop has been heated to 240 degrees. All bubbles are
removed and the deoxygenated water, fresh water travels through the feed pins to the
third stage.” Do you want more?

LC: Yeah.

PW: All right. “By this time, the pressure has been increased to five hundred
pounds per square inch and the temperature to 340 degrees, but there’s still further
warming to go. From the automatic feed regulator valve, our warming drop is taken to
the steam drum, passed through the generating tubes of the boiler to the super heating
section where further heat is added, bringing the temperature to 730 degrees Fahrenheit
and the pressure to 440 pounds per square inch. A little drop of water, now live steam is
heated to a super heat, pressurized and changed with energy and is ready to go to work.
The energy of this live steam is used to turn the high pressure, then the low pressure,
multistage turbine blades which then via a reduction gear, turn the main shaft.”

(Laughing)

LC: Wow.

PW: Now, yeah, when we got onboard, one of the highlights was to get into the
shower and let the water run on us, hot water. Quickly we got told by the engineers,
everybody aboard ship is going to take a GI shower. We’ve got to conserve water here.
We’ve got too many patients in need here.

LC: Absolutely.

PW: So we’d go in and we’d put a little water on, suds all up and then turn it off
and rinse it off and that was the end of that. Then the nurses got sort of out of line, funny,
we were just having fun and we were going to have big buttons made that said, “Save
water, shower with a line officer.” (Laughing) We did crazy things like that to keep our
sense of humor going.

LC: Right, make a little bit of fun out of it.
PW: Yeah.

LC: Because those showers couldn’t have been too relaxing or, you know, invigorating pretty much.

PW: Right. I also have a story of May 1, 1967, when we were up in that Tam Ky, eighteen miles north of Chu Lai, a helicopter went down with casualties and we had a search and rescue mission going on with flares all night. Is that of interest?

LC: Yes it is. I think you mentioned something about this. Did you actually, were you actually witnessing this?

PW: Yes, yes. But I’ve got the write-up if you want it.

LC: Is this in the cruise book?

PW: Uh-huh.

LC: We should actually make clear here too that you mentioned to me earlier that you had something to do with putting the cruise book together.

PW: Right.

LC: What was your role?

PW: Well, they—let’s see, in the back of the book I have to see what they call me. (Laughing) Yeah, Pat Warner, I was a lieutenant then, associate editor. What I did is I wrote to the Chambers of Commerce of Hong Kong and Philippines and San Diego and San Francisco. I got Chamber of Commerce photos that we could put in our folders when we went into those cities, as well as, you know, photographs we took. Then I had a black and white camera, it was a Topcon. I went around the ship taking photographs of the nursing divisions and the nurses while they were at work, you know, starting IVs, giving meds, whatever.

LC: These are the photographs, do you still have them or did you supply all those to the editor?

PW: I think during the—quite a bit of them are in the cruise book.

LC: Okay.

PW: But, you know, I also took other photographs and then people had some Polaroid’s and they gave me photographs of me with some of the kids and stuff like that.

LC: Wow, wow.

PW: I’ve got a lot.
LC: Yeah, it sounds like it. Well, Pat, tell me again a little bit more in detail about the accident that happened with the helicopter.

PW: Okay, I’m going to read it because it’s interesting.

LC: Sure.

PW: “At 19:50 hours, which would be ten minutes to eight on the evening of one May, 1967, while Sanctuary was operating in the waters off Tam Ky, eighteen miles north of Chu Lai, the quiet evening air was suddenly pierced by the speaker on the IMC system.” That’s our loud speaker. “Quotes, ‘Plane crash, plane crash, starboard side.’” Those of us topside looked up just in time to see the waters close over a large two bladed C46 helicopter that had been carrying a full load of patients to Sanctuary. The motor whaleboat and gigs were quickly lowered as the accompanied helicopter dropped flares in the air over the still waters to light the scene. From a compliment of four crewman and thirteen patients, three crewman and five patients were able to swim clear of the sinking helicopter and were pulled by eager hands into the waiting boat. One patient was lifted by the seas by the rescue hoist of the accompanying helicopter. In all, one crewman and seven patients went down with the helicopter. For his distinguished efforts during the rescue, Sanford Peak of second class was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal.”

We put our boats in the water, you know, our rescue boats and we had the crews out and flares going trying to see if we could pick up more people. That went on quite a bit in the dark.

LC: Yeah, this is all happening at night, so—

PW: Well, 19:50 ten to eight in May it was probably still light when the helicopter went down, but it quickly went to darkness.

LC: Yeah.

PW: So, I mean, we stood on the deck and watched all this going on and it was like, wow.

LC: It’s amazing in fact that of the wounded patients, five of them were rescued. That’s pretty incredible.

PW: Yeah. As I remember, the nurses that were up where the pilot was said that was his second or third.

LC: Oh, is that right?
PW: Yeah.

LC: Wow.

PW: I mean, the helicopter pilots take a huge risk, huge risk.

LC: Oh, absolutely. Did you—?

PW: They go down into something called an LZ, which is a landing zone and pick up wounded and they’re under fire. It’s, you know, it’s scary.

LC: Did you have any chance to talk with or meet any of those guys as they’re on and off the ship all the time?

PW: Yeah, they used to come and some of them would come onboard and have a consult of some sort for, you know, some illness or something that didn’t require them to stay. They’d come aboard in the wardroom and they’d kind of look all around because we had white linen table cloths and we ate with China and silver. Here they’re coming off the fields with the mud and the dirt and the grim and all that kind of stuff. They number one would feel funny because they were in their fatigues. We were just glad to have them with us and you know, it was fun to talk about what was going on. I think some of the pilots were angry, we were angry because they would have a mission to go out and get rid of VC (Vietcong). They’d get some message from a politician or somewhere along the line that said, “Wave off the mission, there’s some civilians in there.” Well, there were VC in there. So they’d wave off the mission and then our guys would be slaughtered the next day. So that kind of political stuff was going on and it made everybody on edge.

LC: I suppose then that you all kind of talked about this stuff as it’s going on?

PW: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Wow.

PW: Yeah. We also were told that in some of the villages, if the local villages who were South Vietnamese were going to take any leadership positions in their villages, it was very risky because Vietcong would come down to create disorganization and behead them and put their head up on a pike for everybody to see.

LC: In the villages where a local official came from?

PW: Yeah.
LC: Pat, we talked a little bit about some of this, but how many times did you actually get off the ship and get onto Vietnamese soil?

PW: I think once or twice. One of the times we took the captain’s gig, his boat and a whole bunch of us went into Da Nang and it was White Elephant Landing. There was like a little O Club there. We went in and we had dinner. Some of the gals I think from Da Nang came in and we saw some of the people we knew, had dinner with them.

LC: Right.

PW: Then we’d [go] back aboard the captain’s gig and you know, when it’s dark and you can see fire fight tracers in the air. Then a week later, I think it was Newsweek or Time Magazine, the very intersection in Da Nang that we cross that hand sandbags all around it, there were wounded just scattered all over the streets. They had had a big barrage and just murdered a lot of people. The irony of the whole thing was we were going on liberty in Da Nang and so were the Vietcong.

LC: How did you know?

PW: You really didn’t know who the enemy was.

LC: How did you know that?

PW: What?

LC: That the VC were, that essentially—?

PW: Oh, we were told that.

LC: Really?

PW: Yeah. I mean, it was pretty common. The nurses that were over in Da Nang, they had civilians that did their laundry and things like that. One of the funny incidents was we went ashore to Da Nang to see the nurses. Some of the Vietnamese women who were doing the laundry had never seen a washing machine. They got in it and thought they were going to roll around with it doing the laundry. But there was concern on the part of the nurses, they didn’t know who the employees working on the base whether they were friendly by day, but they might be Vietcong at night. You are always on guard that the enemy may be working with you. I mean, that was common to be worried about that. We had some concerns on our hospital ship that our interpreter, and the interpreter we had I thought was, he always did what I asked him to. He was always polite. I watched his face and the reactions of the patients. I thought he was
giving out the straight skinny, but we were concerned that they might be Cong. We were always on our guard.

LC: Did the Vietnamese interpreter, did he live on the ship? I suppose he would have.

PW: I think he must’ve, I mean, because he was busy all the time. I mean, he, you know—we had not very many, but we had a couple of prisoner of war Vietcong.

LC: Right.

PW: We had soldiers posted, Marines posted, you know, on the wards as a safe guard.

LC: Were they segregated then in a particular ward?

PW: No, it was according to what their wound was.

LC: Oh, really, okay.

PW: If they were medical, they’d be on a medical ward. If they were surgical, if they were orthopedics, that’s where they’d be as I remember.

LC: Marines would be essentially standing in the ward around them. Some around their bed or—

PW: Yeah. It wasn’t, as I remember, it wasn’t a big deal because they were patients.

LC: Yeah, yeah.

PW: I do remember and I can’t remember if I talked about this, but the Koreans were very fierce, very highly respected. The word we had, they didn’t take prisoners. The Vietnamese were frightened to death of the Koreans. There was a Korean, Republic of Korea, badly wounded fellow that was in ICU and a Vietnamese, I don’t know if he was a prisoner or what, but anyway, he was badly hurt. When he woke up from anesthesia and looked at the Korean, the story was he had a cardiac arrest and died he was so scared.

LC: Wow.

PW: Yeah. They had very strong jawbones and they were very fit. They didn’t mess around.
LC: Let me ask, you’ve mentioned the medals, the purple hearts that were given out. In the information you provided Pat, you noted that you yourself had a number of commendations including three bronze stars, is that correct?

PW: Yeah, let me get my book here and I can tell you what it is. I had to write it down because I can’t remember from time to time.

LC: Right.

PW: I had the Navy Unit Commendation, the National Defense, which we look at as the gedunk medal. If you’re in at a given time, everybody gets it. It’s sort of a given if you’re in during certain periods. I’m looking for my address book as we talk. I got the Vietnamese Campaign Medal and I think that is our—oh here it is. Hold the phone here.

LC: Sure.

PW: I’m going to keep talking and look for my other address book because it’s clearer than that.

LC: Okay.

PW: One has three bronze stars [on the campaign medal, not the higher decoration], which means I was there for three campaigns, you know, for certain dates. All right, I’ve almost got it here. What else can we talk about while I’m looking?

LC: Well, what about music on the ship?

PW: Oh, sometimes we made our own music. We had Ann Langley, who went on to be a captain in a CO regional medical center, she played guitar. Lynn Titus who, I think she worked with the open-heart pump for a couple of those patients, she played the guitar. We had various people that played, you know, instruments. I played the little pump organ that you pump with your feet for midnight mass one Christmas.

LC: There was an organ on the ship?

PW: Just a little pump job, real tiny like a portable.

PW: Well, wait a minute. Keep going with me.

LC: Okay, sure.

PW: Because I’m looking, I had it right at hand and now I can’t find it.

LC: I was going to ask about popular music and did it make a difference in attitudes? Some people who served in Vietnam obviously recall the music of the time as
being extremely important in their view of the war, their view of why they were there and so on.

PW: We had several songs that were important to us. “I Left My Heart in San Francisco” by Tony Bennett because we all went over on the first crew. We remember going under the Golden Gate Bridge and the fun we had in San Francisco before we left.

LC: Sure, sure.

PW: Another one that I have in my scrapbook is “We’ve Got to Get Out of this Place”. It was a song that was very popular and I’d never heard of it until we got invited to Chu Lai for the barbeque, which I sent you the story of.

LC: Yes.

PW: We were standing on top of picnic tables in our uniforms screaming at the top of our lungs, “We’ve Got to Get Out of this Place” and I found the words to it. I put it in my scrapbook.

LC: When you hear either of those songs now, does it just jet you right back to those times?

PW: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Is that difficult?

PW: No. I think I have had maybe four or five, what’re they called, traumatic stress incidents. They’re not big deals and I never know when they’re coming. About ten years ago, I was watching an Army nurse talk about surgery in Chu Lai and all of a sudden the tears started coming down my face. I thought, where’s this coming from?

Then there was an incident when I came back to the school’s command, it was April, I think I came back in March. I didn’t have a lot of leave because they needed us to report early. I went to the movies one night with a WAVE officer friend. It was Bonnie and Clyde and I didn’t think anything of it, but there was an incident where they shot, Bonnie shot somebody in the face or he did and I almost passed out. I said, “We’ve got to get out of here, I think I’m going to throw up” and I didn’t know it was coming. Then when 9/11 happened, one of the Angel Flight pilots sent me oh maybe twenty photographs from around the world of people who were giving blood, the Arabs in a Red Cross Chair giving blood or people putting flowers at the American Embassy in Helsinki. I mean, he just went around the world playing the Star Spangled Banner in front of Buckingham
Palace. As I got those pictures, I sat in front of my computer and I cried for three straight hours. I think it had to do with how senseless this all is. That’s the best way I can process it. I was in a Bible study and the pastor of our church was Bob Merrill who was an Air Force colonel. He had never gone to war, but he said, “How are you?” He used to call me squid and I called him zooms. He said, “Squid, how are you?” I looked at him and I started to cry. He said, “What’s the matter?” I told him what happened. He said, “Hey babe, you have Post Traumatic incident going on here.” Hi, I’m a nurse.

(Laughing)

LC: Right, and you just didn’t really—
PW: No.
LC: You weren’t thinking of it that way.
PW: No, no. I got into a conversation at my friend Mary Ann Curtis’ graduation, Georgetown and one of her friends was a psychiatrist or psychologist. He said, “Do you like to talk about the war?” I said, “It’s very strange. Some people don’t want to talk about it or recall it at all. I like to talk about it, but people won’t let me.” When I came home, people didn’t want to talk about it.

LC: People meaning?
PW: Friends, family. I mean, my mother was a nurse and that was okay, but friends didn’t want to hear about it. Now I don’t know whether it was out of respect for me thinking maybe I’d go to pieces, but sometimes I felt like I was bottled up.

LC: Now would this have been even in ’68 when you came back?
PW: Yeah, yeah. Well, Mary Ann graduated from graduate school in 1980 or ’81, but still it was pervasive. People didn’t want to talk about it. I mean, when I came back from Vietnam, I got into, let’s see, I went from the Philippines to Tachikawa in Japan.

LC: Right.
PW: While I was there, one of the aviation guys at the counter came up and he said, I was a lieutenant commander by then, he said, “Commander,” he said, “You have first dibs on going home because you’re coming out of a combat zone, but we have a sailor who’s trying to get out on emergency leave. His dad is dying and he’d like to get home before he, you know, does.” He said, “I hate to ask you, but would you be willing
to give up your seat?” I said, “Of course.” So I sat up all night in the Tachikawa
terminal and got my flight home. Why am I telling you this, I forget?

LC: Well, we were talking about PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and not
really recognizing it and—

PW: Oh, yes, that’s right. So I take the flight home and we land at Travis Air
Force Base and then we got a bus down to San Francisco into town. My mother was
going to meet me in San Francisco. When I got out of the bus terminal, I was in my blues
with my ribbons on and I was getting really dirty, nasty looks. I know some of the people
who came back were getting spit at. My recruiting car was spit at while I was on
recruiting duty. While I was at the school’s command teaching, we were given an order
not to wear our civilian clothes in town because, you know, the anti-Vietnam feelings
were so high, that they were afraid there’d be riots or violence or you know, something
like that.

LC: This was in Philadelphia?

PW: No, that was at Newport.

LC: Oh, okay.

PW: Newport, ’68 to ’70.

LC: Wow.

PW: It was kind of a turbulent time. You wanted my medals.

LC: Uh, yeah.

PW: All right, National Defense Medal, which I said we considered the gedunk
medal, everybody gets it during a certain period just for being in. Vietnam Service
Medal, which was given by the Vietnam—no, no, it was Vietnam Service. It was our
medal. Vietnam Campaign Medal with three bronze stars, which means I was there for
three campaigns in Vietnam that were established by I guess congress or whoever.

LC: Sure.

PW: The Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation with Palm Leaf, that was from the
Vietnamese government and the Navy Unit Commendation.

LC: I mean, that’s pretty impressive. I mean, three bronze stars is nothing to—
PW: No, no, no, don’t confuse a bronze star with a campaign bronze star. A campaign bronze star means you were there in Vietnam for various campaigns, meaning military actions.

LC: Right.

PW: So I was there for three big military actions. So that one ribbon instead of giving you three ribbons, they give you a star to put on it.

LC: Right, including for example the Tet Offensive reaction.

PW: I can’t remember what the dates were, yeah.

LC: Yeah.

PW: But the bronze star is a high decoration.

LC: Right for valor and combat.

PW: We do have a Navy nurse that has it. I think Cpt. Lacy Foley who was a friend of mine who was at Da Nang got the bronze star.

LC: For what action, do you remember?

PW: I don’t know. I don’t know. I can give you her—

LC: Sure, yes, absolutely.

PW: I can email you her information and you can talk to her.

LC: Okay, okay.

PW: She was stationed in Da Nang. She was my chief nurse in Philly.

LC: In 1972 or so?

PW: Yeah.

LC: Okay, okay. Well, when you—

PW: No. No. No. It was after I came back. I think it was more like ’77. [Pat Brennan] was the chief nurse when I first got there.

LC: Oh, I see, because you were in Philadelphia twice.

PW: Yeah. I had a little interlude at the station hospital in Kenitra, Morocco.

LC: Yeah, in Morocco, yeah. Well, I want to ask you about that. But Pat, when you were coming up short on the Sanctuary, did you have new orders in hand or how did that go down?

PW: Well, it was supposed to be a year tour. I went aboard on the third of January. I’m trying to remember, I guess I can look in my book again. I got off, I don’t
know, something like after the Tet Offensive in February. One of the nurses was due to rotate out and she wanted to go out earlier. I think she was finding it stressful. So Sally Smith, our chief nurse came up to me and she said, “Would you be willing to stay longer?” By that time I was pretty well accommodated, I said, “Sure.” So I stayed a little longer. Then I got my orders and I don’t know how Admiral Duerk felt about it. I know when Fran Shea became the admiral of the Nurse Corps, she felt like nurses coming back from Vietnam needed to be in the non-nursing billet just to give them a break from the blood and guts I guess. So she tried to do that from what I understand. I’ve got another interesting story of how we got out of our nursey-nursing uniform that has to do with her too. I didn’t want to go back to more nursing. I asked to teach at the school’s command. I taught at the school’s command from ’68 to ’70, taught leadership. I was staff advisor, taught swimming to the OCs (officer candidate). I was the advisor on a tri-military film when we were filming a recruiting film. I can’t remember where this is going either.

LC: Well, it’s interesting to get a sense of what it was that you did in the years after your tour.

PW: Did we talk about the student who came to me when I was teaching at—?

LC: No.

PW: I had a student from a four-year college who had I believe it was a two-year scholarship. I had come back from Vietnam and she came into see me as her staff advisor and a very smart young lady. I think she was from Baylor. She said, “Commander, I don’t believe in this Vietnam War and I don’t want to go.” I didn’t have too much time for her. I said, “Did you realize that the war was going on when you signed up for your scholarship and you had two or three years of obligated service?” She said, “Yes.” I said, “Well, I don’t believe in the Vietnam War either, but we have young men who are over there getting shot up and hurt badly. You’re a Navy nurse and that’s what your job is. So I don’t want to hear anymore about it.” She left my office and I never heard anymore about it. But you know, while I was in graduate school at University of Buffalo, I did suicide and crisis internship at the Suicide and Crisis Center. I would get phone calls. I was the only one on duty and I would get phone calls from kids who had to report to the Armed Forces Examining Station the next day where I had
once been a recruiter. They were distraught as all get out. Sometimes I would have two
or three calls going at once and I’d have to assess lethality, which one was I going to
hang on the phone for.

LC: You had to assess lethality?
PW: Yeah, like how close do I really think they’re going to take their on life. I
was their link. These kids would be talking to me about, “I don’t want to disgrace my
mom and dad, but I think I’m going to go over to Canada,” because we were on the
border.

LC: Right.
PW: Or, “Maybe I shouldn’t do that. Maybe I should just take my orders and get
shot all to hell.” Or “I think I’m so embarrassed about this and don’t want to go, I think
I’m going to commit suicide.” That happened fairly often. The kids didn’t know which
way to go. They didn’t want to go to Vietnam. They didn’t believe in it. They were
scared. They didn’t want to cause their families embarrassment. So rather than go to
Canada and rather than go to Vietnam, well, we’ll blow our head off or we’ll do
whatever. It was going on.

LC: Did you think that you might have lost any of those kids?
PW: I never heard that we lost anybody, but I was on the phone with quite a few.
LC: But that’s, I mean, that’s pretty stressful stuff for you.
PW: Yeah. I think it was helpful that I really understood what their concerns
were because I’d been in Vietnam.

LC: Did you, I mean, was it, I don’t know what the professional ethics of this are,
did you share that with them and say, “Look, I’ve been over there—?”
PW: I don’t remember. I mean, I don’t see where that would be a problem, you
know, telling them who I was.

LC: The backdrop to both your time in Newport and at grad school at Buffalo,
was the escalation of the anti-war movement.
PW: It was going on when I went.
LC: Yeah. But you know, even by—
PW: I think it got worse.
LC: It got bigger.
PW: Yeah.
LC: Yeah, that’s for sure.
PW: I think a lot of the college students helped bring it to an end. I do.
LC: What do you mean by that?
PW: Well, we had college students that were out in the streets really demonstrating against the war. It was hitting headlines all the time. It was becoming stressful for everybody. The American people was waking up and say, “Hey, I don’t want my son and daughter to go over there.”
LC: Did your own sort of questioning of the war escalate during this time period too? I mean, you had obviously had all these experiences over there.
PW: No, when I went, I didn’t like the war. I had done some reading about Ho Chi Minh and I felt he was a nationalist that could keep things together. The whole thing would be better served if we had supported him. That was my take on it. There were other people who felt the same way, but not everybody read [and were as informed] about the whole situation.
LC: Yeah, that’s true.
PW: If you said too much, it would skew other people who were trying to be patriots. They thought, you know, talking about our country and this war in a negative way was unpatriotic, as much as people don’t agree with Iraq. Does that make you unpatriotic or does that make a patriotic? You know, it depends on what side of the fence you’re on.
LC: Yup, it’s an interesting American problem that if you disagree with the policy, you’re thought to be against the country or something.
PW: Yeah, right. I’ve got the dates and I forget what dates we were talking about. Let’s see. I reported to the Sanctuary on three January ’67 and I went to the school’s command five April in ’68. So we’re talking about the war stuff going on. There was a commanding—no, she wasn’t a commanding officer. She was the officer in charge of women officer school before I got there. She became the first line admiral and her name was Fran McKee. She got into some discussions. I know this from some of our oral history interviews that the Navy Nurse Corps did with Fran Shea. Now it might be interesting to talk on the phone to Fran. She’s a nice gal.
LC: Sure.

PW: Fran was talking about the angelic nurses and our uniform was our caps with the Navy black bland with our—if you were a lieutenant, you had two gold strips. If you were a commander, you had three, that kind of thing. We were wearing ward whites and then we went into pantsuits. They were talking about respect for military women and Fran said, “I’m concerned about our nurses being looked at as angels of mercy, but not as officers as much as I’d like.” Fran [McKee] said to her, “Get them out of their nurse uniform.”

LC: Really?

PW: She did.

LC: So that was some of the genesis of the changing of the uniform.

PW: Yes. So the nurses were wearing blue skirts with white blouses and shoulder boards just like the doctors and their service ribbons. That put a whole different look on things because the Vietnam nurses had plenty of decorations.

LC: Absolutely.

PW: Then they had their khaki uniforms. They’d either wear khaki pants or khaki skirts with a khaki blouse. Of course, they didn’t wear that angelic nurse’s cap. It created a whole different feeling. Suddenly you were a Naval officer as well as a nurse and I think the level of respect and where you were changed.

LC: Absolutely.

PW: Then it was somewhere along, somewhere late 70s I think where the first nurses were going through Monterey Graduate School for management.

LC: Yes.

PW: Then they started taking command billets, commanding officers of hospitals, Naval Regional Medical Centers, Health Education Science Center in Washington. It opened up and we had more of a mobility for, you know, becoming admirals, captains, whatever.

LC: Getting these broader experiences as well.

PW: Yeah, yeah, and they did very well. They did very well. I think the very first one to have a command billet was Bernadette McKay. I sent you her information.

LC: Yes.
PW: Maybe it’s on your email thing.

LC: Yes.

PW: She was the one that was with Ruth Projecky in the [aid team] in Vietnam.

So she’s a very interesting person.

LC: Yeah.

PW: I don’t know her very well. I know of her more.

LC: Well let me ask you a couple of timeline questions that have to do with this period after you had left the ship and were back in the States. Do you remember for example the day that Martin Luther King was assassinated?

PW: Yeah I do. I remember more Bobby Kennedy. I remember very clearly when President Kennedy was shot.

LC: Where were you? Let’s start with John Kennedy, what was going on?

PW: I was in Portsmouth, Virginia. I was charge nurse of two orthopedic units. It was announced and everybody was just saddened. The televisions on the units were cranked into it. It went on for days. The funeral cortège and everything that was going on. Everybody was talking about it. Oddly enough, he was a first or second-class corpsman, Thomas Moore who was on the Sanctuary with me. He shot the photographs of John Kennedy’s autopsy.

LC: Is that right?

PW: It was secret. He became my mentor as a photographer on the cruise book.

LC: Wow.

PW: T. Moore.

LC: Is he still around?

PW: I don’t know. I don’t know.

LC: Maybe we could work together to find out.

PW: Yeah. I can ask Jim Beasley or you can email Jim if he got email. He might know. He keeps up with some of them.

LC: His name was Thomas Moore.

PW: Yeah. I think it was T.R. Moore.

LC: Okay.
PW: I mean, he—I tried to find out as much as I could about the Kennedy assassination and what the buzz was, but he was tightlipped. He had to be.

LC: Oh, I’m sure, yes. Yeah, that’s about as—

PW: Yup.

LC: Keep quiet as it gets I think.

PW: Yup. Then when Bobby Kennedy came over the news, I was stationed at Newport. I was getting ready to go into school to teach. It came over and I just shook my head. I thought, when is this going to stop? I was just appalled. I remember Martin Luther King and I can’t remember where I was. I mean, give me the dates and I can tell you.

LC: It was in April I think of ’68.

PW: Same year. Then I was at the school’s command.

LC: Yeah.

PW: The same thing, you know. At the time there was some discussion about a lot of people didn’t like Martin Luther King. They thought he was—they had negative opinions about him and I can’t remember what that all was about. Anything I’ve ever read about him, I thought he was sort of on the order of Mahatma Ghandi.

LC: Obviously there was huge race issues and all of that.

PW: Yeah, absolutely.

LC: But, I mean, can you recall—I mean, you said people were saddened when John Kennedy was shot at. I’m sure that that’s true. This idea five years later that when his brother was shot, that you know, things were just kind of, you know, what’s going on. I mean, did it feel sort of like chaos? I mean, he was running for president. He had a very good chance of getting the democratic nomination. It must’ve felt quite unstable in some ways.

PW: It did feel unstable. I think one of the things that’s kind of remarkable was Rose Kennedy, the matriarch was on television a lot. People were asking her, “How do you keep it all together? You’ve had two sons assassinated. You’ve got a husband who had a stroke. You’ve got another son who may be running for president. You’ve got grandchildren without a father. How do you keep it together?” Of course, she went to mass and communion every morning. She was a Catholic and her religion bailed her out.
LC: Right, right.
PW: So I don’t know. I think some of that might’ve been good for people to hear. You’ve got to have something to hang on in a belief system to get through it. These things happen, but her family certainly were targeted as let’s get rid of them.

LC: It seems like it, doesn’t it?
PW: The news articles when Jackie Kennedy decided to marry Aristotle Onassis, you know, people said, “Well, she’s money hungry.” A lot of other people said, “No, she’s trying to get out of the United States before her kids get murdered.” That was the buzz.

LC: Yeah. It must’ve been a very kind of destabilizing time, I mean, 1968.
PW: Yeah. I can’t remember exactly when Manson came along and shot Sharon Tate and—
LC: It was the next year.
PW: Yeah. His followers were all drugged up and are in prison and they took pot shots. One of them I think took a pot shot at President Ford.
LC: That’s right, yeah.
PW: President Reagan was shot. It seems to me the more the television talks about all these things and how it’s done. It’s giving fuel for fire for more people who are whackos to do it.

LC: Yeah, it gives them the idea, “Hey, if these other losers did it, maybe I could do it too and be famous.”
PW: Yeah, yeah. I just finished reading Tommy Franks book, his autobiography. He talks about Vietnam in that book and he talks about Iraq. It’s very interesting his take on things between Schwarzkopf time and his own, how much technology had changed and how much battle strategy had change, just amazing how much it had changed.

LC: Wow, wow. Well, let me ask you a little bit about the time that you served in Morocco. How did that come about?
PW: I was a commander and I wanted to be—I loved to go overseas. I thought, well, Taiwan was open. Morocco was open and I think someplace else. I thought,
LC: Morocco, wow.
PW: Yeah.
PW: So I put in for Morocco and I got my orders. It wasn’t like it was the biggest deal in the world. It was a small station hospital. Perhaps the most important part of it was the hospital was on Moroccan soil on a Moroccan base. It was right along the Sebou River that flows out to the Atlantic Ocean. There was a huge prison, Moroccan prison, right by the gate. I lived in—they were starting to send people home because the reason for the base was communications. They put up a satellite, which made the communication base obsolete, so they were going to close it.

LC: Okay.

PW: Our commanding officer of the base would have a meeting every Wednesday afternoon for all the new people that came, officer [and] enlisted. He was a very reserved nice man. He told us we have no status of forces agreement with the Moroccans. “If you get out in town and you misbehave in a Muslim atmosphere, you dance or touch a Moroccan woman in one of the discos inappropriately, if you’re found drinking on the streets, if you get into any kind of difficulty and you wind up in prison, I will come and visit you, but I don’t know what power I’m going to have to help you, be careful.” I had a corpsman who decided to test it. He wound up in the Moroccan prison with his head shaved. It was tough. As I recall, he came out, worked with us for a while. He was smart, good looking kid. He wound up did it again and that put a tremendous stress on the staff when somebody did that because we didn’t have all that many people to go around to do surgery and outpatient clinic and man the wards.

LC: So just from a personnel angle, this was damaging to the unit.

PW: One screw up could damage.

LC: Right.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Do you know what happened with him, I mean, how—?

PW: I don’t remember.

LC: Oh.

PW: I don’t remember it, strange, but I don’t remember whether he was shipped out home or what happened and we got somebody else. Another interesting thing, I’m trying to think of what it was. I had it. I don’t know why things are going in and out of my head this morning.
LC: No, that’s okay. Did you—what was the compliment of personnel, medical personnel there?

PW: Let’s see, one, two—I think we only had about four or five doctors and maybe six or seven nurses. That was all.

LC: As a commander, you must’ve been pretty senior. Were you in charge or next to?

PW: Yeah, I was in charge of the nursing bit. I also was the circulating nurse in the OR. Then our second class trained OR tech had to go home on emergency leave. It left me teaching all the brand new corpsmen who were hospital men how to scrub and circulate in the OR. I hadn’t been in the OR since I was at Niagara University in 1958. But I knew that could happen, so I took my OR books with me.

LC: Okay.

PW: The chief who knew how to run all the autoclaves got orders. The people who were left behind didn’t know how to jury rig the autoclaves. By jury rig, I mean sort of like gum and wire type thing to keep them together. If we wanted to make a phone call, we had to go through the Pentagon. (Laughing) Every time you wanted to call Spain or get a Medevac [plane from the] Air Force in Germany, we had to go through the Pentagon. But it was like we were at the end of the pipeline.

LC: Wow.

PW: A lot of people who worked in the hospital were civilians, like our housekeeping department were Moroccan. They were fun to be with. They were kind people. We had lectures about Ramadan, which is sort of the comparison to Lent. It comes on a rotation of basis. It’s thirty or forty days where they can’t put any substance into any orifice and I mean what I just said.

LC: Got it.

PW: No sex, no eating, no drinking from sunup to sundown. So we were always briefed to be, you know, kind of sympathetic because it was a, you know, it was kind of hard to do. But then you’d hear them as soon as the sun went down, they’d make Ramadan soup and they’d live it up.

LC: Yup. Well, in general, what were relations like between the Americans and—?
PW: I had wonderful relations.

LC: Really?

PW: I thought they were very kind family oriented people. There was, you know, I’ve talked about some [one of] my friends who [was] intelligence. I said, “Was there any fear of this terrorism when we were over there?” [He] said, “No. No.” It’s there now.

LC: Oh, sure.

PW: But I had a friend, Dori Judar who was Norwegian. She was American, but Norwegian in extraction. She lived a couple of doors down. She was married to a Moroccan. He worked at the American Embassy. So I used to get invited to parties on the palace grounds with Moroccans. One of their friends was a national Moroccan tennis champ. He was handsome and he took a fancy to me.

LC: Okay.

PW: So, he invited me to the king’s palace. He was the second buyer to King Hassan. They had a house on the palace ground and we went in around, I don’t know, seven o’clock one night. My mother was visiting me and we sat in this room and the bottom of the room was tile, Moroccan tiles like greens and blues and stuff like that.

LC: Yes.

PW: Then the top of it was like plaster calligraphy. Then they had banquets along the sides of the wall. In one corner they had this enormous brass or copper table and then sometimes it was inlaid with different things and I can’t remember what this was, but it was humungous. There were people there who were—well, there was a man who was painting the portrait of the king. He was there and I think he was Spanish. So there was Spanish and Americans and Moroccans, there were French. We started out with this—I think the first thing we had was, I think it was brochettes. It was beef on like a shish kabob. Then this marvelous white fish came out on this huge platter. The Moroccans eat with the first three fingers of the right hand. If they’re in any kind of trouble, like they steal or doing anything like that, there’s a certain level of stealing and they get their [right] hand cut off. They cut off the [right] hand for a reason because it makes them socially unacceptable. [The left] hand they use for the bathroom, the right
hand’s used for food so that it makes them sort of a social outcast as far as going to get-
togethers.

LC: Yeah. It’s also kind of an inconvenience.

PW: Yeah.

LC: I mean other things, but—

PW: Exactly.

LC: But yes, there is these cultural rules.

PW: There was Muslims don’t drink, but there was a plentiful flow of good
Moroccan rose’ [wine]. Then after people had a couple of glasses, you might have
somebody French on one side of you and Spanish on the other and we’re all—sometimes
one of us could speak French and the other could speak English. We crossed languages.
We’d take a section of white fish and they’d put it on somebody else place as a nicety.
Then when the fish was gone, we had a marvelous thing, like a French pizza. It was
made of filo dough in layers. It was cinnamon and eggs, scrambled eggs cooked in
coriander. Then it would be pulverized almonds and cinnamon and egg and chicken,
only they used pigeon over there. We had it with chicken, but they’d make it with pigeon
too. I learned how to make that. I make that sometimes as an hors d’oeuvres here.

LC: Wow.

PW: Then the next course would be tagine. The tagine would be a round circular
ceramic plate usually with a Berber design on it. Then it had a cone that went up, you
know, just like it tapered up to the top. They’d take the cone off and there would be this
marvelous chicken dish that had been cooked with saffron and raisins and prunes and
lemons. They combined a lot of vegetables and fruit.

LC: It sounds gorgeous.

PW: They would serve it over couscous. Then the next course would be the
national dish and that would be, oh, what was it, couscous, couscous. Couscous is like a
semolina. They would have like a huge double boiler. They would put the, as I
remember, the couscous in the bottom and steamed vegetables in the top and cook it all
together. Then they’d take either big chunks of lamb or big chunks of beef. They would
have pumpkin or sweet potato or white potato and celery, that kind of thing. They’d
serve it in this huge dish and you’d put some on your plate. Then you’d take your first
three fingers and you’d take the couscous. You’d put some in the palm of your left hand and you’d twist it with your right hand until it formed a ball. Then you’d throw your head back and throw this little ball into your head. It was sort of like a ritual you went through to eat cuscus. Then there would be mint tea. Then there would be almond cookies. There would be fresh [tangerines] and purple marvelous olives and black olives and green olives. It just went on and on until sometimes one or two in the morning.

LC: Gosh.

PW: Then we’d leave the palace and we’d go back home. (Laughing)

LC: Stuffed.

PW: Then I met one of the king’s helicopter pilots. The officer’s club was the Moroccan officer’s club, but we used it. I went over one day in a jalaba. I had a caftan on. I was being funny. I had sort of like these coin things on my head going around my head. He came over and he wanted to meet me. So he met me and we talked. He said, “Would you like to go down to the horse stables and see the king’s Arabian horses?” I said, “Sure.” Well, my friend Dori Judar, the Norwegian married to the Moroccan said, “I don’t think so. He’s married. He’s on the make.” So when he came to the door, I told him no and he threw a holy fit. That was over. I think I told you about going into Rabat and watching the changing of the guard of the palace and being able to speak French to the guards. They asked me to marry him.

LC: Just like that?

PW: Yeah, just like that. Stood up [on his horse] and asked me to marry him. I was like—I thought it was hysterical. I started to laugh and he was furious. I mean, I thought he was going to have an international incident over that. Then another day, Lou Romans was the head of the American Express Bank. He worked for the guy I was dating, the comptroller. He had a French wife who was darling. We all went into Rabat together. Tom and I were walking to this art gallery. This man came up in the street and tried to bargain I don’t know how many goats and how many cattle for me.

LC: Yikes

PW: That happened. It wasn’t that uncommon. We worried about white slavery and you know, be careful.
LC: Right, were you, I mean, obviously you were observing a certain level of sort
of personal security and you needed to be safe.
PW: Yeah.
LC: But yet this stuff just kept coming up.
PW: Yeah, it was there. You tried to, you know, go places with people. We had
two guys with us and we were in downtown Rabat. We were going to an art gallery with
some French artists. It was a reception with wine and cheese. It was all done very nicely
and you know, kind of high class.
LC: How many goats were you worth?
PW: I can’t remember.
LC: I mean, this would be very telling.
PW: What Tommy said, but I think, you know, it was a fair number of goats and
a couple of cows.
PW: (Laughing) I couldn’t understand what the big attraction was. I was 5’10”.
LC: Well, that was probably part of it.
PW: I have green eyes and dark hair.
LC: That’s also part of it.
PW: White skin.
LC: There you go.
PW: There you go.
LC: I think that’s the complete package.
PW: Yeah. You know, if you can conquest that, wow, ho ho.
LC: Oh, yeah, that’s right.
PW: Yes.
LC: It’s all about them.
PW: Yeah, I guess that was part of it.
LC: Well, Pat—
PW: But I mean, the people I knew that I worked with were nice families
concerned about their families.
LC: Sure.
PW: I can remember one of them coming to me and he had too many kids and he
didn’t want anymore. He asked about possibly having a vasectomy. I didn’t have a
mechanism to get that done for him. I talked to our surgeons to see if there was some
way we could do it. But another funny thing, Spain was a Catholic country. So if there
were any military people that wanted to have a birth control vasectomy, they shipped
them down to Morocco. (Laughing)

LC: To have it done?

PW: Yeah.

LC: Oh, that’s interesting.

PW: The Yankee Clippers.

LC: (Laughing) Is that what you called it? Is that what it was called?

PW: Yeah. (Laughing)

LC: How much traffic did that generate for the clinic?

PW: Well, I think we used to do not a lot.

LC: A couple, couple?

PW: Yeah, one or two a week maybe.

LC: Wow.

PW: (Laughing) I mean, it wasn’t horrendous, but it went on.

LC: But overall, your experience as an American and as a military officer was
not a bad one then it sounds?

PW: Oh no, I loved it.

LC: Wow.

PW: You know, when I had chances to have a weekend off, I went in a Marine
caravan. There was a Marine officer who lived next to me. He was married and he had
five kids, but we got along. His, I don’t know if he was a gunny sergeant, was married to
a real nice gal and they had a teenage daughter. Then one of the pilots and his wife and
Fatima, their Moroccan maid, we all took off in a van one weekend and we went down to
the Sahara. We went through the Middle Atlas Mountains. I think we could see the high
atlas, but we went down to as I remember the Toger Valley where there was like a Grand
Canyon, like our Grand Canyon on a smaller scale. Then we saw the French Foreign
Legion way up on a hill where the French troopers [had been] garrisoned. We saw oases in the middle of the desert with water and palm trees and dates.

LC: Wow.

PW: Then when we got toward down the Sahara dunes, out of nowhere comes this woman in a jalaba with a veil and head gear on a moped, like a mirage.

LC: Just like that.

PW: You’d see camel caravans.

LC: Oh, gosh. I mean, that’s amazing.

PW: Yeah. It was really interesting because when I said I was going to Morocco, my friend said, “Oh, how lucky, you get to see Prince Rainier and Grace Kelly and where they live.”

LC: You’re like, “No.”

PW: I said, “No.”

LC: (Laughing)

PW: I’m not going to Europe. I’m going to Africa.

LC: Right.

PW: “Patsy, what the hell do you want to go to Africa for? A third world country, what do they know?” Well, it was dress as in bible times and it was dress in French couture times, haute couture.

LC: It sounds fascinating. It sounds like an incredible experience.

PW: It was fascinating. It was fascinating. Their cuisine was out of this world. I mean, some of their hotels like the Mamounia down in Marrakech—my mother and drove to Marrakech with a thirteen-gallon gas can between our legs. We got across the Middle Atlas and we went down toward Marrakech. We knew there were people, bandits who came out of the hills and might hold you up, but there are also very kind people. We had, you know, if you were to slow down, they came out to help you. So I guess it’s like everywhere.

LC: So your mom came out to visit you?

PW: Yes.

LC: What did she make of all this? I mean, she must’ve just thought this was just fabulous.
She did. She loved it.
I’ll bet she did.
She ate it up with a big shovel.
(Laughing) My friends had a party on base and one of them had been in Turkey. She had all this Turkish red rugs in her place.
Right.
So she put them all outdoors and we had this big barbeque and mint tea.
They said, “What’re you going to do when you retire,” because I would’ve gone back to the States for one more duty station and I said, “Well, my mother’s a widow and I’m an only child and I think maybe she’ll come to live with me.” They said, “No, no, no, huge mistake.” I said, “You don’t know my mom.” So they changed their mind after she visited because she was so much fun.
Because she was a blast to have around.
Yeah.
She was probably thrilled for you I’m sure.
Oh, yeah. I mean, we went down to Fez and she rolled up her pants. If you go down into the inner bowel so to speak of Fez, in the Medina, you go into the tanning area. You’re walking through very narrow cobble stone streets where barely one person can get by. This camel comes by or this donkey comes by and dripping freshly slewn hides. Then there’s all kinds of sheep wool and they’re dying it and it’s dripping onto the pavement. So you see dyes and blood and goop.
Yup.
Then it gets very hot and you get down and you see these huge vats that are up to a man’s waist. They have turquoise and yellow and red. They’re dying all the different leathers, goatskin and camel skin to make camel saddles and those beautiful hassocks. So the kids were buying those, you know, just sit around their brass tables, were having parties. There were purses and that kind of stuff.
Amazing.
The camel skins and the goatskins were on top of houses and on top of hillsides. They’d tan them in urine, animal urine so they’d soften.
Yup.
PW: Of course, the stench was out of this world.

LC: I’ll bet.

PW: So we get to do that. Then we got to go to the Mamounia Hotel where Churchill and Stalin and I think Roosevelt met during World War II and marble floors and gorgeous swimming pools and landscaping to die for. The Rabat Hilton where we used to go for Sunday brunch was they had a big marble lobby. They had like a huge cassock with a turban all made of leather. It was sort of like a settee in the round with a center comb coming up.

LC: Wow.

PW: We’d sit there and just for a while, just sit there and watch the potentates come in from Africa with their, them boys from Ghana with their big turbans and their jewelry and their long gowns. It was fascinating.

LC: Amazing. I mean, just, what an incredible opportunity, not to mention the fact of course that you’re continuing with your career and so on, but to have that kind of exposure.

PW: Right. Then sometimes we’d have flights for the weekend that would go over to Gibraltar. We’d fly into Gibraltar and that was kind of fun to see it from the air. The Horns of Hercules I sort of as I remember, the land portions of it split apart across the Mediterranean entrance there. When you go down into the earth of Gibraltar, there’s a huge cave. They used to have like Miss Universe contests in that. They had a huge pipe organ and we sat in this big cave and listened to the organ play “Amazing Grace” and it was just out of this world because the acoustics were wonderful.

LC: Wow.

PW: Then another favorite thing was it was a British colony, so we would go pub hopping. There’s all these little pubs in Gibraltar where you wind in and out and meet people from all over the world. (Laughing) Then they had a, I don’t know if you call a funicular, but it was like a tramcar that went up to the top of—you see the Prudential rock up at the Gibraltar.

LC: The rock, yeah.

PW: Yeah. There’s a saying when there are no more Barbary apes, that will be the end of the British influence.
LC: Yes.
PW: Well, we saw the Barbary apes and fed them and that kind of stuff.
LC: So you felt secure that the British, global influence would last another little
bit.
PW: Yeah. Then there was a cemetery. It had some of the British officers from
the Battle of Trafalgar buried in there. It was very, you know, historical.
LC: Absolutely.
PW: I’m kind of a nut for history.
LC: Absolutely, yes.
PW: Every chance I got that I could go somewhere I went. Then the Middle
Atlas had outdoor souks. They were markets and every little village had their own
market. So you would go to the market and it might be a rug market if you wanted to
pick up rugs or if you went to a spice market, it would have all the different spices that
were available. They even had, and I read about this in my nursing book way back when,
when the people had trouble with headaches, they would do something called trepanning.
They’d drill a hole in the head and kind of drain it a little.
LC: I’ve heard of this.
PW: They were doing that in some of the outdoor suks. They had dentists that
were pulling teeth.
LC: Oh.
PW: So I mean, you got to experience a little bit of everything. (Laughing)
LC: Oh, God.
PW: Then I always worried, being the senior nurse, that I’d be invited to some
Moroccan party and get the really delicious hors d’oeuvres, which is a goat eye. They’d
serve it on your dish and you’d sort of popped it in your mouth. They considered it a
delicacy and I don’t know what I’m going to do. I never had to deal with it.
LC: It never came up because to refuse obviously was extremely rude.
PW: No. I never got to go to a Fantasia, but I wanted to. It just didn’t happen,
but they’d have Moroccan men dressed up in their jalabas and head gear. They’d have
these long rifles. They’d get on these beautiful Arabian horses and they’d sound the
guns. They’d go racing off to some point yelling and then they’d have this big feast. It
was sort of like a celebration feast extravaganza. They liked to invite the Americans to see what it was all about.

LC: Yeah, I would’ve gone to that. (Laughing)

PW: Yeah. Then some of my nurses lived out at Madea Beach, which isn’t too far from the hospital. We all had our own cars. They would pay a gentleman to sleep under their beach house for security. They lived at Madea Beach out on the beach. So it was fun for the kids.

LC: They would pay them?

PW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You had your man for security. If we went into Rabat, like if I went shopping with somebody, we’d park the car and immediately a man in jalaba would come over. You knew immediately he wanted maybe ten dirham which was equivalent to two dollars. He would protect your car from losing its wheels or anything happening to it. [They called it giving “flouce”—payment.]

LC: So it was just a cost of doing business in a way.

PW: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Wow.

PW: Then when you went to the market, like the downtown Medina was a lot of fun to go to, it was expected that you haggle. If the going price was oh, say a hundred dirham, then you’d go down to a third. You offer thirty. They’d stamp their feet and wiggle their fingers at you and we’d say, well, go up to the fifty point mark. If we thought it was worth more than that and they’d raise a little fuss, then we would have an agreeable thing. Then everybody would laugh and drink mint tea. (Laughing) My mother loved that.

LC: I’ll bet she did.

PW: We went deep into the Medina and Marrakech with a French student. He showed us all around. I mean, you could get lost forever in those deep labyrinths.

LC: Wow.

PW: We got some tables and we got some various things to bring home.

LC: What fun for her, I mean, obviously for you too, but—

PW: Oh, yeah.

LC: What a terrific—
PW: To have her with me was more fun.
LC: Oh, I'll bet, absolutely.
PW: Then we had an open horse drawn carriage where we went through the big beautiful boulevards in Marrakech. The sides of the avenues would be lined with bougainvillea or orange trees in blossom. Then the walls of the palace would be around in this sort of rosy pink with a keyhole Muslim-Islamic keyhole arches and the gorgeous ceramic tile work. I mean, it’s a beautiful country. The architecture is out of this world.
LC: Amazing.
PW: Their cuisine is wonderful.
LC: Wow, wow.
PW: The people were very kind. Being on the Moroccan base, we would hear the, I forget what they call it, but the call to prayer five times a day. They use a record to do it now. It’s automated. But everybody would stop and turn toward Mecca and pray.
LC: So your tour was one year there essentially?
PW: It was about nine months.
LC: Nine months?
PW: Mm-hmm.
LC: You packed in quite a bit for nine months it sounds like.
PW: I did.
LC: Wow.
PW: I did.
LC: Pat, let’s take a break there.
PW: Okay.
Interview with Patricia Warner
Date: July 20, 2005

Laura Calkins: This is Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University continuing the oral history interview with Cdr. Patricia A. Warner. Today's date is the twentieth of July 2005. I am in the interview room in the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech and Pat is speaking to me by telephone from Florida. Pat, thank you for agreeing to continue this morning.

Patricia Warner: My pleasure, Laura.

LC: I want to ask a couple of questions if I can about your final posting, which I think was back in Philadelphia.

PW: Correct.

LC: Tell me what your position was at that time.

PW: I had several positions.

LC: Okay.

PW: Let’s see. When I came back, I’m trying to think. I think I was head of education and training and hospital corps detailing. Education and training sometimes dipped out into the region to some of our dispensaries. Generally it was hospital in service education and on the job training for our corpsmen, meeting JCH (Joint Commission on Hospital) standards for accreditation.

LC: Which standards?

PW: Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation Standards. [a civilian organization]

LC: So would that be across the services or within the—?

PW: No. No, no. They go out and they evaluate hospitals on various criteria and you have to be ready for their inspection. I think it’s every two years.

LC: This is a non-military, a civilian—?

PW: Yeah, you pay them to come in and accredit you and you had internship programs. So it was important that went well.

LC: Yes.
PW: Then, lets see, I’m trying to think, did I do this before I went to Morocco or after? As the detailer, we had dependents and we had psychiatry and we had twelve floors in the main hospital. I’m trying to remember. I think we had 253 corpsmen that I was responsible for their performance evaluations. They were done by other people, but you know, maintaining a standard. All counseling supervisors who may have not seen the big picture and may have underwritten or overwritten some other kids and corpsmen and might of jipped them out of a chance for schools, but I mean, that was sort of my role.

LC: So you were like quality control for evaluations?

PW: Well, it was staffing. It was staffing and I kind of prided myself on the fact that I started a system of—in each clinical area, we had corpsmen and nurses on days three to eleven and nights. I worked with third class petty officers who represented their area and [did enlisted] staffing. I decided that we had new nurses coming and new corpsmen, so we would pair our more seasoned nurses with the young corpsmen and our more seasoned corpsmen with some of our younger nurses when we were doing our staffing. Then I put a pivot corpsmen on who was able to be flexible and understand the needs of clinical and management to some extent. He would be able to pivot on nights from three to eleven off over multi-floors where he was needed. That system seemed to work out pretty good.

LC: This was innovative in some ways?

PW: Yeah, I thought it was very innovative. (Laughing)

LC: You were, at this time, your rank was commander?

PW: I was a commander.

LC: Okay.

PW: I don’t know. I’ll throw this in for what it’s worth. The staff corps, medical corps, nurse corps and we’re at the bottom of the totem poll as far as who has precedence, the nurse corps is. Our strength in numbers of people are predicated on the numbers of the fleet. So if the fleet is cut back in peacetime we take our cuts too. So we may have a booming hospital situation and we may have dependents and we may have retired and we may have active duty, but we still get only our allotment of the staff. So you have to kind of dance around to see it goes around well.
LC: Are those ratios set and rigid? I mean, I’m sure they’re reviewed, but—
PW: I think they are. I think they are. Now maybe that’s changed since my day, but that’s the way it was.
LC: Wow.
PW: Because what prompted me to set up the staffing pattern I did throughout the hospital for the enlisted was I went down to our chief nurse. I said, “We’re very busy and I don’t feel we have a staff level that’s safe.” She said, “I can’t give you anymore people.” So then I thought, “Okay. Go back to the drawing board and figure out how to use your people in a most productive way.”
LC: Pat, let me clarify. This was between 1978 and 1980 or is it a little later?
PW: That’s after I came back from Morocco, I think it was around sometime in ’77 to ’80.
LC: Okay, ’77. Were you seeing still on your wards, on those twelve floors that you’ve described, men who had injuries and were recovering?
PW: You know, I don’t remember Vietnam casualties as being part of our patient load at all.
LC: So who would the hospital be seeing just to clarify for people?
PW: Well, we would be seeing sailors and Marines. Sometimes we’d see some Army personnel. If a ship came in from a foreign port and somebody was, you know, hurt, we sometimes would see some foreigners. We saw quite a bit of retired in Philadelphia. After I did the education and training in hospital corps detailing, I also went to work as the assistant chief nurse at the regional medical center. That was looking over the staffing of the whole shebang for the nurses and you know, doing research programs and [setting up a system of matching patient care requirements to level of staffing that is whether a corpsman or nurse needed to be assigned]. I set up one of those programs. Then my sayonara was as a research coordinator. I set up an on the job training program for our corpsmen who came in from corps school who neither of them were a boost. I went down to the Naval base and the kids circulated through the Naval base to get some outpatient experience. They went through the lab. They went through x-ray. So I set that up and I set up a program for the licensed practical nurses for on the job training and continuing education. I set up some patient care, planning classes.
LC: Who in the Naval structure, in the corps structure would you have been reporting to because you’re pretty far up the food chain at this point it sounds like?

PW: Yeah. I was reporting to the chief nurse who was at the full captain.

LC: Who was?

PW: Claire Shea.

LC: Okay. Did you look forward to getting out of the nursing corps with excitement or was this something that, you know, you kind of felt the time had come or how did it—?

PW: I felt the time had come. I mean, somebody had said to me once upon a time when it ceases to be fun, it’s time to take a hike. (Laughing)

LC: (Laughing) Had it ceased to be fun in some ways?

PW: Yes.

LC: How come?

PW: I had been overweight when I was in the Navy. It was a constant struggle with me. I had done race relations, which was not a career enhancer.

LC: Yes, you talked about that, yeah.

PW: Yeah, yeah. So I was not selected for captain and that hurt.

LC: Do you think weight had anything to do with it?

PW: Could’ve.

LC: Really?

PW: Mm-hmm.

LC: How come? I mean, I know—

PW: Oh, they’re very strict about that. It doesn’t look like they’re as strict as they used to be, but they’re pretty strict about it.

LC: Wow.

PW: You know, it was a constant bug-a-boo with me.

LC: When exactly did you leave active duty then?

PW: I left the last day of June in 1980.

LC: What laid before you at that point? What did you see as what you would be up to?

PW: I had no idea.
LC: Really?

PW: I knew I was going to go to exercise classes at the European Health Spa near my house. I was going to go on a vacation up through the Cascades in British Columbia with my mother and her nursing friends and one of my nursing friends and we had a blast. That was our—let’s see, I think that was July, August. Mount St. Helens had blown when we had encountered some of the ash as we flew over it.

LC: Wow.

PW: My mother was a nurse as we’ve said before. She unbeknownst to me was experiencing some veiling at higher altitudes, which is like a curtain coming before your eyes and it was precursor to a stroke. I didn’t know it. So in August, she did have a stroke and that kind of colored what happened to me from, oh the end of August till she had carotid surgery and a graft taken out of her leg to improve blood flow into her head. So I took care of her for that time. It was a good year of rehab trying to get her back to where she was. Then the next year she was able to go back to community college with me. She was [getting ready to drive] to school one winter day and she had cheesecake in her hand. She put her hand on the car and it slipped and she fell. She shattered her arm badly and needed a lot of screws and things to put her back together again. So, that rehab process was another year. So then we kind of rethought, well, all of our family is pretty much down in Florida, do we want to move or do we want to stay here. The condominium that I was in was being subletted by a lot of the people who were younger going to their first homes to renters, lessees. It was going down the tubes.

LC: The condition, the condition of it?

PW: Yeah, yeah. The condo fees were going up. I was on their board. I thought, well, the writing’s on the wall. This is not going to be a good situation to stay in. So we came down and looked over Florida and next thing we knew, we were here.

LC: About what year would that be?

PW: ’84.

LC: Okay. Did you choose to live in the area that you’re in right now?

PW: Yes.

LC: Okay.
PW: Yes. I had researched for about a month before we came down or more, getting what kind of healthcare, what kind of recreational facilities, what kind of water, what kind of taxes. I was looking at a little town called Mount Dora, high tax base, but we found a house we liked in it. I put a bid in for it. I was three thousand dollars under what they were asking because it needed a new roof. Somebody that was a friend of the family sent a cashiers check sight unseen. So that meant I had to do some looking in other communities. We came out here to Howey in the Hills. There was a house that was on the market for the very first time. We walked in and it had had beautiful living room/dining room sort of open area. It had windows overlooking little Lake Harris sat on a hill. We fell in love with it and bought it.

LC: It sounds very, very nice.

PW: Yeah.

LC: So your mom lived with you there?

PW: Yeah, my mom lived with me. She subsequently had a broken hip and a heart attack and wound up in Florida hospital and almost died and went into respiratory failure, blah, blah, blah. Then she had macular degeneration, lost her sight. So I took care of her until she died in ’99. But while I was doing that, I mean, she wasn’t always critical.

LC: Sure.

PW: I became the public relations chairman and champion public speaker program for Angel Flight Southeast, which is a five state volunteer pilot organization that helps people in need go to out flying areas, which they couldn’t normally afford. So I did recruiting for them and I trained their volunteers and I wrote their manual, a public speaking manual. I was also a member and then chairman for several terms of our historic board here in Howey in the Hills.

LC: Which is the county historical or—?

PW: No, no, no, the town.

LC: Oh, the town.

PW: The town one. Now I’m on the board of the Lake County Historical Society. We have a board meeting at noon.

LC: Right.
PW: What else did I do? Then I started our birthday bashes. We had a seventy-fifth anniversary here in Howey in the year 2000. So I set up an annual birthday bash, which brought in crafters and a band and eats and all kinds of activities. Then we had a big bang celebration in the year 2000. [I wrote a seventy-five year history of our town which the town subsidized.]

LC: It sounds like the sort of—the party continued in some ways.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Although, of course, I understand your mom not being well sort of took the edge off of some of that.

PW: Right, but you know, she went in the wheelchair.

LC: It sounds like, you know, before she moved down there, she had—you told us about her trip to Morocco and she went out west with you and sounds like a riot.

PW: I truly never remember my mother complaining.

LC: Now that’s very cool.

PW: She had days when she’d say, “Am I ever going to get better?” She wanted to feel better, but it wasn’t in the cards. She didn’t carry on about it. I mean, we went out to lunch and breakfast. She went to garden club meetings sometimes in her wheelchair. If she could walk, she walked. So, her life went on.

LC: Well, let me ask you a little bit about your position as a veteran and specifically as a Vietnam veteran. Are there issues that have arisen in the course of your sort of, I guess I’ll say retirement, although it doesn’t sound like a very retired, but have issues arisen that have brought back to you the fact that you were in Vietnam or that have perhaps been less than what they could’ve been in terms of the support you’ve had from the Veterans Administration or other agencies?

PW: Yeah, that has multi-parts. So I’ll address them as they come into my head.

LC: Okay, sure.

PW: When I came back—I think I told you earlier that my uncle was the state commander of the VFW in New York.

LC: Yes.

PW: They would not let women into that organization, even though we served overseas in combat situations. So I was always needling him about that. Well, then they
changed their tack somewhere around, I don’t know, around ’82 or ’83, somewhere in the early ‘80s. I saw an ad in the post office that was looking for members for the VFW. Sort of as a lark I thought, well, I’m going to challenge it. So I put in an application. I deliberately put Pat Warner on it, which was sort of gender neutral. It went into the VFW area that was near my home. Two of the fellows called one day while I was at church and my mother answered the phone. She knew what was going on and she said, “Well Pat’s at church and she’ll be home in about an hour.” They said we’d call back and when they called back, of course, they knew it was a female on the other end of the line.

LC: Right.

PW: They tried very hard to suggest I join the “Cooties”.

LC: Which?

PW: It’s a women organization.

LC: Is it the Auxiliary?

PW: Yes.

LC: Okay.

PW: So then they wanted to know if they could come out and did I have my DD214, which is discharge papers. I said, “Sure.” So we made a date that afternoon for them to come out and I showed them my DD214 with my service in Vietnam and my, you know, medals and what not. Again, I got the, “Well, you know, would you like to join our Cooties, the women’s organization?” I just paused and I said, “Gentlemen, I didn’t serve with the women’s organization.” They just stopped cold. So then they wanted to go over the DD214 again. I thought, I don’t think you do this with everybody else, but that’s okay.

LC: Right.

PW: So they didn’t have much choice. They took me into the VFW. We had tables set up for yard sales to make money. I asked if I could have a table and bring up the POW [situation]. You know, they had their own flag and we were trying to get people behind us to get the government to locate the POWs and all that kind of stuff.

LC: Yes.

PW: They were not happy. Then we got—

LC: These are the local organizers of the—?
PW: This is the VFW guys that I knew, most of whom were wonderful fellows that served in World War II. It was very obvious they did not think we were up to snuff in Vietnam. So then I went with them, my mom went along and we had a nice time down at the Jersey Shore for their annual convention. It was at the convention that I learned that they felt like we had lost the war, that it hadn’t happened before, and so there was something wrong with the Vietnam veterans and they looked down on us.

LC: How did you learn that? I mean, what clues?
PW: That we had discussions about it.
LC: So these gentlemen who had served in World War II would be upfront?
PW: Yup.
LC: With you?
PW: Yup.
LC: As a woman and as a Vietnam veteran?
PW: Yup.
LC: Say you guys screwed up?
PW: I liked these guys.
LC: Sure.
PW: I respected them.
LC: Sure.
PW: But I was angry. I thought, how dare you? Then I thought about it and I thought, well, you had the country behind you. You had the policies of the government behind you. We did not. [Vietnam battles were being orchestrated by politics. A Navy nurse from the Korean War era also told me that she felt the Vietnam vets had not done their job.]

LC: Pat, you and I have discussed this a little bit in the information that you provided, you did refer to the fact that you had some qualms let’s say about US participation in the war in Southeast Asia. Can you tell me what you thought then and what you think now? Can you contrast those two things or has there been not much change in your thinking about it?
PW: I don’t think there’s any change in my thinking about it.
LC: Okay.
PW: I think my thinking has been born out when Secretary of Defense, Mcnamara admitted, I don’t know, a couple of years ago, three or five years ago, I don’t know exactly how long, that they blew it. They blew it. The Johnson Administration and whoever blew the Vietnam War participation. My feeling was—I’m a student of history and always have been. I’m interested in politics. I felt in my readings that Ho Chi Minh was a revered national leader, that if we had supported him, the whole debacle may not have occurred. I was saying the other day. I think it was Nguyen Cao Ky who was a very flamboyant and good-looking leader after Uncle Ho. I think there was some graft and politics that were involved in that regime. I just felt like it’s very difficult. My theory of politics is politics is a very noble profession and public policy is serious business and it’s a practice by people who go into public service who are looking out for the common good of the people. I mean, people on all strata—the wealthy, the middle class, the poor. They are not on an ego trip and they are not out on a power surge for themselves and they’re not out for family wealth in their own self aggrandizement—what do I want to say? Self aggrandize.

LC: Aggrandizement.

PW: Yeah. If they realized that lobbyists are there for their own interests and they put some checks and balances on that, then we have many people in our Congress and Senate who are doing a good job. We also have many who I feel are filled with graft. It’s a power ego trip for them.

LC: This is personality driven you think?

PW: Well, you know, yeah. I think in some cases it’s personality driven. I think it’s sometimes, you know, power in their own area, their own state or whatever. But when the last election occurred, I did more reading and there was one book that came out called the American Dynasty. It was this story of the Bush Dynasty, but in that story and it was footnoted throughout, there was details narrative of the Dulles Family, the Rockefeller Family, the Harriman Family, the Bush Family, the Kennedy Family. What I gleaned from that was these families have gone into politics, so they know what’s coming. They have gone into the stock market so they know where the trading is going on around the world. They have gone into banking so they understand that. They have gone into energy. They have known before world wars had been started that they’re
going to start. Some of them had been involved with say the Germans before World War II broke out. I’ve come to believe now and I’m watching it that we have powerful families that are running the United States and it always isn’t in the best interest of the people. It’s their own self-interest.

LC: That in some way they’re positioning themselves to profit from each of these.

PW: Yeah. Yeah I’ve got mine. You get yours. If you haven’t—

LC: Or not.

PW: Huh? Yeah. If you haven’t risen to an Ivy League school, maybe it’s because you didn’t work hard enough. Maybe it’s because you’re not motivated. I think that’s kind of unfair. So, you know, I’ll throw this in for what it’s worth.

LC: Sure.

PW: It seems to me like the Republican Party, and I were one, has forgotten that there is more to it than the wealthy protecting [themselves] and the logging industry and everything else. Our environment’s going down the drain. The economy is there to benefit the wealthy and the powerful. But then I changed party last election. I got so angry with what was going on. Now I’m getting weekly emails from the democrats and they’re bashing the republicans. Every time I get one, I fire off an epistle to them. I’ll say, “Hey, I don’t want to hear you bashing the republicans. I want to hear what your goals and objectives are.”

LC: Right.

PW: Yeah. I want to hear a timeline of what you’re going to do about it and I want to see that put in motion. I’m not going to fund you or do anything until I see you doing something concrete. They haven’t got their act together.

LC: What did you make of the discussion of the Vietnam conflict and service and valor and so on during the election last year between John Kerry and George Bush?

PW: I think John Kerry was getting bashed pretty well.

LC: Well, he’s a Navy guy, I mean—

PW: Yes he is a Navy guy and he served down in the Delta, I believe once with boats. He was decorated for valor. The books I’ve read about it that happened. It was
true and there were a group who decided to bash him. I think he didn’t represent himself very well in the national arena.

LC: Did it take away do you think from other veterans, including yourself, who served over there to have a certain segment of public opinion led in fact by other veterans?

PW: Yes.

LC: Sort of basically take a huge swipe at service over there and questioning service and questioning valor and all that.

PW: Right, right, yeah. I just thought that was dirty pool. I also felt like when John Kerry came back and he threw his medals over the fence, I believe that was at the White House—

LC: Yeah.

PW: That was stupid. He came out on the airwaves and said it was not the best thing in the world he had ever done, but I think they held his feet to the fire over that issue and it was politically driven. I think when the Bush Administration was campaigning and they really sullied John McCain up in the Carolinas and Max Cleland who was, I think he’s a triple amputee, I thought that was outrageous. I thought, is there no end to this political horrid nastiness. It just turned me off. I don’t think there’s any place for that kind of stuff. It just seems to be going on and on and the press feeds it. When I took journalism, you checked your sources. You did your research. You just didn’t sell papers and anything goes.

LC: Right.

PW: I think selling papers and getting money and prestige and getting on the airwaves with a story sometimes was a little more paramount than getting the truth.

(Missing Audio)

The Germans, the French and the Americans, I’m not sure the Aussies were in. That whole [Yangtze River] dam project is going to supply ten percent of electricity to China, but it’s also built on a fault line. Behind the dam is going to be a lake bigger than Lake Superior, four hundred miles. [If the dam breaks, it’s going to be horrendous and the Chinese know this.]

LC: It’s built on a geological fault line?
PW: Yeah, yeah.
LC: I didn’t know that.
PW: We had a video on our ship. We had a television and it showed that and it talked about it. Then I talked to some people who have, you know, worked on some of our dam projects out west and the same thing holds for them.
LC: Yes, yeah.
PW: So I guess you take your chances.
LC: Well, these are pretty big gambles.
PW: Pretty big gambles.
LC: Did you come up with any impressions about China’s relationship with Vietnam or its regional relationships with Japan or North Korea? Any information come to you while you were in China about that?
PW: I had loved Japan. I went into a Buddhist temple and Peter [our guide] was beside me. We used to talk a lot. I said, “Oh look, bonsai.” It was a big bonsai display that was just beautiful. I said, “Ah, I love that in Japan.” He looked at me and his eyes narrowed and he said, “China. It started in China.”
LC: (Laughing) I can well believe it.
PW: So I thought, okay.
LC: I can well believe it.
PW: Okay. So I got a sense of that. Then you asked me where else we went.
We went to Chongqing and that was the site of the nationalist stronghold in Chiang Kai Shek’s hang out in World War II, hideout.
LC: Hideout, yes, that’s exactly right.
PW: We saw one big tunnel in the city that went way back and a thousand people could, you know, go in there during air raids. The Japanese bombed so heavily that the people were in there, lost air and just died.
LC: Suffocated?
PW: Yeah.
LC: Oh, gosh.
PW: I think the Chinese felt the Japanese were very atrocious in their behavior.
So—
LC: There’s a lot of lay over from that too.
PW: Oh, yeah. I think there’s hostility towards Japan. Maybe not with everybody, but it certainly when it comes to Peter and Peter was very intelligent. We also went on to Guilin.
LC: Down south.
PW: Which was the gateway city to I believe a gorge, the river Gorge.
LC: Yes.
PW: With the beautiful high land stone projections that come up.
LC: Out of the water.
PW: Beautiful, beautiful trip. I got to drink snake wine.
LC: Hmm.
PW: I thought, oh my God, what am I doing? Because we had a restaurant and on the counter at the back of the restaurant on this two decker boat going up the Li River was a huge, like a huge pickle jar and it had snakes wound around in it in alcohol. I kept looking at it and they were gutted like they had slit them open and taken out, you know, their innards. I said, “What do you do with this stuff?” They make wine and they sold it aboard ship. It was clear. It had a little snake in the bottom. Charlie Williamson, my friend who was a Marine colonel, he says, “Hey Pat, you want to try a little?” So I had a sip and I said, “That’s enough Charlie.” It tasted like pure alcohol. But the travel guide that was with the other section, there were two sections traveling together, about thirty people each, she had tried some snake wine and apparently they didn’t get out all the poison because she was paralyzed for a little while.
LC: Oh, no.
PW: Then they had beautiful acacia trees throughout Guilin. They made a cash of wine, which was like a fruity wine out of that. We got a chance to have a massage in Guilin. People said, “Oh, what’re you going to do that for?” [The massage therapist] couldn’t speak English, but he had like the Meridians and energy points all—he knew what he was doing, wonderful, wonderful massage. (Laughing) In the hotel in Guilin, it was interesting. We walked into the hotel and it was a big atrium, you know, high ceiling. As I remember, it was late in the afternoon and here are four gentlemen in tux,
their cello and violins and four piece in front of this glass etched wall that had, as I remember, bamboo and flowers and they’re playing classic composers. It was beautiful.

LC: European composers.

PW: Yeah.

LC: That’s very interesting. It must’ve been a little strange.

PW: Yeah. Then their gift shop had hanging scrolls that were out of this world. They had beautiful scrolls, some of them very big of the Li River Valley and some of them were like getting into dusk and they had like little lights on the sampans that were painted in. I almost brought one home, but I didn’t have the wall space to hang it. We went to their museum. Let’s see, we went to Xian. Xian is where they have the terracotta warriors.

LC: Yes.

PW: The man who discovered the terracotta warriors is in their museum, I mean, he holds court and he will sign the terracotta picture book if you want if you first put money in his cup.

LC: I see.

PW: We were warned. He’s very gracious, but you put the money in there up front and he’ll autograph your program for you. So I have pictures with him and you know, and that was very impressive. I thought we were going to see this dirty dugout. Well, it’s about, I don’t know, a couple of football fields and they’ve got a great big building built over it and they’ve got a museum and they’ve got like an Imax theatre presentation in color of going back to the emperor who buried all those Terracotta—well they weren’t Terracotta, they were real. They were warriors that worked on his tomb.

LC: Right.

PW: He didn’t want anybody to know about, so he murdered them. Then we went into Xian one night and we saw a gorgeous stage show, which was about the emperors and the various periods. They had Chinese music and gorgeous costuming and dance and it was stupendous.

LC: It sounds like an amazing trip.

PW: It was amazing. We went to a dumpling and dim sum factory. We all kinds of steamed this, that’s, and the others.
LC: Right. (Laughing)

PW: So I mean, it was a marvelous trip. We flew. We flew on Dragon Air and we flew on I think Southeast China and there was another one. We also went to the silk factories. Oh, where is it? I think it was a trip out of Shanghai [to Suzhou, out from Shanghai], but I can’t remember without my brochure in front of me. We went on what they call the soft seat coach. When you go into the train station, you look for a sign in English that says soft seat and hard seat. Soft seat is higher class. So we rode on that down to, I can’t think of it, it’s the city where they have a lot of the silk factories.

LC: Higher class meaning—?

PW: Cushions plus—

LC: Fewer people.

PW: Oh, no, our coach was filled with our people. (Laughing)

LC: Oh, okay, okay.

PW: I’m trying to think if there was Chinese in our coach or not, I don’t remember. I mean, we had Vietnamese doctors that were traveling with us.

LC: Really?

PW: Yeah. That was interesting because we had one girl, she was about forty. She was the daughter of a diplomat and had spent some time in Spain and someplace else, had a Canadian background and she was the prototype of the ugly American. She was just hateful everywhere she went.

LC: Yikes.

PW: But then we also had three doctors; one was a wife and two fellows and then the other gal was an accountant. They were all married, two couples from Houston. They had left Vietnam and I used to eat with them and, you know, people would say, “Why are you eating with those people for?” There was definitely a racial thing going on. [One wife was an MD, one an accountant and the two men were MD’s. All very educated and cultured people.]

LC: Meaning among the other tourists.

PW: Yeah.

LC: Why are you eating with the—?

PW: No, they were apart of our tour group.
LC: Right, but who—
PW: Why was I spending my time with them? They were delightful, well
educated nice people to be with. Then I got some answers. One of my corpsman [from
the USS Santuary in 1967] said he went back to Vietnam a couple of years ago and our
base was just, it was trashed. Why did they do that? Why didn’t they keep it up? So I
asked him [the Vietnamese MD] the question and he said, “I was the senior military
person who decided some of those things.” He said, “The Russians came in and bought it
and they took everything that was usable out and couldn’t maintain the rest of the
property and went to pot.”
LC: Now this is about Cam Ranh Bay or—?
PW: No, Da Nang.
LC: Da Nang, wow. So the word that you had was that it was just completely
gone to wreck and ruin in a way?
PW: Yeah, yeah. I mean, if you think back to Vietnam, the French were there
and the Americans, they had war going on out on their territory for a hundred years.
LC: Yes.
PW: I mean, what position would you be in?
LC: Right.
PW: Of course, the communists took over from the South Vietnamese and they
were in control. So it wasn’t the best of situations for them.
LC: What did those Vietnamese-American folks that you were traveling with
make of their tour of China?
PW: Well, they loved it. They loved it.
LC: Did they have any particular feelings about China itself or the Chinese
people that were negative or critical?
PW: I didn’t hear anything.
LC: Really? That’s interesting too. Well, let me ask you a couple of big picture
questions and some of this you’ve already covered, but I wonder if kind of rounding out,
you might say something about whether you think the United States ought to have or
ought to now commit troops overseas in situations such as the one in Vietnam where we
were trying to defend supposedly democratic government against the supposedly aggressive communist government?

PW: I think the Cold War threat and the domino theory in the ‘60s was very strong and there was a great deal of fear because we were coming off the Cold War and being adversaries with Russia. People were frightened. I think as things have evolved—I studied general systems theory administration while I was in graduate school. I firmly believe that we are in a world now where we have to interact with other countries. We have to be respectful and we have to be knowledgeable. I think we’ve lost our edge in education. I don’t think we’re as smart as we should be. This is all my personal opinion.

LC: Sure.

PW: I think anytime somebody rises to a position of power, they have a lot of responsibilities on their plate. It’s very easy to take potshots at people when you don’t have the top-secret information and high diplomatic things that are going on. In other words, I’m taking a potshot when I don’t have full information. I try to read books that are footnoted and as some of the senior officers have said to me when I take cracks at the administration, “Well, people can lie in their footnotes too.” After a while, you say, “Well, who do you believe?” So I try to read sources that I think are reputable, but I have thought since I was at Newport and after Vietnam that the United States government acts like a country that’s only about three hundred years old. We are talking to countries that are five thousand years old who have very rich cultures, who have deep philosophical thoughts, who have great arts and music. We’re talking down to them because we have money and we have power. I don’t think were always as smart as they are or as seasoned or as patient or have done our homework as well. So I think sometimes we are like an impetuous puppy dog that’s wagging it’s tail and we get into things before we should really do it.

LC: Military forces get committed in some of those cases.

PW: Yeah. I’m a firm believer, you know, and I’m glad to see all the cars running around the county that say, ‘‘Support our Troops,’’ because they’re ordered there. They’re doing what their country told them to do. They don’t have a say in it. The policy people are the people who should be getting the flak. You exercise that flak at
the ballet box and look at the numbers in the United States of people who don’t go out
and vote. I think it’s a travesty.

LC: The apathy that you were talking about before.
PW: Yeah, I think military people—when you see blood spills over our freedoms
and then people don’t take advantage of them, it’s sickening.

LC: It rankles in a big way.
PW: Yeah, big time.

LC: I’m sure it does, yeah. Well, Pat, the one other issue that I wanted to ask you
about has to do with the Veterans Administration and care for the veterans and what
priorities the US has assigned to those issues. Whether for example, medical treatment is
as available as you think it ought to be for people who served in the Vietnam Theatre and
other theatres.

PW: I can only answer from my perspective down here in Florida.

LC: Sure.
PW: I was in Vietnam in ’67 and ’68. It was in the ‘80s when I was here in
Florida that one of our Navy Nurse Corps newsletters came out. The article was written
by Fran Shea who was one of our rear admiral nurse corps types. She said, “If you
served in Vietnam, it would be well worth your while to go to your VA rep and ask about
disability for Agent Orange if you were exposed.” I thought, well, it’s been almost forty
years, but then I’m an only child and I don’t really have a support system. So I thought,
well, there’s a nursing home over in Daytona if I should ever need it. Maybe I should go.
So I went down to Tavares to the VA rep and she was wonderful to me. She said, “You
know, you served your country. Do you have your discharge papers?” I said, “Yes.”
She said, “Does it prove that you were in Vietnam?” I said, “Yes, I was on a hospital
ship offshore.” I said, “Sometimes it was as little as a thousand yards and I did go, you
know, ashore a couple of times. I worked triage where the guy’s were coming in with
Agent Orange supposedly on their uniforms.” She said, “Get me your papers.” So I got
my papers. She looked at me and she said, “The Veteran’s Administration has done a
study and they have proven a link between Agent Orange and Diabetes Type II.” I just
looked at her. I said, “Well, you know, I don’t have any diabetes in my immediate
family. I worked triage, so I mean, the supposition, we were exposed.” She said, “Put
your papers in for disability. You will get it.” I had some feelings about, you know, I
have a Navy retirement and Social Security and I’m more blessed than some people in
this world, should I really do that? Then I thought, but I could get worse and where will I
be? They will help me. So I put in and I got the disability. It was handled I thought very
expeditiously. Just so you know how it goes—

   LC: Yes.

PW: When you get your disability, I got forty percent. It was also for
hypertension. They take the money out of your paycheck. In other words, you get a
Navy retired paycheck if you’ve been in, you know, so many years.

   LC: Yes.

PW: They take the money out of your Navy paycheck, the Veterans
Administration sends you another check for that amount of money minus the taxes you’d
pay on it.

   LC: Okay.

PW: So your disability isn’t an addition to your pay, it’s taken out of your pay
minus the taxes. That’s what a lot of the veterans are complaining about. I’m speaking
for me and I love the Navy, but when I was on active duty, I worked three to eleven and
nights and stood the duty. We didn’t get extra pay for that.

   LC: Right.

PW: I mean, in the civilian world, you get differential.

   LC: Sometimes.

PW: We did get combat pay in Vietnam.

   LC: Yes.

PW: Okay, so my feeling is, I think in the civilian sector, if you are hurt, you get
your retirement plus whatever the compensation is for being hurt. Plus it isn’t taken out
of your pay and paid back to you from another organization.

   LC: Account, right, right.

PW: So that’s what a lot of the angst is in the military.

   LC: That it feels like magic accounting in a way?
PW: Well, just if you look at the number of veterans who are getting disability and the paperwork between the two agencies, how much bureaucracy and money is being spent needlessly for that.

LC: To manage it.

PW: Yeah, I think it’s pretty absurd. Now you asked me about the VA, I’ve had some of our nurses on the ship who have been disabled with various problems.

LC: Yes.

PW: They’ve gone to the VA hospital up in Gainesville and they said they were treated very nicely. The VA has opened a clinic in Leesburg. There’s one in Orlando. I hear they’re treated very well. People are happy, but I don’t think there’s enough VA facilities for the veterans. As a student nurse my senior year at Niagara, I did my psych affiliation at the VA hospital in Buffalo. I thought it was run very well. Then you see the Tom Cruise movie, *Fourth of July*, where the Vietnam Veterans were coming back and there were rats on the floor and they were being hosed down on gurneys for baths. It was understaffed and it was ugly. I think that did exist. I didn’t see it. So now I feel like the veterans who need the care in the veteran’s hospitals, it should be funded. I support that.

LC: So if I read you correctly, improvements while certainly there could be extended. In other words, more facilities could be built.

PW: I mean, it goes to staffing the kind of equipment, the facilities to match the number of people who need the care.

LC: Right, which is growing. That number is growing of course.

PW: Well, yeah, I mean there’s Gulf War people coming back with injuries. There’s Vietnam people still with injuries. There’s the Iraqi-Afghanistan problem, the Grenada situation. World War II veterans are still, they’re dying I think at the rate of eleven hundred people a day, but they’re older with multi-system problems.

LC: Exactly.

PW: So they need help.

LC: Yeah.

PW: So, you know, a lot of military people viewed this as a recruiting issue. If you’re not going to take care of your veterans, you’ll pay them at comparison to the civilian population. They’re not going to want to come in and serve.
LC: Yeah, it makes a big problem for the volunteer Army.
PW: Oh, yes. The Army has had big time problems.
LC: Yeah.
PW: I think, you know, I’m getting off target here, but I think the [National Guard] has been treated abominably. I mean, they’ve gone over there and done two or three tours. Where are the regulars? It speaks of, well, that’s the backdoor draft.
They’re using those people when maybe we should have a draft so we have the numbers we need.
LC: I was going to ask you, would you support a national service requirement of some kind?
PW: Yeah. If we’re going to stay in this war, we’re going to win it to solve it. I think everybody should have a crack at it.
LC: Of course, there’s always the possibility of additional conflicts elsewhere.
PW: Of course. I mean, Korea is a serious issue. We have another serious issue that could break out in China.
LC: Yes, exactly.
PW: So I mean, I think we should be prepared, but you know, the draft isn’t popular.
LC: No.
PW: But we may be left with our pants down.
LC: Well, Pat, I want to thank you for those observations and I wonder whether there’s anything else about your Vietnam service or your experiences as a veteran that I haven’t asked you about that you’d like to kind of pitch in here as part of the record.
PW: I’m just scanning those sheets real carefully here. One of the questions on page seven, “What did you learn while serving in Southeast Asia?” I’d like to comment on that.
LC: Please do.
PW: To me, people are basically the same throughout the world. Kindness and understanding and diplomacy and knowledgeable discussions with them, understanding their culture and language and how they operate, I think it’s critical to getting along. To me, I just don’t feel we can afford to go on the way we’re going on. That appalls me
when I heard on the news that Karen Hughes is going to be starting in September as a
person who’s going to build up our relationships with foreign countries.

  LC: Now Karen, just for reference, Karen Hughes is the Texas advisor, domestic
        affairs advisor.

  PW: Right. I think she’s a lawyer and she worked in the White House and then
she went out for a while with her family. Now she’s being brought back, she’s a smart
        lady.

  LC: She was a campaign director.

  PW: Yeah.

  LC: For President Bush.

  PW: But you know, to say they’re bringing her back to help improve our image
around the world says, well, what does Condoleezza Rice do? What does our president
do? They put their foot—and not so much Condoleezza, but when you put your foot in
your mouth and [Audio cut out]

  LC: How things looked at this particular time in 2005.

  PW: Yeah, I mean, I see the Chinese, other countries coming up asserting
themselves, their economies going up. Our healthcare system isn’t one of the best in the
world. It’s in a state of disarray. When I was in graduate school, I think we were
seventeenth down the list of neonatal death. That’s unconscionable. Our insurance
company, our legal system—nobody’s putting their foot down to say, “This has got to
stop.” You know, I do think George Bush is saying the buck stops here and this is what
we’re going to do and this and that isn’t right, but I don’t trust him. (Laughing)

  LC: (Laughing) But in your—

  PW: That’s just a personal thing with me.

  LC: Sure, sure. You’re thinking there’s certainly more to be done.

  PW: Oh, yeah.

  LC: Yeah.

  PW: I think we need to take an overhaul and say, “Hey, where are we going in
this world?” Isolationism isn’t in the cards for a country of our caliber. It just isn’t. It’s
ridiculous.

  LC: It hasn’t worked very well in the past.
PW: No.
LC: Yeah.
PW: No. I think we need to cement our relationships and have trade agreements and work across territorial boundaries. We need to work really hard at peace.
LC: Would you include communist Vietnam in—?
PW: Oh, we’ve already got trade relations with communist Vietnam.
LC: Should we work harder?
PW: Yes.
LC: To improve our relations?
PW: Yes. I really truly believe that if you are in a war with somebody, it’s like people said to me, “What are you out with those Japs for?” when I was in Japan in the ‘60s. The war was over. There were people who suffered in Japan and starved. They didn’t go along with the war. It’s time to call a halt to that and get on with life. I know there are people who have bitter grudges against the Japanese still because their fathers or their sons or whoever were killed and that makes a huge difference. They’re hurting, but we’ve got to move on. So, it’s easier said than done.
LC: Well, Pat, thank you very much for participating in the oral history interview and working with the oral history project.
PW: Laura, it was a pleasure and it was a pleasure working with you.
LC: Thank you.
PW: [It is important for the American people to remember that civilian secretaries (Defense, USA, USN, USAF, et cetera) run these departments and the administration in power sets the policies. The military is there to keep the peace and to protect our country and advise the president. The military does as it is told to do and follows those policies. It is essential that Americans take their right to vote as a very serious responsibility—who each of us votes for is critical to our national well-being and security. Apathy is inexcusable. Appointing political cronies who are ignorant of their area of responsibility is irresponsible and presidents who continue to do it should be impeached. It is widespread in our government and we are reaping negative consequences as a result. We need to act toward other countries with respect for them while not giving quarter to dictatorships or terrorists. The USA has lost respect from the world and largely it is our
own doing. Americans in the majority are compassionate, giving people. We absolutely need to pay attention to how we select our leaders in the executive legislative and judicial areas of our government. Government at the national level had to set the tone and agenda for where this country is going and what the world problems are that affect the USA. Local, state and regional governments in the USA do not always see, understand or certainly have the resources to deal with problems that cross boundaries. Example: we need a national policy on education, transportation, health care, disaster control, aid to the disadvantaged, organizational tables for communication and response et cetera. Local people can’t generate these policies. Local, state, regional, national and international governments and agencies must plan and work together.]