

[Ora Pierce Hicks] We didn't have TVs then. We had radios, and on the radio they said that the soldiers were dying because didn't have enough nurses. So I volunteered to go into the Army, and they wrote back and said, You are 30 pounds overweight, but we'll take you. I said, Yeah, the Lord. The Lord told you to take me. So I entered the Army through Camp Livingston, Louisiana, all Negro's camp there.

And I spent about two years at Camp Livingston. I volunteered to go to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. And I was transferred there. And while I was at Fort Huachuca, that's when my mother took ill, and I nursed her. And then they sent her home because she was going to leave us. So, I took my first airplane trip and flew home and nursed my mother til we lost her.

And then when I went back to camp, I picked up my things at Fort Huachuca, and I was transferred to a German prisoner of war camp in Florence, Arizona, about 100 miles out in the desert. And so they had all white civilian nurses there, and they all left. I don't know whether they fired them or what happened, but they sent 35 Negro nurses up there, and I was one of the Negro nurses and I served as supervisor, the head nurse, dietitian. I established the physiotherapy department.

[Historian] Tell me a little bit more how everything is segregated.

[Ora Pierce Hicks] You said... When we went into the Army, it was segregated, all the Negro patients was in one in one side of the hospital, the white was on the other side. Negro nurses stayed in one building, white nurses stayed in another building. But you were so busy till it hardly crossed your mind because you had all these patients you were with, and when you went in, we had sometimes had critically ill patients.

They turn every 2 hours, and you work 12 hour shifts. So your mind was wondering when they could get some sleep when you got off of duty, you know. So we didn't worry too much about that because you get used to it in civilian life and it was a way of life then and we knew in time it would come to pass that they wouldn't have this.

But you just were what you had. That was a lot of sick patients.

[Historian] About how many Germans were there?

[Ora Pierce Hicks] At least 500, I believe 500 were there. See, there were thousands any time you have 4 or 5000 German anybody, you will have 400 sick. Don't know what's wrong with them, but you will have a number of them sick. So I'd say about 500, 400 to 500 in and out, you know.

[Historian] Okay. So is that to say a thousand Germans in the camp and then four or 500...

[Ora Pierce Hicks] In the hospital. See, it's a big camp out there. And another thing we had to do, we had to count them. We had to count the prisoners every evening. To see that nobody escaped. I don't know where they thought they were going. In Arizona, all you going to is another mountain, to another desert out there and burn to death in that heat.

But they maybe they thought they would reach some relative here. Cause see the physiotherapy department, those smart Germans know how to talk. They tell me, through those instruments in the physiotherapy department, some of them tried to get Germany. They tampered with the machines, you know. And so you had to watch them because they were trying to get Germany.

And in the every evening we had count them and turn the count in. It had to be correct. You couldn't have nobody missing. And they would stand at the foot of the bed and be counted and they all look alike because all of them had shaved clean. So after a while, they would give some identification no, but at first they all look like everybody clean headed.

And if somebody was in the toilet, they would say, [phrase in German] it was nurse. And you'd have to see them in the bathroom. They must come out. You must look them in the eye because you had to turn that report in with your name on it that they were all there. They were all there every single night you had to do it.

That was the job we didn't like, but we did it.