

OK. This is July 15th, 1995. I'm Neenah Ellis speaking with Louise Birch in West Park, New York. Tell me, please, when and where were you born.

June 21st, 1921, Cleveland, Ohio.

And tell me something about your family and your background.

Mother and father-- father was a newspaper reporter in Cleveland, transferred to New York City, and became sports editor of the New York World Telegram. Have a brother. My mother and father divorced. And saw very little of him. But my mother, I think, was loyal to him all the time. The one thing I remember about him when I wanted to become a nurse-- he said to my mother, there's not going to be any damn maids in our family.

That's what he thought of nursing?

Mm-hmm. Well, in those days, you're thinking, talking 1939. That's when I graduated from high school. So my mother said I could go to college and become a teacher. Well, I didn't want to become a teacher, I wanted to become a nurse. So I stayed home for a whole year and absolutely nothing.

And she finally said to me, go. Go, you know, I'll pay for it. Because in those days, you had to pay for a nursing education. And it was dad's responsibility. So anyhow, make a long story short, I became a nurse.

And he never congratulated me or anything until I got in the service. And he wrote me a letter that he wanted to come down and do an article on the nurse, the army nurses.

And by the time I got the letter, we were all already overseas living in tents. In fact, it was Eckie who helped me compose a letter back to my father, saying, you wouldn't want to do a story unless-- we don't look like nurses, we don't act like nurses. You know, we're living in tents, and you know, walking in mud, and not the sterile atmosphere that you think, white, crisp nurses.

So he dropped the subject. He never said boo to me the rest of my life or his life.

Where did you get the idea that you wanted to be a nurse? And why was it such a strong motivation?

Actually, it goes back to-- I was 5 and 1/2 years old, had a real bad operation. And I almost died evidently. It was rare in that time. And I won't go into it because I, well-- but anyhow, two holes in my belly here.

And I had specials around the clock. And I can always remember begging my nurses that I'd give you a drink if you were thirsty, you know. Because I couldn't have any water or anything to drink and stuff. And that must have been what was instilled in me.

I remember that

Because I had no idea what nursing was like when I went into training. In fact, my mother, when she finally said go, she said, I'll give you a couple of months and you'll be back. And I said, no, I'll stick it out. And I did.

Well, where did you get the idea that you wanted to go in the service?

Well, that's almost another chapter in my life. I had my boyfriend through high school had gone in the service before he was drafted. And he volunteered for the airborne. He was in the 82nd Airborne Division. And in training, we weren't allowed to be married.

And we had been really romantic. And he knew he was going overseas. And so he got leave, and I sneaked out, and we got married. His family knew about it, my family knew about it. It was a real simple ceremony. And he just had a

weekend pass.

And that was the last I saw him. He went over, he was in the invasion of Sicily. And he was-- that's a thorn in my side. He was considered an MIA for a year. And then you're dead. Not like the MIAs today that they're still-- I know that they have to look for these people. But they didn't look for the boys in the World War II. And there were many of them that they never found.

And unless there's blue-eyed blondes running around Sicily, then I don't know where he is. And so I went trying to find some trace of him. I'd written to his chaplain and I'd written to a lieutenant that used to censor our letters and never got any response. Went to the Red Cross, never got any response.

So I finally found-- when I was in the service and I was stationed down in Atlantic City in what they called England General Hospital. It was one of the big hotels in Atlantic City at the time, they made a hospital. And I found a fellow that was in his company.

And so he invited me over to his apartment with his wife and we got talking. And he knew that my Hughie had jumped. Because I wondered, you know, did he even make it over there? And he said, yeah. He said, but that was-- I guess that whole operation was a faux pas. You know, they went off of target and whatever. So anyhow, at least I knew that he did his duty.

What was his name?

Hugh Sheridan. And that's why they call me Sherry. My maiden name was Williams. So at least I found that out.

When did you find that out?

Well, actually, it was a year that they-- well, no, it wasn't a year. Because they had listed him as Missing In Action and his picture was in the paper. And his family had given his little blurb that he just got married, et cetera. And I know my directress of nurses would see this paper because it was a local paper.

By this time, I'm out of school. But I felt so bad because I had lied to her, you know, to get this little pass that I had. So I went back to her, you know, teary eyed, and I said, you know, Miss Coleman, I want to talk to you. So I started to say something.

She said, I know. She said, I know you got married. And I looked at her. But she didn't know, you know, that he had been missing. So she was sorry about that. But it was OK. And I guess she probably felt good that I came back to confess my crime or so. Now, see, we were Catholic. And the bands had to be announced in the church. And they were announced in his church, where she went.

Oh, so she knew.

And she picked up the names. And she must've even known who was writing to me. I don't know. Because they knew everything.

So he was lost in--

Sicily.

About June, '44.

Uh, actually, July. July '43.

Oh.

And I got out of school. I finished school probably September '43. And by the time we took state boards, you know, to get your RN. Because you couldn't join the service until you got your state boards and had physical papers. It was '44, it was early '44 that I went in the service and was stationed down in Atlantic City for a while. And then got my orders to go to Camp Polk, where the 131st was being started.

The full name of your unit was what? 131st Evacuation Hospital, Semi-Mobile. In other words, you could pick up half of that hospital and move it on while the other half was still operating. Although we never did that. But it was equipped to do that.

You could even take down half of the operating room, which was a huge, big tent. Look, it was several tents put together. Looked like a big circus tent almost. And you could take down half of that and move it on and move half of the wards on.

And we had two teams, you know, nurses and doctors and stuff. But we never did that. When we set up, set up as a whole and moved the whole unit as a whole.

So it was like what we might know today as a MASH unit, mobile hospital.

Yeah, Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. And I imagine today that that's what they call them. I don't think they call them evacuation hospitals anymore. The patients that we had stayed maybe two nights at the most. And then they were either taken by ambulance or air evacuated out.

So this was 1944. They were forming this unit at Fort Polk.

Where was that? What state?

No, I'm wrong. Fort Jackson.

Jackson.

Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

1944.

Yeah, Fort Polk is where we got just broke up. Yeah.

And you stayed in South Carolina until when? Do you remember?

Well, we headed up north in December, early December. And by this time, we knew that we were heading someplace. We had gotten a leave to go home. And it was a short leave, probably 10 days. And then we wound up at-- and I don't remember whether it was Camp Kilmer, someplace in New Jersey. And we did a lot of training as far as marching with packs on our backs.

What other kind of training?

Well, I think we did that down at Fort Jackson. We dug flip trenches, we put up tents, and we hiked, and I was-- I think I told you about the gas chamber that we went through.

Tell me about that again.

Well, it was this, almost about the length of a barrack, maybe shorter. But there was nothing in it but tear gas.

Underground?

No, no, up above. It was all sealed. Full of tear gas. And there was a sergeant or some GI sitting at the end with a pad of paper and a pencil on a desk. And you went in through the far end and walked through this whole chamber of gas with a gas mask on. You always had to have your gas mask on. And you had to put it on properly, too. Because if it wasn't properly fit, then you got the gas.

When you reached this officer, enlistment whatever he was, you took off your gas mask and told him your name, rank, and your serial number. And if you got nervous and flubbed-- because he must have had right down there what your serial number was. If you missed a number, he'd say, repeat that. You know. But it was one way to teach us all our serial number. Because that was very important. And then you got out into the fresh air.

Oh, where he was sitting, he had a gas mask.

Oh, he had them on, too.

There was gas.

Oh, yeah. He was sitting there with his mask on. But you would take yours off. And he was just delighting in every-- especially with a bunch of females, you know, and we're all screaming. I imagine. I know the men had to go through this, too, and probably even harder.

And you had to dig trenches.

We dug a slip-- well, what they call a slip trench, which would just hold up a body. In case you got bombed, you could jump into it. And we had to put our pup tents up. And those were small tents. They were like two-men tents. And as I remember, each one of us carried a half a tent at all times. So if you were ever caught someplace with no shelter, you could double up and put some kind of a shelter up.

All those things, I think, are in the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. Because when we came back, stuff was going on inside.

Oh, really?

Yeah. Well, did you want to-- hey, you didn't want to carry this home. Hopefully you wouldn't need it again.

Did they teach you how to use a weapon?

No, no.

Never.

No, never, no, no.

Never had to use it.

No. We were given all sorts of films on disease, body lice, sanitary conditions. And I don't even think there was a film for us on weapons. And there were no weapons in our hospital. Although I do have a picture of our dental assistant, and he's got a bandoleer of, you know, shells on him. I don't know where he got it.

And did they-- did you have special training in how to treat combat wounds?

Well, that was-- in the army, you do everything, as they say, by the ARs, Army Regulations. There was only one way to dress a wound, and you did it that way. You might not like to do it that way. But the army wanted you to do it that way. So yes, we had all these army regulations on how to treat this and that.

And going over on the ship, I was assigned to be an orthopedic surgical nurse. And I met the orthopedic surgeon. And he gave me a whole list of what we would do for all these orthopedic amputations or whatever. You know. And you read them and OK. We'll do what we have to do.

Were they substantially different from the way you had learned in nursing school?

No, not really. You know, you still have surgical technique that you had to follow. But they had a particular way of doing things. And the army is a stickler for that. In a hospital, you might have several different sizes of bandages, you know. In the army, you have one or two sizes. It may be different now, but in wartime, it wasn't, anyhow.

And while we were in England, I saw returning casualties from the Battle of the Bulge. For bandages, they used the latest issue of Stars and Stripes, which was in the magazine. They had no bandages. We'd get them in the operating room and we'd have to wet down this let that had all this paper, newspaper stuck to it. Because that's the only thing they had because that was a different situation.

So you can't say that they went by army regulations. You do what you have to do.

Let's pick up our chronology. You had to leave in December, you went home.

We went home for short leave. And I can remember, my mother gave me a [? hegen?] haig bottle of scotch, pinch bottle, and I hate scotch. And we got back to base.

Why did she give you scotch?

I don't know. Evidently, this was a very-- and is. I don't know, because I'm not a scotch-- it's a very good brand of scotch. And she said, take this back, you know, you might want to have a little party or something.

And when we got back to camp, the door came down, you could not make a phone call, you could not write a letter, you could not have any visitors. It was-- and I'm trying to think of the name they used. I want to say blackout. But it was a censorship.

So my mother never heard from me. And she said, oh, Louise got caught with that bottle in her. She said, they put her on-- put her in the brig or something because I got it.

And I remember going into the little commissary there. And they had a florist in there that they could wire flowers out. I'll fix. I'll get in touch with my mother. So I wired her a dozen red roses. Of course, she got them a month later. But I thought they would go right out, you know. But they were smart, you know, and so what I put on was I love you, you know. And it didn't work.

And you shipped out.

Yeah, we shipped out. Yeah. We were like that for maybe three or four days, I think, that you couldn't do anything. And the other girls must have told you the story about crossing the Hudson at night and this fog rising up. And that's a vision I'll never forget.

Tell me about that.

I can't remember exactly whether-- I know we'd gone by train to this barge. Now, it seemed to me the train was on the barge, but I could be wrong. But I remember crossing. It was dark night. And crossing the river, and this fog coming up.

And there was this big, gray thing in front of us. It was huge, huge. Several stories high. And you're looking up at it and you could just make out Queen E-L-I and then you don't know what was in round because it was all painted gray, the Queen Elizabeth. And we went, my god. You know. I get goose pimples right now. This is it.

And we all had steel helmets on. And they chalked mark. You're all numbered. And lined up. And they had the roster and one, two, three, four. And then you got to the gangplank and they checked the one, two, three, four. And you got up on top of the gangplank, one, two, three, four. And they showed which way to go.

They had our orders all-- women were, of course, all segregated. And there were thousands, thousands on that ship. All the doors on the stateroom were removed. There were no doors on the stateroom. They had guards at either end of the hall so nobody could go. Nobody else could go.

And we only could eat twice a day because there were so many on there to feed that I guess the kitchen was going constantly. You got your seating thing, which was like 10 o'clock in the morning and maybe 9 o'clock at night. That's when you ate two meals because they couldn't feed everybody three meals.

Were you able to mingle with the men at all? Would you talk to them?

Yeah, well, just the officers. Because it was very segregated. The huge, huge, big lounge. You couldn't find a place to sit. Everyone was sitting on the floor. The few that got a chair were lucky, you know, and they weren't about to give it up. And the officers all mingled.

There were many Air Corps fellows going back to England. There were many other units. I found out after the war that one of my friends who I knew as a little kid was on that same ship. And in fact, he was in the 120th Evac Hospital--

Watch your microphone there.

--that liberated Buchenwald. And I tried to get him to talk to me. No, he's busy right now. His wife has got cancer. But anyhow. Yes. And while we were there, some of the nurses from another unit put on a little skit.

That's why it was the same boat this friend of mine went on. Because he was talking about I can still see the girls up there saying don't fence me in. And they had big wings, was supposed to be Air Corps wings on it, you know. And of course, the Air Corps guys went ape over that. And so we had good time.

So there was another unit of nurses. Yours wasn't the only one?

Oh, and this was in Buchenwald they went to. A unit replaced us when we left, the 58th Field Hospital replaced us. And I have no idea, you know, what happened then. That's why I was disappointed. Well, maybe Mike would know, when he comes back with Bonnie. Because I'm sure his outfit stayed there.

So you got to England right after Christmas?

Just before Christmas. Just before Christmas. And we knew we were going to be away for Christmas. So all the nurses went into the PX, and we all bought three gifts. Handkerchiefs, or aftershave, or a razor or something. And wrapped it up for the enlisted men. And we had that. And I think we bought an ornament, too, it seems to me. But we carried those.

So when we got to England-- and of course, holly grows wild over there. So we had a ball cutting it off and trying to make our quarters a little bit more cheerful. And Christmas night, we took all these grab gifts, you'd call them, but we thought it was something, up to the enlisted men's quarters.

And we all were a great singing group. Not that I have a voice. I'm losing what I have. But we sang all the time. And I'm sure the men got so sick of hearing us sing. And Eckie was one of the ringleaders because she has a voice. You know, all kinds of songs. And we sang Christmas carols for the enlisted men and gave them their little presents, so that made it a little nicer.

You all-- seems like you saw it as your responsibility to care for the men as well as the injured.

Well, it was hard, the segregation thing, you know. And the men thought of the nurses as for the officers only. We

weren't supposed to fraternize with them. And how can you do that with somebody you're working with? I mean, you had a little law and order, let's say, on the wards and stuff. But you still were friendly.

Like one night at Christmas time, we had this house that we turned into a sickbay. So anybody in the outfit, whether they were officer or enlisted man was sick and needed care and stuff were sent there. So of course, the nurses had to man it.

And one night, we're sitting there and one of the GIs, the enlisted men who was taking care of the fires. In England, each house room has a little fireplace. And god, if you don't keep that going, you freeze to death. And he'd go around.

And so we were sitting there and we're talking about Christmas back home. And we're sad, you know. And this guy says to me, boy, he says there's no place like Christmas in the Adirondacks. Just, you know, right up here. And I grew up in the Adirondacks, summertime. And I said, whereabouts in the Adirondacks? And he says Speculator. And no one has ever heard of Speculator. Well, that's where I grew up.

I off the bench-- and I jumped in his lap, and I'm kissing him, and going on. And the poor kid, he's scared to death, you know, what did I do wrong? You know, I'm going to be court martialed. But I was so-- someone had heard of Spec. And then he said to me, you know, I recognized you, but I didn't recognize your name. And that's because I had my married name. But that was, you know--

You all were homesick, huh?

Oh, yeah.

Yeah.

Especially at Christmas time. And this boy happened to be Jewish, too. So that really didn't mean as much to him. But the fact that he was even near any area.

You know, when you meet a soldier-- where are you from? Everyone wanted to know where you're from. The majority of our enlisted men were from Oklahoma. A bunch of Okies. A few, like Mark, happened to be from New York. And we had a few from Pennsylvania.

Us girls, most of us girls were from New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Our officers, our doctors were mostly from Ohio, Pennsylvania. And you know, so there were little areas. So you always looking for someone who knew your hometown so you'd have something to talk about that would remind you of home.

And you know, especially the fighting soldiers. They were so glad to see somebody. First, you know, it was an American voice that they were so glad to see. And then an American woman. And then, you know, where are you from? Where are you from? And if you were even two states away, you know, you were their sister.

What was it like caring for the men who had been injured coming back from-- there they were in the Battle of the Bulge some of them?

At that point, it was right at Christmas. I was in the operating room, so I really didn't care for them. I saw them and saw their wounds. And that's all. Because they were in and out. And we had two tables going at the same time in one room.

These were people who were pretty badly injured.

Well, they had all sorts of-- and the room I was in, it was an orthopedic room. So it was either real bad fractures, some amputations, something like that. But there were other rooms that had chest wounds and, you know, abdominal. So they were, in a way, worse off. Because it's a little easier to fix a bone than it is to fix a--

Soft tissue.

--a shatter, you know, lung and stuff. So in fact, I had to relieve one day in the chest surgery room, and I went, get me out of here. You know, I was scared because I'd never saw so much blood in my life. You know, and they worked so fast, whereas orthopedics, it's--

It's slower.

Yeah, it's slower because most of the bleeding had already been under control because it didn't just happen. But you know, they were repairing what they could. And even that, they would probably have to have more surgery when they got back to the States because there were nerve damages done, which I don't think they would attempt to do there. It's an awful thing to say, but it was good to take care of our soldiers.

What do you mean by that?

Well, that's what we were there for. And when I was stationed in Atlantic City, these soldiers were all injured ones, but they were up and about on crutches, and wheelchairs, and you know, slings and whatnot. So they were sick, yes, but they weren't sick that way. Had a couple real bad head injuries that upset me because they couldn't talk. But they weren't fresh wounds. And in England was the first time I saw a fresh wound.

And then in France, we set up the hospital in France, but we didn't have any patients. It was like a dry run because that's the first time we had set up the tents. We had to make sure all of our equipment worked, trying our generators, and water distillers, and autoclaves.

And all of our instruments were shipped over, covered with some sort of grease, or Vaseline, or something. We had to clean all that off. It was to protect it, you know, from the saltwater, I guess, whatever. And we cleaned the instruments. And even made little-- some of the girls made, sewed, hand sewed little compartments for some of the more delicate instruments, to protect them.

And then we went on to Germany. That was the first time we had fresh patients.

In April?

April, yeah. April, yeah.

April, 1945.

'45, yeah.

And these were coming off the battlefield?

Yeah. Our very first load of patients was a truck accident. The truck had tipped over and a whole bunch were injured in that. In fact, we even had some German POWs that had gotten injured and we treated those.

But then there were-- the war was starting to wane down. So there weren't that furious amount of accidents. There were a lot of mine, you know, people walking into personnel mines and stuff like that. I remember.

And I can't remember what happened to him, one night in the operating room, was this kid with this head wound. And we had just set up the distilled water. And it was-- the doctor yelled at me to get a pitcher water and pour it over, you know, to debride it, to get the dirt out.

And I said, no, the water's too hot. And he says, pour it. I said, it's too hot. He says, pour it, god damnit, pour it. And when I did, I could see the kid's toes jump. And, oh, I felt terrible. And he came later.

His toes moved?

Well, yeah, because of the nerve reflex, you know. And I felt terrible. I felt so bad. And he came to me later and apologized. He says, I shouldn't have yelled at you. And I said, well, I shouldn't have questioned you. And he said, he couldn't have felt that. He said, the damage that was in his brain, he said, but I had to, you know. So that was one incident I remember.

Was it a generally tense situation? I mean, I don't know about what the normal state of an operating room is. But how is it different behind the lines?

Well, I think any operating room situation, even if you watch MASH, is tense while they're doing the operation. Once it's over-- and I know in civilian because I worked in the civilian hospitals in the operating room. Once it's over, the laughter starts, and they ask how your golf game is, or they'll start, hey, did you hear this joke? You know, it's very blase. And I think there, too. Although they did things a lot faster. They had to move, keep moving.

Because there was always another.

There's another one waiting, yeah. We always had what we called a pre-op tent that came out this way, then the big operating room tent was this way. And the pre-ops were in there on the stretchers and--

Waiting.

--waiting.

So it was a constant emergency surgery.

Yeah, next.

Constant, yeah.

Some of it wasn't considered emergency, but it had-- it wasn't life or death. Some of them weren't life or death but they still needed attention. And you took the first ones first, that's triage.

Who would do those assessments, the triage assessments? A doctor in that area?

Well, yeah, and the nurse like Woodie, she was head of the OR that I worked in. I don't know because I was in the operating room. Actually, I don't remember those. And I know we had a sergeant who was in charge of the ward itself. And he was an older man. So whether he was, you know-- the corpsman, god bless him, was a lot better than some of the nurses. They were great, really great.

On a typical day, how many surgeries would you do?

That would be hard to tell because we move so much. We moved an awful lot. You just couldn't keep up with the third army was moving through. And we weren't that busy. Our wards were never full. Whether they shipped them back out fast enough.

Like I said, the war was waning down. And they could get them moved out. They wanted to get them to general hospitals as soon as they could. And then back home. So we were never out straight. I wouldn't say. In England, yes. England was different. England was when they--

What do you mean by out straight?

Well--

Working around the clock?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. One right after the other. And at nighttime, you might be called out at night.

That would happen that you--

Yeah. oh, yeah.

--were on call virtually every day, all the time?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. There was always this two team units. So somebody was always there to work the hospital if some of us got to go to a so-called party. You know, as long as there was enough left to cover the hospital, that was OK. You could get leave to go.

So half of you were always on and half of you were always off?

Well, actually, yes, I suppose you'd call it that. I was going to say we were always all on unless there was something doing, which wasn't that often. It sounds like we were just one big party but it certainly wasn't. And we made our own parties a lot of times just for something to do, something different. I think that's probably why we got along so well together. Because you could always think of something else to do.

What do you mean?

Well, if you had to, you know, you sit in the tent, and you might write letters, or read books, and somebody would come in, and make a lot of noise, and say, oh, well, quiet down. And you know, they realize well, maybe I should go out for a walk. And you'd go out for a walk. And you couldn't walk far because you weren't allowed to go too far.

So I don't know, it's funny, thinking back of we didn't take it lightly but we didn't let it get underneath, you know, let us get down. We had a job to do and we were there to do it.

Let me check this. While you were in Germany in April, was your general attitude-- what was your general attitude? Were you feeling I'm glad to be here, I feel good doing this? Or was it this is terrible, I want to go home?

Well, I always wanted to go home. I know that when I was in Germany, I hated the Germans with a passion. Just hated them with a passion. And I couldn't even be civil to them when I would look at them. I've changed since, believe me. Because I've been back and found some real nice people.

But we were almost like cattle being led. You're in the service, you're told when to get up, and go to bed, and when to eat, and you didn't question what you were eating, you ate it. You went to work and you did your job. And why am I here? Because I joined. I wasn't drafted, I joined. This is what I want to do.

I never thought of coming home as it seemed to me that everybody in that era joined the service. So it was the thing to do. You had to do it for your country.

And we weren't doing it, maybe-- we weren't doing it for the country, per se. We were doing it for our men, our fellow men, fellow Americans. And that's what we wanted to do. That's why we were all there to help them over. Because they're the ones that did the dirty work.

Yeah.

And we try to make it a little nicer, or softer, or healthier. Did you think about your husband? Yes, yes, I did. Wondered, you know. He used to have a-- on his dog tags, he had a little vial with my hair in it. And he had said to me, the last I saw him, don't ever believe I'm dead unless you get this back. Of course, I've never gotten it back.

But there were-- I have heard so many stories since how must have been an awful job for these-- I don't know what they

call them. They had a name that buried the dead.

And this especially, in the Battle of Normandy, I heard this from one of the GIs. That the invasion of Normandy was so horrendous that they had a truck of left arms, a truck of right arms, a truck of left legs. And when they went to bury a body, if it was missing a left leg, they went to that truck. So you wonder.

And even when I was in high school, my chemistry teacher in high school was a doctor, a female doctor. And she was a doctor in World War I. And she had all these slides to show us. There were slides of heart tissue, lung tissue, and all sorts of tissues that she had taken out of World War I dead soldiers.

And she told us, and here we are, that's way back in the early '30s, that they stuffed them with straw and sent them home to be buried. So you wonder, you know, what came home. Maybe he's better over there not knowing, you know. Blown to bits or something, I don't know.

But that stuck. And I can remember we had these seats in our chemistry lab that were two to a desk. And I'm listening like this. And all of a sudden, I hear blump, and the girl next to me fainted right out of her seat. But I don't know if they could do that now. Maybe they do, I don't know.

I don't know. So you were caring for wounded soldiers and grieving at the same time?

I couldn't have been grieving. Because now, this is a year later, for one thing. I was busy doing my work. I thought of him. I still have the same picture I carried with him, with his wings. And the last letter I wrote him-- or he wrote me, excuse me, which was a V-mail letter.

But they never photographed it. And I'm curious to know why it was never photographed. Because they came all photographed. I don't know if you're familiar with V. Well, V-mail you would write on the certain paper. You could only have one sheet. And they would photograph them and put them into microfilm. And then they'd send that microfilm.

They'd get thousands and thousands of letters on this little small microfilm. And that saved hundreds of cubic feet in a cargo ship, sending all these letters back and forth.

His letter, dated July it looks like seven, but he made it an eight, and he was missing on the 10th. And it says, I'm going to be busy for a while. This will probably be the last letter you get from me because I'm going to be busy. But you'll hear about it soon enough.

And why would they send that handwritten, you know, piece? The original piece. So I still have that and his picture, which I carried all overseas with me. And kept even when I remarried. And my husband knew it was in my drawer, and it stayed there, and it's still there.

Let me turn the tape over while we have a break. This is the end of side one with Louise Birch.