

Marcelle Duval Interview

RG50.498.0003

1:54 Q: Let's get started. Please introduce yourself and tell us the circumstances that led you to become a nurse.

• A: Of course. As a youngster I never thought of becoming a nurse. I was fascinated with pre-modern cultures- Greece, Persia. Therefore I thought about pursuing a career in Archeology. After I graduated from college and received my Bachelor's degree, my father expressed his concerns with my current career path and pressured me to pursue a career in law. He believed that women did not understand contracts and have many difficulties throughout life. They are often taken advantage of and do not know how to defend themselves. I could see the logic in his reasoning and I decided to study law. I studied law for two years and passed the first year exam. In order to be a civilian lawyer you not have to take the final exam. This was in Paris. A member of my family was very sick and needed to be taken care of and then the war began. My family and I moved to Fontainebleau to a larger house where my sister and her three children could live as well. She had previously lived in Le Havre which at the time was in danger of being bombed. Her father was absent at the time and she preferred to stay close to the family.

4:03 I began a first year in Archeology in 1939-1940. In June we moved to the south of France (Le Midi). We did not think of the terrible collapse and stayed there two to three months. In September we returned to Paris. Everything was chaotic. The war had ended and the armistice had been signed. Given the current situation, studies were not a first priority. A group of friends and I decided to work for the Red Cross. We wanted more experience in humanitarian issues. We were well received by the Red Cross and were told to first acquire a nursing diploma, and if possible also one in assistant Social Worker, and then we would have plenty of work.

Q: Do you remember the names of these friends?

A: It was a small group, about 15 of us. We remained very close up until 1945. We were assigned to the First Army Unit in 1944 and stayed with them until Austria. We participated in all battles and were in Bavaria and Tyrol. We returned to Paris November 8th, 1945. This was much after the armistice.

6:37 Then, I was offered to direct a dispensary which was only possible given my law degree. The administrative work required a law degree. I had a great career, and through this I was offered other jobs. I realized then that my law degree was extremely useful

Q: You started your nursing studies in 1940?

A: I started them in September 1940 and graduated in May 1942

Q: Do you remember where you studied?

A: In the “School of Peupliers” (School of Poplars) which was a part of the Red Cross. It was located at “Poternes des Peupliers” (Gate of the Poplars) in the 13th District. The school and the hospital were founded and continue to be a part of the Red Cross. It is considered to be one of the best schools in Paris. I found my studies very interesting. Our class was very homogenous since we all had intentions of helping with the war.

Q: Did you go to several other hospitals for learning purposes?

A: For my instructions we had to be at the hospital around 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning. I was forced to take the Metro at 6:00AM and it was unbelievably crowded with others commuting to work.

Q: Do you have specific memories from these hospitals during the war?

A: I do have distinct memories of the services. They functioned very well because the Service Chiefs were remarkable men. They knew how to wisely choose their personnel. They had excellent main nurses that performed the highest level of care for the patients. Chiefs at other services were not always available and they accepted anyone to care for the patients. This caused disastrous situations. Sometimes I saw things that made me jump up in indignation.

Q: At this time did you have a specialty?

10:45 A: No. At the time we had to spend time in all of the divisions. Medicine, surgery, anesthesia, urology, and pediatrics. Over the course of two years we had twenty-four different periods of instruction. Then around August or July, I continued instruction in the anesthesiology department along with my regular requirements. I wanted to improve in this area. Since it was war time, there were fewer personnel and since I was known to be a serious student, Public Health asked me to replace the current nurse. This position was much more interesting for me.

11:44 Q: Do you have any memory meeting Jewish individuals during the war?

A: I did not pay a lot of attention to this considering my family had many Jewish friends. To my family and me, being Jewish or Christian was not important.

Q: Where did you live?

A: With my Parents in the next building from here.

Q: Did you receive a degree from nursing school?

A: Yes. We had already had some excursions due to bombing emergencies. After getting our State Degree (license?) one of my friends, an extremely energetic woman and great organizer, met with us at the Bois de Boulogne to tell us about projects regarding management of emergency care given to her by the Red Cross. She was the niece, I cannot remember of either the President or the General Secretary. She asked if we were ready to be a part of the National Emergency Teams that were sent to provinces to help local teams after bombing raids. Between 1943 and 1944, we had approximately one

mission per week. These missions consisted of spending two to three days in bombed cities to do in general what was entrusted in us.

13:54 Bombing was not a regular event. The first time you are on one of these missions you were expected to perform duties even though you are not completely competent. You had to perform your duties in unusual environments. It was very difficult to perform the necessary duties, such as, identifying dead bodies, putting together arms, legs, and heads, just like an archeologist. You had no idea if it was the right one. It was awful. There were people who were completely crushed; we would find pieces of bowels in stomachs, practically everywhere. After that we had to do the shrouding and then have families come in and identify the bodies. This was all very hard and evident that there was a need for specialized teams.

Q: This was terrible work!

A: Yes, it was terrible but you got used to it and you can do it.

Q: You did not expect to be confronted with these horrible situations.

A: Obviously, the first day it was, but then we knew what we had to do. Out of all my companions who had been accepted to perform this work, very quickly our numbers decreased to 40-30%. We had a special train (name is given but is unclear) it had a surgical wagon, one for pregnancies, and one for the transportation of ambulances. The National Assistance had 2 wagons, one for the kitchen and one for clothing. The Ministry of the Interior had one wagon to make identification documents which was attached to the train called "311". It had 300 beds for the wounded, and both returned to Paris together. Our duty was to operate on individuals who were delivered to us and some operations were urgent. There were often people who had one foot, an arm, or a member caught in the rubble and had to be operated on the spot because they would not have been able to be freed. In general, Firefighter's Physicians performed this work, however sometimes they were busy and our surgeons had to do the job. I was generally the only one who would accompany these doctors because I had knowledge in anesthesiology and knew how to help. I would hand over instruments during the procedure. The procedures were performed in the simplest manner possible. Amputation was done when it was possible and the sooner the better. The wounded were then taken to our train where a second procedure was performed utilizing better technique.

17:38 Q: You also went to the grounds of the bombed buildings?

A: Yes. The hardest part was getting to the wounded. We had to pass over stones, beams, and breathed in horrible amounts of dust. That was the hard part, we were used to performing surgery.

Q: This was your emergency activity?

A: Yes it was, we performed these activities for three years.

Q: Your daily activities were emergencies?

A: My job was very simple- to complete my nursing studies and also my social work studies which also required 18 months to complete. It was forbidden for students to be a part of the emergency teams due to the numerous required absent days. However, I had informed my Director of my activities. I only had one friend who knew that I was apart of the emergency teams and she copied her class notes for me and kept me updated on our courses.

Q: It was a Red Cross school?

A: it was the school of St. Simon Cross which was a part of the Red Cross

Q: In Paris?

A: Yes in Paris. So, we would come back around 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. We would wait for the first metro and go home, shower quickly and then go immediately to school. I looked tired, which was I was, and appeared ill.

Q: Nobody knew at the time that you were on the Emergency Teams?

A: Yes, I was asked not to tell anyone

20:20 Q: This was your activity during the whole time?

A: Yes.

Q: You received your degree as a social worker?

A: Yes. On May 1944

Q: Therefore, you completed double school during the war- nursing and social work?

A; Yes

Q: Now to focus upon our main interest of today- the famous journey of July 1942.

21:42 Ms. Duval stands and looks at a picture. A small conversation follows and stops.

0:06 Q: Going back to the famous day of July 1942, how did you live through it?

A: If my memory serves me right, I received a phone call from the Red Cross the Sunday night before the round-up occurred. They told me to be ready Thursday at 7am. One of my peers would pick me up in a car- I was not surprised it was always a youngster who came when we had a special outing. I was ready at the sidewalk at 7:00 in the morning and the car arrived with three other nurses. I knew them well and we were friends. They told me that we were going to the Winter Cycle- Racing Track (Velodrome) to open an aid station. We were a bit furious since we were used to outings, how to say, of much more importance. We did not understand what we would be doing at an aid station with a small first aid bag in Velodrome since none of us had been there before. We pondered amongst ourselves what we would be doing- there were no races at this time so figured it was a try out race that would take place in the evening. The car

arrived at Velodrome and we exited the car. There were numerous policemen. We didn't know what was happening. We were informed that there had been a round-up the night before and the people had been brought to Velodrome. The mass amount of people and the shear size of the building were overwhelming. Some people were sitting, others were coming down the stairs and others were going up. There children yelling, crying, looking for their parents and parents looking for their children. We were not used to these kinds of conditions and we spent a few minutes in confusion. We set up our small aid station.

- 3:06 Then oh! Then I believe the first person committed suicide by throwing him or herself off of the balcony. There were metal balconies protruding around the area and from one of them he or she committed suicide. Luckily, our physician arrived and stated that the person had died instantly and the body was taken away. Later I learned that there had been twenty who died in the same way. We opened our station and the Red Cross called for reinforcements immediately. Around fifty nurses. We also needed a tent to take care of the sick and it could not be done otherwise in an arena. We also needed medications- we had only come with very small items for surgical needs and bandages but it was not adequate for the given situation. They brought us very sick children.

- 4:30 Patients were diagnosed with diphtheria, mumps, scarlet fever, measles, otitis, and other various illnesses. We could not care for these patients at our station because we only had aspirin. The aspirin helped bring the fever down but was not adequate. Then the Germans, I assume so but I do not know for sure, arrived. They were responsible for the people at Velodrome. Our medical doctor strongly argued with them and explained the need to send the children to the hospital due to their high fevers and contagious diseases. I do not know what happened to the children afterwards but I know our request was granted.

- 5:31 We saw numerous worried women bringing their sick children. They did not want to be separated from their children and they preferred to stay close to them. People had an idea that they were going to central Europe. The other nurses and I did not realize that the crowd of people was only Jewish. I realize that they were foreigners because they did not speak French well and they spoke some sort of foreign tongue amongst themselves. But I did not realize that this was a round up of Jews, at least on the first day.

Q: Were deportations talked about at this time?

A: No. I had not heard about the deportations. Obviously, I was not knowledgeable about this; I did not read newspapers because I was not very interested at the time. I know that some children were evacuated, I imagine to Rothschild Hospital because someone from that facility came and some other delegations. Also many people from the National Relief arrived.

Q: First?

A: Yes, we were the first to arrive at 7:00am.

7:44 Q: You saw many illnesses, but what other pathologies?

A: Some women were in labor, and they were quite a few abortions caused by the situation. Our representative of the Red Cross talked to the Germans requesting that women in labor and those pregnant for more than 6 months (by physical examination) should be hospitalized. Indeed they left with their babies and their children (if they had others). If they had a man with them, a husband or other, I do not think that he left also. But they left with their children.

8:63 Q: Women and children, was this a large number of people? Were there older people in this group?

A: The whole family was taken, so if grandparents were there they were taken with all others, it was the whole family

Q: You were at this aid station?

A: Yes. In the afternoon we received the requested tent that allowed us to do examinations more discretely

Q: Your team was still small?

A: No, eight other nurses arrived. Obviously this was not enough, we needed many more. We received some first aid helpers and Red Cross personnel who set up food distribution. The detained people were asked to bring food for two days but no one had been forewarned. It was war time and food was being rationed. Also at this time Jews could only buy food between 4:00 and 5:00pm and by that time nothing was left in the stores. Therefore, no one had food reserves at home. They did not eat cold cuts and no one had a refrigerator and could not keep milk. It was a difficult time to buy food so we tried to make feeding bottles. I do not know if we had enough but I do not think that the babies suffered. All of the humanitarian groups who had come to help had sent boxes of milk as well as the Rothschild hospital.

11:27 Q: Let's go back to those days at Velodrome. You mentioned the nutrition problems

A: Yes, you asked about the treatment of the sick. I told you about the labor but we also had to deal with hysterical crises and epileptic seizures. I remember how dramatic these episodes were. We had five cases of raving madness and we did not know what to do. We were not used to dealing with this and we did not have the strength to hold them.

12:12 We ended up closing them up. I think we had emergency guards or specialized nurses. They came to get them as they could not be left in the middle of the crowd. During the three days, we the nurses faced medical needs, but we did not focus on the demand for hygiene, feeding bottles, water supple, and food. It was not our duty as nurses.

Q: Did you have problems communicating with the patients.

A: No. They spoke French; sometimes we had a difficult time understanding them. We understood each other in those cases. But amongst each other they spoke a foreign language.

Q: Do you have precise memories of anyone you encountered in the crowd?

A: No. I remember an anguished crowd always looking for a missing member of their family, a child or a friend. There was no order. No one was there to keep order. People went up, others went down. There were women feeding a bottle to their infant, some did not dare to leave their arm chair. You knew the risks; if water packages arrived there were 50 arms trying to get them etc. some of my colleagues went to other floors to distribute feeding bottles and barely escaped being mistreated. There was a need for protection and guards to help distribute bottles to the various floors.

Q: Was there great despair and violence among the people?

A: Great violence, yes. The great despair did not surprise us. In the bombardments we attended we saw it but no violence.

Q: These people did not get enough food?

A: Yes, but the main cause was the lack of organization.

15:42 Q: Organization problem, nothing had been anticipated?

A: It was a problem of organization or a problem due to the lack of information. We, as nurses, were not informed about what we were going to find. The lack of food was a problem for the International Help groups. They intervened only at bombardment events and had provisions for 200 or 300 people. But at Velodrome there were 9,000. With no prior notifications, how could we be prepared with the necessary dishes and food? The first day we did not give any food but food arrived the second day. I remember well it was 5:00pm. We made a great effort to find plates and potatoes were handed out. Unfortunately they were not cooked and people did not want them so they overturned the plates on the floor of the arena.

17:09 Then the thrown potatoes were handed out. It was disgusting and they should have cooked them a little bit longer. I remember the reply we received on this regard: "When one is hungry you eat no matter what". I do not believe you eat raw potatoes. You're not used to that.

Q: Tentative solutions for the food problem did not work. Was it lack of organization?

A: The second day it did not work either. The third day I do not remember, maybe it did.

Q: Those three days you stayed until late evening?

A: We arrived at 7am and left at 10:00pm. They were frightening days.

Q: And this lasted for three days?

A: Yes, on the third day it ended for us. I do not know, but probably during the night the evacuation was completed. On the third day there were significantly less people.

Q: Were those people evacuated?

18:33 A: Most likely, but during the night

Q: Did you know where they were going?

A: No, nobody knew. Maybe they were going to their home country. We did not understand at all it was because they were Jews. Yes they wore the yellow star. Many hid them so they were not visible. An idea of deportation of a race did not enter our mind.

Q: At the time did you think of urgent problems?

A: A problem of foreigners being sent to their country. As simple as that. We did not think at all about what would happen to them.

Q: People were evacuated rather quickly- three days?

A: I think it was so people would not notice at night. One could not leave home between 10pm and 6am. It was the curfew. Therefore at 2-3am buses would come to pick them up. No witnesses and no news in the papers.

Q: Did you speak about this to your family?

A: No, there was an edict that we were taught: never talk about what you do. You see too many horrible things and it is not necessary to speak about them. We never did and preferred not to.

Q: But this was an exceptional situation and you did not talk about it?

A: Yes, but we had the habit of not speaking. The question of discretion in the profession. We did not speak

Q: You spoke of medical problems, nutrition problems, and lack of hygiene

A: The hygiene problem was talked a lot about. For 8,000 people the Velodrome had only 5 toilets, people relieved themselves where they could, nobody came to clean. Many relieved themselves at the place they occupied and the excrements fell at the level below and many individuals were sprayed by them. The place had a bad smell. It was truly horrible

Q: Did people stay on the tier steps?

A: They were everywhere. In cases like this there is a need for order services to avoid people suffering.

Q: Nobody had anticipated the problem?

A: I was surprised that people did not do something for themselves. People can take initiatives even during misfortune. There could have been some people who could have helped maintain some sort of order. I think the situation was each one for himself. They were overtaken by the events.

Q: Once you finished this assignment, did you continue with your prior activities?

A: Yes. I was taking courses for my social work studies. Then the landing happened and we were sent to Normandy for three months. We spent one month near Caen and then we were close to Lisieux.

23:06 We worked hard as German troops were encircled. The battles were large. We entered Paris at the end of September. Our group was offered to the First Army so we left to join them at Belford and we saw combat in Bosges, Ruhr, and Tyrol.

Q: Did you go all the way to Austria?

A: The armistice surprised us in Austria

Q: You continued working as a nurse. Did you wear a uniform for the Red Cross or the French Forces?

A: We were offered to work for the French Forces but we declined the offer and remained with the Red Cross.

Q: Were you asked to help open the concentration camps in Germany or Austria?

A: Absolutely not. Because in the first place it was not a part of our duties and due to our surgical duties we were constantly busy.

Q: When did you return to France?

A: In November 1945 after the armistice. We continued to care for Army members. Many were wounded during mine clearance and some hurt themselves by cleaning their guns. Many were hurt on the roads since many soldiers and officers went out in the evening. They drank too much and were found at the bottom of a ravine, there were many car accidents.

1:37 We also had to perform all of the normal procedures needed in an Army: appendicitis, hernia repairs, and many others. We were liberated in November 1945

Q: You were a nurse in a surgical team?

A: Yes. I was responsible for the surgical team. There were 4-5 procedures each day and we were lucky to receive a surgical table from the Phillips Society. The table was [radiological] and surgeries could be performed on it. At the time it was the only one in the world. It was, I think it was called bifocal, you could see the bullet horizontally and

vertically so the surgeon could immediately locate the bullet in the body. A great number of Physicians came to see this small wonder because this type of table was unique.

Q: When did you realize the fate of the Jews?

3:07 A: It was when we were in... Belgesh? After May 8th a small publication was distributed, in German, full of pictures. It was during the time the camps were being discovered.

Q: That was when you realized the nature of what you saw in the Velodrome?

A: No, I did not make this connection. You have to understand the position we were in. we were working 8-9 hours a day and did not have enough time to think and make associations like this. It was afterwards when I read about what happened during the war. But at the time we were in the midst of horrible things.

Q: So you returned to Paris in November 1945 and continued your career as a nurse?

4:19 A: I did not continue because it was not my career. I made different plans, but by chance I was offered a director position at a welfare center. I found it very interesting and this opened the medico-social avenue. After that I was involved in a service for home hospitalization.

Q: so you spent your entire professional life in the medico-social areas?

A: Yes, although I did not start with this

Q: Here you have a document written by you. Is it a war diary?

A: Yes.

Q: When did you write it?

A: I remember well. I started when I was offered a package of pictures when we returned from Normandy.

5:16 Ambulance workers had taken the pictures others taken by professional photographers. I myself am a photographer and had the habit of classifying materials. Therefore, I realized that it was absolutely necessary to add comments to these pictures because without them their usefulness was lost. I put them in an album and made comments on all of them based on my memory. Those regarding Normandy are precise since I had kept a notebook for the team procedures. Therefore I knew all of the categories of injuries. The same thing happened after we returned from Austria- I was given a package of photos.

6:21 I added these photos and added captions since I knew I would forget. Then I put the album at the top of my bookcase and did not show it to anyone. I took it out in 1994 during the 50th anniversary of the landing in Normandy. I remembered the album and look over the material. I completed it with materials published in 1994 that helped explain what we saw.

Q: When you wrote all of this did you include a paragraph about the Velodrome? Something that you distinctly remembered?

7:07 A: Yes of course. Although I did not have pictures of it.. it was horrible

*Looks through the album, states that one of them shows the team. The group of nurses who participated in the emergencies in 1942. Says "Here we are in Normandy and then we went with the First Army, we were always together

Q: Next one?

A: this is the operating room and you can see me here and there

8:46 *Showing pictures in the album and next to each one there is a written comment.

*She continues to talk: "We lost 7 Physicians, 3-4 nurses. This is in Normandy 1944. We slept on Hay, we came with beds but very soon we had so many wounded that we gave them our beds

There are no pictures of everything. There are moments when you cannot take pictures. When you are very busy working you do not think about that. The ambulance drivers and reporters were those taking pictures. In Normandy, we were filmed for "actualites" news. It was around that time that I had to transfer seriously injured patients and I accompanied them to Paris. While I was there, I went to the Red Cross and they told me that at a movie theater on the Champs Elyses they were showing the news and that there was a long passage of us working. A friend and I went to see it. While I can laugh silently, others cannot.

11:40 We were in the operating room, and it was when we had not lied down for about 7 days. So to rest a little bit we went for, maybe, a half hour to rest where the linens in the operating room were kept. It was not a very clean place, it smelled horrible. A reporter had photographs a sleeping nurse there. My friend exploded in loud laughter and somebody sitting behind us made a rude comment about the nurse.

13:10 Q: *Asks Ms. Duval to read something from her album, about the Velodrome. She mentions some things already mentioned in part 2 that the numbers were more than 1100 men, 2916 women, and 4115 children. That as mentioned before there were suicides, women who aborted the problem with food, etc.

When the people were round up they were told not to worry that it is only a matter of verifying identity and in 48 hours you will be free. So people left without blankets or food. but some people had the premonition of what was going to happen and they had their suitcases ready for a few weeks.

15:17 The people crowded in the Velodrome. The first morning around 9,000 to 10,000 people arrived. All of the exits were guarded and any communication with the outside was forbidden. Entering was strict; identity had to be verified 3 days before departing for the camps. When I wrote this in September these events were recent.

