Memories

of

A World War II Army Nurse

On Saipan

Lucy Slade Libby

March, 2005

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By Lucy Slade Libby

December, 2004

As told to Christine Ann West Cataldo

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Dedication

This Veterans' History Project manuscript is dedicated to my parents, Harry and Fanny Slade, who made great sacrifices in support of my education and my career. They were always supportive of my choices, and they never complained.

Lucy Slade Libby
March, 2005

On December 7, 1941, while I was in my last year of nursing school at Duke University, I was riding in the car with my boyfriend John Carter on the way back to campus after dinner in Durham, when an announcement came on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese. Where is Pearl Harbor, we wondered? Neither one of us had ever heard of it before. Little did I know that this event half-way around the world, would change the course of my life forever.

Age 21, nearing graduation. Duke University, 1942.

I was born in 1921 in Danville, Virginia, and grew up on the family tobacco farm in Blanch, North Carolina. We were way out in the country, and Blanch was not much more than a post office, a gas station and a freight train station. Danville, Virginia was the closest big city, about 12 miles away. The main industry in Danville was warehousing tobacco from farmers to tobacco companies, i.e. Liggett Meyers, a big cigarette company.

I had three brothers and two sisters; I was number two. Ultimately, my three brothers and I were all in the service out of the country at the same time. During that time, probably a three year period, Mother wrote to each of us every day except Sunday. All four of us returned home, two of my brothers with purple hearts. My brothers served in the Army Air Force, the Army Infantry and the Marines.

Both my mother's and father's families had been in North Carolina for generations. My father's grandfather, John Wesley Slade, was a school master and had his own boarding school in the neighborhood of Blanch. My mother's father was a surgeon in the War Between the States, probably with no formal medical education. My mother can remember the dining room table being set up as an operating table and her father performing surgery on soldiers. How ironic that this man's granddaughter (me) married a Yankee from New Hampshire. My mother never expressed a problem with this, but her sister had quite a few strong words to say about it.

All my life I had wanted to be a nurse or a missionary, and my father told me with no hesitation that he would not allow me to be a missionary because he did not want me to leave the country. So, my path seemed clear. After high school, I entered Appalachian State Teachers' College in Boone, NC, and stayed for two years taking a curriculum of science courses that were required by Duke for a bachelor's degree in nursing.

I did not know what kind of nurse I wanted to be, but I wanted so much to go to Duke School of Nursing where my cousin Mary Carter Gay had gone, that I did not apply anywhere

else. As I was finishing my second year there, I received my acceptance at Duke, and entered Duke in the fall of 1939. After I got accepted, I learned that there were 100 applicants for the school, and only 60 were accepted. Of those, only 40 eventually graduated.

When I began at Duke, I had never yet been outside of North Carolina and Virginia. Tuition was $100 per year, which was a considerable sacrifice for my parents to make, since their tobacco farm raised very little money during the depression years of 1922-43. I was at Duke for eleven months per year; we had formal classes for nine months, and then worked in the hospital during the summer months for eight hours a day.

Enlisting and off to Camp Davis, North Carolina

I graduated from Duke University School of Nursing in the spring of 1942, but then I had to stay the summer to do my practical duty. I was 21 years old. In October, two weeks after finishing at Duke, my roommate Dot Sheldon and I went to downtown Durham to the Army recruiting office and joined the Army Nurse Corp. First, we had to pass our physicals, but I was so nervous I could not produce a urine sample. So, in the spirit of resourcefulness and efficiency, Dot gave me some of hers! It must have been OK because the next thing we knew, we were both second Lieutenants assigned to Camp Davis, near Wilmington, North Carolina. We were both assigned to the general hospital at Camp Davis, which was a typical hospital with medical, surgical, orthopedic and psychiatric wards.

My duty uniform consisted of a white dress and a cap of the officer's choice with a blue cape. I am wearing my cap and dress from Duke. At Camp Davis, NC, 1942.

It was not a hard decision to join the Army Nurse Corps; most of the graduating nurses at Duke were enlisting, except for those who were engaged to be married, usually to men on the campus. I did not discuss this decision with my parents first; and looking back, I'm ashamed that I did not. When I told them what I had done, Mother was supportive, but my Daddy was not happy at all. He thought that the service was too rough for women, and that there was too much "riffraff" in the military. Later that year, Mother and Daddy visited me at Camp Davis, 20 miles south of Wilmington. They were treated with a great deal of respect while staying on the post, and I think that changed Daddy's mind.

My roommate, Dot Sheldon, was from Fair Play, South Carolina. We were together throughout all of our years at Duke, as well as throughout the war, because we joined the same unit. We could have joined the unit of nurses from Duke, but we decided we had spent enough time with them and it was time to move on. There were about six of us who did not go with Duke University's hospital unit, which ultimately was sent to England.

Shown here in navy blue uniform which had been worn by Army nurses for many years. Camp Davis, NC, 1942.

Camp Forrest, Tennessee

After eighteen months in the Army Nurse Corps, Dot and I were ready for something more challenging, so we requested overseas duty. We were both transferred to Camp Forrest in Tennessee, near Nashville, where we spent four months doing general duty. During this time, Dot was promoted to First Lieutenant because she was smart enough to follow the rules. I was a bit less likely to follow orders. They did not like the way I wore my cap or my uniform. Dot always knew how to handle her superiors, and I was not so inclined to try.

An officer friend at Camp Forrest made a dagger in a sleeve and gave it to me before I left. I never carried it for protection, but I kept it throughout the war. It is one of my few possessions left from the war. Several years ago, I gave it to my grandson Sean.

Dot and I received our orders at the same time to join a station hospital in Florida that was being organized for overseas duty, and we received ten days of leave before reporting to Florida. I spent this time on the family farm in Blanch.

Florida and the Train to Seattle

We reported to the 176th Station Hospital in Blanding, Florida, and stayed about three weeks, spending time preparing for overseas duty by taking survival training, doing exercises, and receiving equipment and clothes. We were issued winter clothing, boots, gloves, scarves, and other cold-weather equipment, so it seemed evident to us that our unit was being sent to Europe. Wouldn't you think? However, after a few hundred miles on a troop train heading northwest, it became obvious that we were heading in the opposite direction of Europe. Surely, we thought, we must be going to Alaska! Only the Commanding Officer,

a male Colonel, knew exactly where we were heading. During the very cramped train trip, we would stop every two days, all get out of the train, and do exercises. Sometime we would stop for a few minutes and at other times for a few hours. After six days of travel we arrived in Seattle, Washington. There we received five days of intensive survival training. The Lieutenant tried to teach me to march, but to this day, I have to stop and think about which is my left side and which is my right side -- it just never came naturally to me. Once he yelled: "Keep your eyes off the ground!" I did exactly that, and fell flat on my face. He hadn't told us that we were about to cross a ditch!

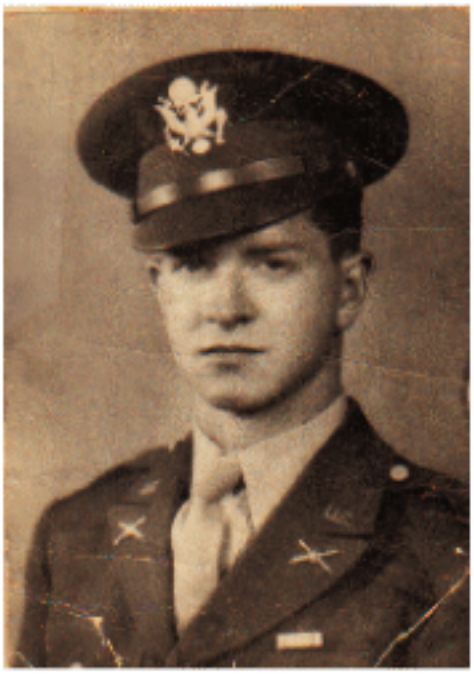
On to Hawaii

Late in evening of the fifth day in Seattle, we were told that we would be leaving early the next day by ship. It was a sobering thought to realize that I was about to leave my country! We sailed on a Merchant Marine vessel in open waters to Oahu, without any escort. There were submarines in the waters, but I was too naïve to be afraid of them. The ship was all men except for my group of 29 women. (There were 28 nurses, plus our chief nurse.) The woolen gloves and scarves we were issued in Florida? All that was to confuse the enemy should word leak out to them. At Hickman Field, in Oahu we learned that the hospital of our destination had not yet been built, but we were told that there was critical need for all hospital personnel. My chief nurse gave her twenty-eight nurses the option of staying in beautiful Hawaii or going with the unit to a station hospital in parts unknown. She told us that she didn't want anyone going who was afraid. I, and 17 other nurses chose to go; ten nurses chose to stay in Hawaii. After our station hospital was built on Saipan, those ten nurses joined up with us.

On Saturday nights at Camp Davis, the officers club held formal dances. Although the male officers were required to be in uniform at all times, the nurses (the only female officers on post) were allowed to dress as desired. I always wore a formal gown. Here I am ready for a good time!

In Hawaii we had physical training. We went through another survival course, and had to crawl on the ground to avoid overhead shooting. This training, and the few days of marching in Seattle, was all the survival and military training I received. The following year, in 1943, the Army required basic training for nurses, but that was after my time.

We did not do any nursing in Hawaii because we were only there for ten days, and we spent



Early in January 1943 I met Edwin Clark Libby, a 2nd Lt. from Walpole, NH. This picture of him was taken for me, and the picture of me was taken for him. We were together some part of every day until he was transferred to Camp Edwards, New Jersey, in March. His departure left a big void in my life, but although I was extremely happy with him, I was not ready for marriage. A long, hard war was yet to be fought.

our time getting ready to ship out. We visited Pearl Harbor, and did some fun things, including going to see a volcano, and going to a luau where a native woman tried to teach us to hula dance.

Mud, mud, everywhere mud! We arrived at the beginning of the monsoon season. This is the 369th Headquarters area in Saipan.

Destination Saipan

We boarded a very old ship with poor accommodations but Dot and I were fortunate to share a state room because we outranked most of the other nurses who were younger. The ship's officers were very much concerned about "their American women" going into such a dangerous situation and did everything they could to make the voyage more comfortable. The purser gave me fresh water privileges in his stateroom, which I shared with Dot; everyone else had to use saltwater to wash up. The voyage lasted three weeks and was a very hot trip. Each day we spent sitting on deck without chairs, playing cards and writing letters. Partway through the voyage we were informed that our destination was Saipan. Where is Saipan, I wondered? I certainly had no idea that it is one of the three major islands in the Mariana chain. The reason it had taken so long for us to arrive was because the fighting was so intense it was deemed unsafe to try to get into the harbor until that time. The Marianas were home base for the B29 planes, which were loaded with bombs, which would be dropped as war progressed toward Japan. Perhaps you remember that the Enola Gay, flown by Colonel Tibbets, flew from Tinian, an island nine miles from Saipan.

Here are my three tent mates. Dot is first from the right.

As the ship approached the harbor, we saw that not a tree was visible—they had all been blown away by the warfare. One of my strongest memories of the war is the overwhelming stench of dead bodies when we disembarked from our ship. This powerful stench was unmistakable. We arrived in September, the beginning of monsoon season. It would rain for days on end with mud, mud, mud, everywhere you went, and of course nothing had been paved. Because the fighting had been so intense there, there had been no time for the construction of a new hospital. So our unit was temporarily assigned to work in the one small station hospital already in operation on the island while our new station hospital was being built. We were billeted four nurses to a tent, with a wooden floor and mosquito netting. Because there were Japanese snipers all around the camp and throughout the island, at night we nurses were escorted to the latrine by a guard who stationed himself just

outside the door. At first I was embarrassed to have a guard outside the latrine door, but the first time I heard shots nearby, I was ready to invite him right into the latrine with me! We had rationed iodine-treated water stored in canvas barrels. We were given one cot and one blanket per nurse. We took our baths from our helmets, which were always at our sides, if not on our heads. Our patients were from Saipan as well as from the island of Tinian, which had a field hospital.

Here I am shampooing my hair outside my first "home" on Saipan.

Before the invasion on Saipan, the Japanese had sent all the island's Japanese citizens back to Japan. They left behind their slave laborers, who had been taken from Korea to work in the sugar cane fields, and told then to commit suicide rather than be captured by the Americans. Many Koreans escaped into the caves in the mountains of Saipan. Periodically, the marines would go into the caves to search for Japanese snipers and to rescue what local (Korean) people they could find. The Americans confined these poor people -- all women and children -- to a fenced area in tents right on the ground, which of course was muddy, unsanitary and wretched. My unit was assigned to care for them until the next big offensive, when we would be needed to care for the Americans. We reported for duty in the early morning because it was too dangerous for us to be there overnight; the medics would stay there overnight. The Koreans were all women and children, identified with numbers. Each morning when we came on duty, the medics would report the numbers of those who had died during the night. They all died from malnutrition-related diseases; there just was no food in the caves, and most of them were too far gone by the time the Americans treated them. Being so helpless while these women and children died made a big impact on me; I am so grateful for the health and nutrition of my own family, and since then I have never been able to tolerate the waste of food.

Here I am with some of our Korean slave patients.

We were given very little information about what was going on in the world outside. Sometimes I would experience three weeks without mail and then receive a large delivery of mail all at once. Most of the letters from home only talked about the family and the neighborhood, not the war effort.

My Typical Day in Our Saipan Station Hospital

During the War, a friend's mother asked me to write and tell her about my typical day.

Below are the words I wrote, which she had published in a newspaper on December 29, 1944. This describes my typical day while we were still caring for the Korean slaves. Unfortunately, I do not know in which newspaper it was published, but I believe that my friend's mother lived in Illinois, near Chicago.

NURSE DESCRIBES DUTIES IN MARIANAS
December 29, 1944

The following letter, which Mrs. W.C. Drury wishes to share, will interest many. The writer is Lt. Lucy Slade, a registered nurse whose home is Branch (sic), N.C., is now serving in the Marianas and she tells of her experiences:

November 17, 1944

Dearest Mrs. Drury:
I was very glad to have your letters of October 23 and October 31, which were delivered today. Along with that was a Christmas card from Bill, and he didn't mention his health. It was dated October 11 with his return address to the hospital, so I know he was there at that time. Will be looking forward to receiving your letter from him.

I shall try to give you a description of a typical day for me. This A.M. I was awakened at 4:00 by rain blowing in my face (the rest of my body was covered by a blanket; the nights get cold up here on the mountain). Managed to get down a little lower under the blanket and slept until the alarm went off at 5:00.

With a toothbrush in one hand and a helmet in the other, I rush out about half a block to the water barrel to get cleaned up. Incidentally, I am already dressed, 'cause our area is right in the open and we have practically no privacy from the men who surround our tents on all sides. My dress includes high-top shoes – too much mud for oxfords – woolen socks, seersucker slacks and shirt, with a matching seersucker cap. You can imagine this uniform isn't very becoming for ladies, but we do manage to dab on a little lipstick.

At 5:30 I meet a truck just by our tents, which carries us a mile up the road to our hospital area for breakfast and to work. The truck is a big vehicle high off the ground. We have to climb into and jump off about five feet.

Our hospital is made up of new buildings, which the men in our outfit helped build. They are made of material about like plywood with big leaks all over. When I got on duty the patients had been moved into the aisle and the floors were soaking wet.

I'm in charge of an orthopedic ward with battle casualties back from one of our forward areas. I've twenty-two bed patients who can do nothing for themselves, and have one other nurse and two corps men besides myself to care for them. Needless to say, we are rushed to death.

Worked until 9:30, then walked a mile home to catch a little "bunk fatigue" (G.I expression for rest) until 11:30, when I went back to lunch and work.

Lunch, by the way, consisted of spam, canned spinach, dehydrated potatoes, bread and canned peaches, with coffee. This is a typical meal. Twice since we've been on the island we've had fresh meat and butter.

Worked until 6:00 with fifteen minutes out for supper. Our mess hall is a tent with the ground for the floor, but it is at least clean, and after seeing the natives' living conditions, I realize I'm fortunate to be an American, even in foreign service.

At 6:00 I climb on the truck again and ride home. By 6:00 it is pitch dark, and it is considered unsafe for us to walk home. There are quite a few Jap snipers on the island; hospital areas are their favorite hang-outs.

Since I wrote you last (about two weeks ago) I've moved again and am no longer on detached service or working with the natives. I am with my own outfit and we are working like mad trying to set up a hospital and take care of patients before we get enough supplies. We nurses take everything we can find of use in the wards up to the hospital – candy boxes, lotion bottles, tin cans. We use beer bottles to get medications in from the pharmacy, cream jars for ink wells, and candy boxes (tin) for ointments! I've certainly gained a lot from the experience of setting up with limited supplies.

The day my ward was opened I was called from another ward which had had patients for a week and told that I would receive casualties within the hour. I found in the ward nothing but beds, with linen for same. My corps men make all the furniture I have – desks, linen shelves, two work tables, and a medicine cabinet. Later I was issued a chair. By the time I had gotten twenty beds made, they came with patients. That day I admitted fifteen bed patients – several with shoulder spica, others with legs and arms in fresh casts. So you see I don't do too much loafing on duty! This week I've been bringing work home so I can catch up with my records in the evenings. Even in foreign service the Army requires as much paper work for each patient as it does actual nursing care.

Oh yes – my room is a tent, which I share with three other girls. Each of us have our corner with an army cot: I happened to get a pillow from a friend so I sleep more comfortably than the other three. However, we are expecting to be issued a mattress soon. The tent is

about as high as an ordinary room and is boarded up about half way up: the rest is screened. That leaves little privacy, so we girls have covered the most exposed corners with burlap, which the chaplain gave us. He offered to put it up, but we have all become quite efficient with a hammer and nail, and did it ourselves.

My dresser consists of one large box setting on two smaller boxes, which make it the right height for the stool I'm using, which is an old bomb rack I picked up near here. It is really a crude life, but I don't mind one bit; we have so much more than the men up near the front lines. They tell some weird tales.

Recently we have had several air raids with little damage. Surely is disgusting to have to get up once or twice after mid-night for an air raid. However, we lose no time getting out of the tent when we hear the siren go off.

I've received Harriet's package and it is apparently in good shape. I haven't opened it yet 'cause I do want Christmas morning to seem a little like last year. Her gift will help to make it so.

Thanks again for your letter.

My love,

Lucy

Our Saipan Station Hospital

At last, after six weeks of this duty, my unit's hospital was finally completed, and our unit came together from various parts of the island. We were all rejoicing to have a home of our own. The buildings were all Quonset huts built off the ground with screened window areas. And we were to have our first showers in over two months! The water was in an open barrel which caught the rain. There was no roof on the shower building because the sun

was needed to heat the water. The barrel has a pull chain. Oh, what luxury! We moved to this location in open trucks, and as I got off my truck in front of our new buildings, I noticed three enlisted men who were looking toward my truck and laughing—at me. Finally one broke away and walked directly to me, grabbed me and gave me a big hug and a kiss! I was flabbergasted because enlisted men simply did not approach officers, much less with such boldness as to grab and kiss! I was delighted to realize that those three men were friends from my high school!! Wonderful! They were serving in the Quarter Master Corp, and told me that they had known I was on the island but they could not locate my unit until our hospital was finished and we moved in. Over the next few months they made me the most beautiful furniture of plywood for my room - a dressing table, a stool, and a hanging wardrobe. I shared these with another nurse, and we truly had the best furniture of anyone on the island! This was high living!

Here is my new bedroom which I shared with one nurse. Three men from my hometown who were stationed on Saipan made me the wardrobe and dresser. The mirror is from the purser on the ship to Saipan. Only the cot was issued. The stool is a bomb crate. *(above and opposite)*

During this time I was promoted to First Lieutenant. My job as nursing supervisor was to supervise the Head Nurses of each of the (six or eight) wards. Of course, these nurses needed little supervision, because they were the most dedicated and hardest working people I had ever met! My work involved determining what each ward needed, trying to procure supplies for them, resolving problems and making rounds of the wards to ensure that our patients received the best possible care. I don't think I ever heard a complaint from a nurse about the lack of creature comforts; we were there by choice to work and work we did.

Here is the exterior of our "Lazy Lodge." Note the clothesline with the laundry between the two huts, the flowers in front, and the camouflage fence between the hospital and our hut.

To service this 500-bed hospital, our 176th unit was made up of the chief nurse, the assistant chief nurse, hospital supervisor (me), 28 nurses who were assigned to wards and the operating room, and at least 50 very excellent corps men.

Here I am with my Chief nurse, and Assistant Chief nurse, wearing our seersucker uniforms. We are in the Administration building.

In February the big offensive began on Iwo Jima, an island near Saipan. As the nursing supervisor, I received a call from Saipan Harbor Headquarters saying they were sending 1,000 patients within the hour. My hospital only had 500 beds! Within minutes of the phone call, convoys arrived with several large tents and five hundred cots. Everyone in the unit worked to set up the tents next to the hospital. Our two chaplains were pitching tents with the enlisted men, the two Red Cross ladies were making beds, the few ambulatory patients were doing their share however they could. When the patients arrived we were ready, and we worked around the clock for 36 hours. The wounds were just horrible. As soon as the patients were in condition to fly, most of them within a week to ten days, they were sent back to Honolulu for extended care. Most of these patients were amputees. One of our patients had been blown almost to bits—no buttocks, much of the abdomen gone, chest wounds, and other wounds. This seventeen-year-old father stayed with us for six weeks with continuous nursing care. We never left him alone and I think that almost every person in our hospital had something to do with that man. After six weeks he was able to be shipped back to Honolulu. I don't know what ever happened to him after he left us, or how long he lived, but our unit was able to boast that we never lost a patient!

Here I am with another nurse the water supply tank.

Penicillin had been developed by then; it was a thick paste, which was injected from a very big needle. Giving these shots required a lot of strength on the nurse's part, and it was very painful to be on the receiving end!

The next offensive was the Okinawa invasion on March 31, 1944. The U.S. was getting nearer to Japan. This was another bloody and horrible offensive, but not as long as the Iwo Jima campaign. My hospital once again repeated the experiences of the prior offensive.

176th Station Hospital, in a Quonset hut.

We had dances at least once a week at an officers' club. My unit never had a dance, but the male officers' units hosted them almost every weekend. I asked my mother to send me ribbons to make corsages. Wild flowers grew in the fields, and I would make corsages for our uniforms to wear to the dances. The day of Dot Sheldon's wedding was the only day before war ended that I wore civilian clothes on Saipan.

We usually had a 7:00 p.m. curfew, but towards the end of the war when our hospital was less active, our curfew was delayed until 9:00 p.m. Sometimes during an inactive period, Dot and her fiancé, and a Texan I dated and I would go down to the beach in the evening for a picnic of tuna and crackers from the mess hall. One beautiful, warm, clear evening, we were marveling at the beauty of the moon and the sky, when suddenly out of the shadows we saw the figure of a man creeping towards us. The men jumped up and prepared to shoot, as the Japanese man ran away, back towards the caves near the beach. We raced to our Jeep, flew back to camp, and never went back. This was the most frightened I've ever been for myself. There were many Japanese who had not been captured and were hiding all around, especially in the caves in Saipan. Back on base, we were not guarded during the day because the snipers would not come forth, but at night we were protected by the Marines outside our Quonset huts.

A few weeks later, there was a dance on Saipan, and one of our nurses and her officer escort left the dance early. They never returned. When it was evident that they were

Here I am with a corps man holding a Japanese flag of surrender. From time to time a Japanese soldier would walk into our camp to surrender, from the nearby mountains where he had been hiding. My office was near the entrance and once I was the first to see one outside my window. I screamed for the guards, who came running. I was very frightened by this.

missing, there was a massive search for them; they were found in a shallow grave on the beach where we had earlier had our picnic. The man had been shot, and the nurse had been raped, and then shot. Later some American Seabees were arrested for their murders. We learned that the Army told the nurse's family that she was killed in action when the operating room where she was working was bombed.

Front row, from left: Red Cross Director, Chief of Physiotherapy, Chief Nurse, Physiotherapist. Back row: Assistant Chief Nurse, Supervisor (me).

The War's End!

On August 6, 1945 Colonel Paul Tibbets dropped the first atom bomb from the Enola Gay on Hiroshima and we knew the war would soon be over. Two weeks later about mid-afternoon we heard church bells, horns, sirens, and whistles from all over the island. This was the sound we had all been waiting for -- and working for-- the war was over!! Almost immediately plans were being made to get most military personnel off the island and back to the States.

And almost immediately, Dot made plans to marry an officer she had met on Saipan. She had arrived in Saipan engaged to someone else, but had met someone new in Saipan who lured her away. They decided to get married before returning to the states, so Dot had the Air Force nurses bring her a wedding gown from Hawaii, along with a gown for me to serve as her maid of honor. Our nurses picked wildflowers for bouquets and corsages. It was quite an event on the island, and everyone welcomed such a happy occasion. As far as I know, it was the only wedding on Saipan during or right after the war. They honeymooned for the weekend in a Japanese cement bunker, which had four-foot thick walls with holes to accommodate the guns. Then Dot came back and lived in her quarters, and he returned to his quarters. This was September 15, after the war ended; on August 14 the Japanese surrendered and the official surrender document was signed on September 2.

176th Station Hospital Chapel, Saipan

In August 1945 the Japanese surrendered to the U.S. after the second atom bomb was dropped. Dot and Walter Scheuplein were married on Saipan shortly thereafter. I was her maid of honor.

As soon as the surrender was signed, everyone scattered fast except for the regular Army nurses. Dot and her husband flew home but not together; both arrived in Los Angeles but could not find each other. After frantically looking for each other, they were finally able to each contact his family, who advised them where the other one was located.

Nurses Quarters, 204th General Hospital, Guam
(above and below)

Leaving Saipan, and Off to Guam

Since my chief nurse had earlier been transferred to the 2,000 bed general hospital on Guam, it was my duty to get orders written and transportation arranged for all of our nurses to leave Saipan. Then, by choice, I went to Guam to become the assistant chief nurse of the 2,000 bed general hospital. My chief nurse wanted to go to Japan; and I was training to relieve her, which would have been a giant step in my career, as the Table of Organization identified the position as a full colonel. However, after I was in Guam for four months, Admiral Nimitz, the Chief of Pacific Operations, decreed that all nurses who had been out of the country for a year or more, except for regular Army nurses, were to return to the States. I was very disappointed to receive orders to return to the United States. I was having a great time on Guam, and looking forward to my new duties and promotion. The war was over, things were more relaxed, there were a lot of evening parties, and we worked hard but had fun.

Within two days of Admiral Nimitz's announcement, I got orders to return to the U.S. I had a choice between going by ship or by plane. I had seen so may B29s go down that I did not want to take a plane. So, after four months in Guam, I returned to the U.S. via ship with five women from my unit and some

Air Force personnel comprising the entire passenger list. This was a flagship; however the Admiral was not aboard and a Navy Captain was in command. Being the highest ranking female officer on the ship, I was assigned to the Admiral's quarters. What luxury – for five wonderful days I had a soft, clean double bed with sheets, every luxury that a ship could offer, and three wonderful meals a day with the Captain!

Coming Home!

Our ship reached California in late February, 1945. When I laid eyes on United States soil, my joy was indescribable. The screaming and cheering from the ship was matched only by the screaming and cheering from the shore! The overwhelming emotion of coming ashore in America was tempered by the fact that in this throng of millions of screaming, ecstatic people, there was nobody there waiting for me. Oh how I longed for a familiar face to meet my ship and share this special moment!

I was in Los Angeles three days before starting the long train trip back to North Carolina. Because my family did not have a telephone, I wrote them a letter and told them that I made it back to the U.S.

All three of my brothers arrived home before me. I surely had happy and relieved parents!

U.S.S. Sitka – my transport back to the U.S.A.

My Army Nurse Corps Experience after the War

After a month's leave with my parents in North Carolina, I received orders to report to Walter Reed General Hospital in Washington, DC. At Walter Reed, I was assigned to an orthopedic ward where I had an amputee patient who had been a patient in my hospital on Guam. Although I had only met him through my rounds, and not through direct patient care, we recognized each other immediately. After five months of active duty at Walter Reed, I requested my Army discharge.

My Husband

I met the man I would later marry, Edwin Clarke Libby, at Camp Davis. From the day we met, I saw him every day for three months, until he shipped off to New Jersey. A few days

before his unit was to leave for parts unknown, he was removed from his unit and shipped instead to Dover, England to serve as a radar operator. When I arrived at Saipan, imagine my surprise at finding that his first unit was also stationed in Saipan, and they remained there throughout the war!

Before he left Camp Davis, he asked me to marry him. I gently turned him down and told him that our lives were about to change too much to make that kind of commitment. We wrote periodically throughout the war, but we dated others as well. After some time in Dover, he was assigned to the second wave of the Europe invasion. His unit was the first unit into France after their liberation, and he often spoke of the wild and joyous reception that the French gave the Americans. When I arrived home after the war, there was a telegram from him waiting at my parents' home, asking me to call him in Ohio. He had returned home and was attending Ohio University on the G.I. Bill. After two years, we married and he transferred to George Washington University to finish his degree. My mother came to visit me in Arlington where I was living with my sister Betsy, and met him when he came to visit, but my father did not meet him until they came to Arlington for our wedding.

We often spoke of what would have happened if he had stayed in his first unit and had come to Saipan. Once when I asked him what he thought would have happened, he responded, "Well, I guess Ronnie would have been a lot older!"

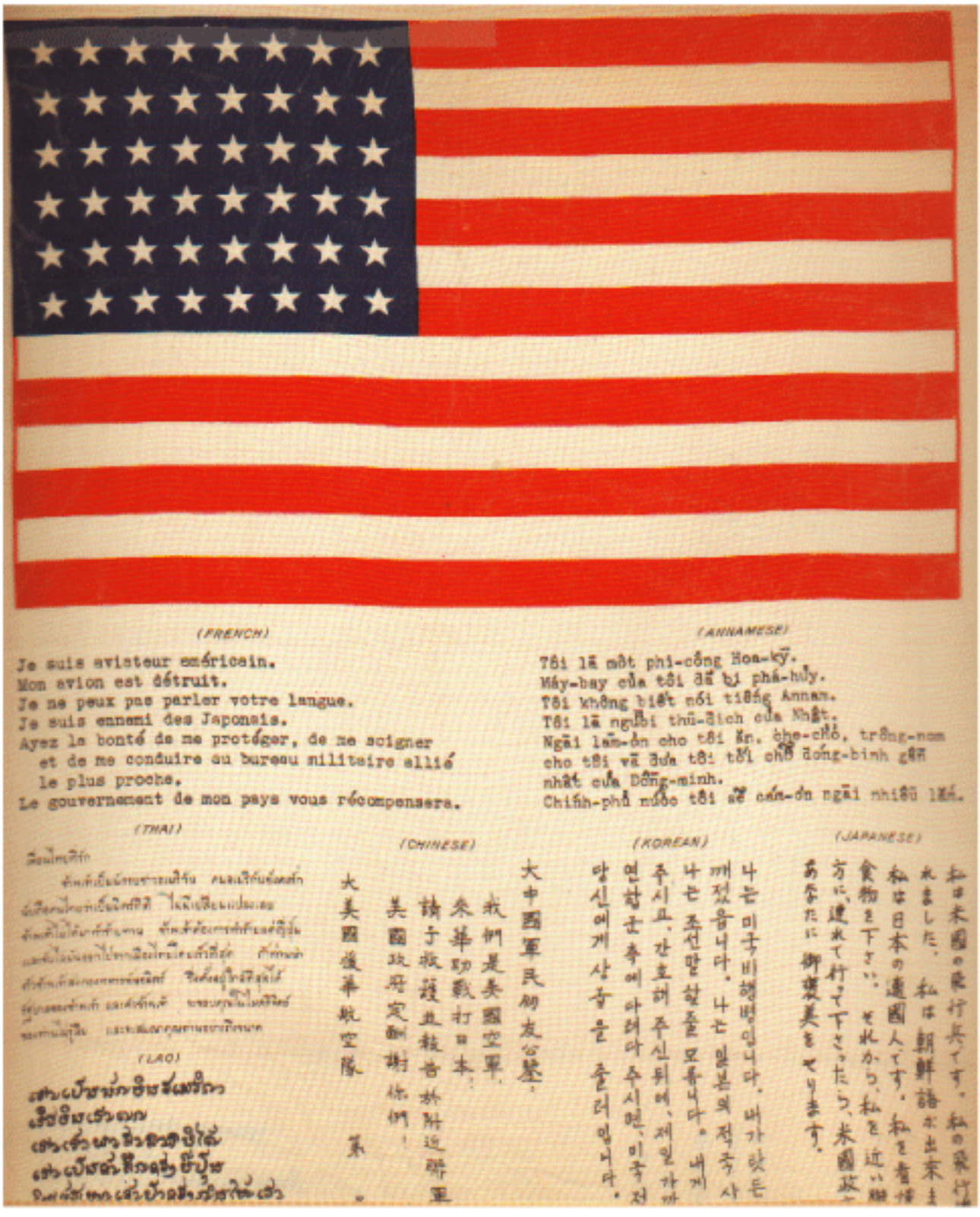
My Medals and Ribbons

I received the following medals and ribbons:

- American Campaign
- Asiatic-Pacific Campaign with one Battle Star
- Army of Occupation- Japan
- Victory WWII
- Army Good Conduct

My daughter Gayle has my ribbons and my husband Libby's medals. My daughter Jan has my medals and Libby's ribbons. My granddaughter Katelin has my "Table of Organization One" file. My grandson Sean has the knife that someone made for me, which I carried throughout the war.

June 14, 1947



Flag carried by U.S. soldiers. It says "I am an American. If you care for me and protect me my government will reimburse you."

Additional Tidbits

• The Navy was much better to their personnel than the Army. I was invited to dinner several times on board the Navy ships and they had wonderful food, like steaks and ice cream. Almost everything we had – including eggs – came from cans. In the Army, our typical breakfast was canned eggs, applesauce, and fruit juice, and our typical dinner and lunch was something else from cans, plus fruit cocktail every day. To this day I cannot stand fruit cocktail, and I have never had it since the war.

• We had 2 young Korean girls (about 12 years old) assigned to each Quonset hut to help keep it clean. Our girls were so cute, and tried hard to speak English. I recall that they always had comments about our dates and we were always giggling about something.

• In the psychiatric ward, there was a young 17-year-old soldier who was having a very rough time. For some reason, he responded well to me and would calm down considerably. Sometimes the nurses would call me to come visit with him to calm him down. I never really understood why he took to me; maybe he liked my southern accent.

• My cousin Pemberton Slade was stationed in Guam, and we would exchange letters. He was an enlisted man, and he told me not to come to visit him because there was no place for me to stay, but once he and a buddy came to visit me in Saipan. Oh, it was wonderful to see him! And the high school friend who kissed me when we were moving into the hospital - his brother later married a cousin of mine.

• My mother saved all my letters home, and when she showed them to me later, they were full of holes where they had been censured to ensure that information was not given away that would help the enemy.

• For a while I dated a young man from Lexington, KY, and I would occasionally write to his mother. She asked me to write about my typical day, which I did, and she had it published in the local newspaper. After this woman died, her son was settling her estate, and he found my letters as well as the article that was published in the paper. In 1983, he sent them to "Lucy Tabor Slade" in Branch, NC with a note for the postmaster to please locate me as this envelope contained unfinished WWII business. The post office forwarded this envelope to Blanch, NC. The postmaster there knew my sister Betsy, tracked her down in Arlington, VA, and mailed the package to her in Arlington. Betsy of course sent it on to me. What a surprise and a delight to receive that package after all these years!

• Before I resigned my commission, my promotion to captain was granted. My chief nurse on Saipan had recommended this in June 1945. Because I had accumulated 3e months leave, I did get to enjoy the increase in salary and other perks that were granted to the military, such as reduced train fares for in those traveling in uniform. For that reason I always wore my uniform when going back and forth to Ohio to visit my future husband.

World War Timeline

1931		Japan invades Manchuria in China
1936		Japan allies itself with Nazi Germany and Italy
1939	September 1	Germans invade Poland; World War II begins
1940	June	France falls
	September	Germans bomb London; "The Blitz" begins
1941	December 7	Japanese attack Pearl Harbor & other areas in the Pacific
	December 8	USA enters war
	December 22	Japan invades the Philippines
1942	April 9	Fall of Baatan, Philippines
	May 6	Fall of Corregiodor, Philippines; 66 Army nurses taken prisoner
	June 4-6	Battle of Midway
1943	July 9-19	Allies invade Sicily
	September 3	Italy surrenders
	September 9	Allies invade Italy ar Salerno
	September 13	*USS Newfoundland* bombed off Salerno with nurses aboard
1944	January 22	Allies land in Anzio, Italy
	February 7	Evac hospital at Anzio bombed
	June 4	Allies march into Rome
	June 6	D Day: Allies invade Normandy, France
	August 15	Allies invade southern France
	October 20	Americans invade Philippines
	October 23-26	Battle for Leyte Gulf
	November 1	Nurses arrive on Philippines
	December 16	Battle of the Bulge begins
1945	February	POW nurses liberated in the Philippines
	February 14	American fleet sails from Saipan to Iwo Jima
	Feb 19-Mr 16	Battle for Iwo Jima
	March 7	Allied troops cross Germany s Rhine River
	April 12	FDR dies; Truman becomes President
	April 28	*USS Comfort* hospital ship bombed
	April 30	Hitler commits suicide
	May 7	Germany surrenders
	August 6	Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima
	August 9	Atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki
	August 14	Japan surrenders
	September 2	Japan signs surrender; World War II is over

My Memories of World War II

Submitted to the Washington Post for Commemoration of the new World War II Memorial
May, 2004

My lasting memory of World War 11 is the stench of death. As a member of the Army Nurse Corps, I disembarked on Saipan shortly after the island was considered taken from the Japanese; the burial detail had been unable to keep up with the bodies. The island was completely barren-all vegetation had been bombed to smithereens. The odor was unmistakable and unforgettable.

Saipan had a large population of Korean slaves who had been transported there by the Japanese government to work in the sugar cane fields and mills. Those who were not killed escaped to the many caves in the mountains with their children. Periodically, Marines stationed on Saipan would go into the caves and bring down escaped Japanese soldiers. They were able to rescue many of the Koreans who were near death from malnutrition. These people, mostly women and children but a few men, were hospitalized in tents placed on bare ground. In spite of blood transfusions, intravenous fluids, and good nursing care, few survived. My experience in caring for them has made me thankful for my daily food; I have very little patience with finicky eaters. Nor can I tolerate the waste of food.

Saipan was a big base for the B29 planes which dropped bombs on islands as the army advanced toward Japan. Many times I would watch the planes take off on a mission heavily loaded. They would fly very low over the water to cool the engines and sometimes could not get up; once I saw a bomber was lost in the ocean because it could not get up. Observing this, sometimes knowing members of the crew, made me fearful of flying. In fact, given a choice of flying back to the West Coast or returning by ship, I choose the longer route of sailing. It was many years before I'd fly.

After each invasion of an island-Guam, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, etc. the causalities were sent back to my 176th Station Hospital. Many were cared for and sent back to duty but the amputees and more serious injuries were sent back to a general hospital in Hawaii. In spite of receiving ones who were near death, my hospital never lost a patient. For this I am proud.

Following two years of service on Saipan and Guam, I returned to the states very proud to be an American and remain a patriotic, flag-flying citizen.

Lucy Slade Libby

The Army Nurse Corps

Summarized from "The Army Nurse Corps;
A Commemoration of World War II Service"

When World War II began, fewer than 1,000 nurses were serving in the Army Nurse Corps. Within six months, the Army Nurse Corps had grown to 12,000 nurses. Not until July 1943 did the Army begin a formal four-week training program for all newly commissioned Army nurses. By the time WWII ended 6 years later, more than 59,000 American nurses had served in the Army Nurse Corps.

In the European and Mediterranean theaters, Army nurses worked near the front lines. In the Pacific theatre, Army nurses were stationed in rear areas where they cared for soldiers who had been evacuated from the front lines. The Pacific campaign was characterized by a lot of island-hopping, where a battle would take place, and then the hospitals would arrive after the fighting ceased and the Allies had gained control of the island. In the Pacific islands, including Saipan, the Army nurses quarters were fenced in and guarded by armed guards at all times.

Nurses arrived in Saipan a month after the Americans invaded and took over the island, in July of 1944. The first nurses on Saipan were attached to the 369th Station Hospital, and the following month, the 148th General Hospital and the 176th Station Hospital arrived in Saipan. Throughout 1944, the Saipan hospitals treated significantly more patients with diseases than with battle wounds – in a ratio of about five diseased patients to every one wounded patient. In late summer of 1944, Saipan was hit with an epidemic of dengue fever, which affected about half of the Army nurses. In September, the Army sprayed DDT over the whole island.

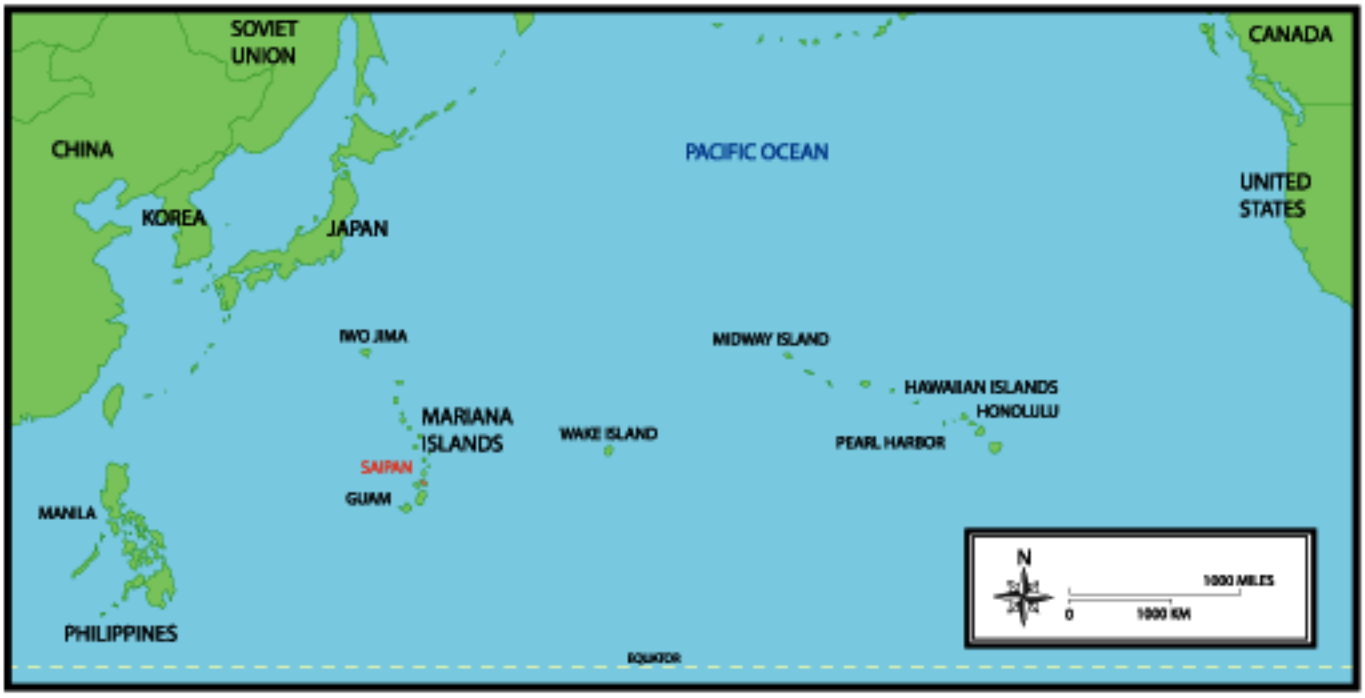
Army Hospitals in the Pacific

There were three types of overseas hospitals in the Pacific:

(1.) **Field hospitals** were situated near the battleground and staffed by a doctor and members of the Medical Corps. The Medical corps men were very well trained and excellent in their performance. Field Hospitals were responsible for treating emergencies at the site and getting the patients stable enough to travel to the Station Hospital. Field hospitals were in tents.

(2.) **Station hospitals** were not on the island where the fighting was taking place, but rather in safer places. Once an island was considered taken by the U.S., a station hospital would move forward onto that island. The station hospitals were in tents until they built Quonset huts.

(3.) **General hospitals** received patients from station hospitals who were not able to return to duty. These were often on an island, but most of my patients were sent to a general hospital in the territory of Hawaii.


SOVIET UNION
CHINA
KOREA
JAPAN
PACIFIC OCEAN
CANADA
UNITED STATES
IWO JIMA
MIDWAY ISLAND
HAWAIIAN ISLANDS
HONOLULU
MARIANA ISLANDS
WAKE ISLAND
PEARL HARBOR
SAIPAN
GUAM
MANILA
PHILIPPINES
N
1000 MILES
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1000 KM
EQUATOR

Suggested Readings

"The Army Nurse Corps; A Commemoration of World War II Service," CMH Pub 72-14, PIN: 070605-000. A 32 page brochure purchased from the Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery.

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Russell, Maxine K. Jungle Angel: Bataan Remembered. 1988

The Women's Memorial -- www.womensmemorial.org

Veterans History Project – www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/

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