

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

Interview with

**Mary Priscilla Powell Burkett
N 767748
1st Lt.
USA**

Interviewed
April 16, 2005

Mary Priscilla Powell Burkett
N 767748
1st Lt.
USA

Medals earned:
Good Conduct
Ruptured Duck

Original Interview
by
John B. Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter

My name is John B. Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter and I are interviewing Mrs. Burkett on April 16, 2005.

Mr. Tombaugh

Would you please state your name and address?

Mrs. Burkett

Mary Priscilla Burkett, 10040 17th Rd, Argos, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

Where did you go to school?

Mrs. Burkett

I went to school at Macy Elementary and High School, Macy, Indiana and graduated in 1939.

Mr. Tombaugh

What were your parents names and where were they born?

Mrs. Burkett

Glen and Loda Dowds Powell. My father in Macy, Indiana and my mother in Knox county, Ohio.

Mr. Tombaugh

What year were you born?

Mrs. Burkett

On November 9, 1921 in Macy, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you remember the kids you went to school with and how many are still around?

Mrs. Burkett

There is only three of us left but there were only eight in my graduation class.

Mr. Tombaugh

What did you do after you graduated?

Mrs. Burkett

I had odd jobs until I entered nurses training at Indianapolis City Hospital (now Wishard) in February 1940.

Mr. Tombaugh

Did you go into the military with your classmates?

Mrs. Burkett

No. I volunteered for the Army in August 1943, and entered October 1943.

Mr. Tombaugh

What is your service number?

Mrs. Burkett
N 767748.

Mr. Tombaugh
Where did you take your training?

Mrs. Burkett
My basic training was at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indianapolis, Indiana and lasted three weeks.

Mr. Tombaugh
You finished your training and are now a 2nd Lt. Did you get a leave between the basic and training at all?

Mrs. Burkett
No.

Mr. Tombaugh
Then you went on to your next place?

Mrs. Burkett
I went to Ashford General Hospital at White Sulpher Springs, West Virginia. Before the war it was known as the Greenbrier Resort.

Mr. Tombaugh
How was the lodging?

Mrs. Burkett
It was very good. The nurses lived in cottages a short ways from the hospital on the hospital grounds. There were five-six nurses in each cottage.

Mr. Tombaugh
How was the food?

Mrs. Burkett
The food was very good. We had a little spam, but I never complained about the meals. My brother was in the Philippines and they had spam a lot.

Mr. Tombaugh
What were your jobs at the hospital?

Mrs. Burkett
My job was to care for the patients. I was assigned to five different wards during my time there.

Mr. Tombaugh
The POW's were there before they were shipped out.

The following taken from the files of John B. Tombaugh:

"1 Apr., 1942

America

The Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarians are relocated from the Greenbrier Hotel located in White Sulpher Springs, West Virginia via train to Grove Park Inn, Ashville, North Carolina."

Mrs. Burkett

I wish we would of known more of the Japanese being there. I can see why they kept it a secret. There was a bunker for the higher officials at that time at the Greenbriers. Of course, at that time we didn't know about it.

I worked from 7 am to 7 pm, and since I was trained in psychiatry, I was assigned to the neuro-psychiatric (Psycho) floor. The floor I had was the third floor. Now penicillin was just coming into the picture.

One boy from Florida. He had a orange on his nightstand and he said: "Miss Powell just stick it in that orange and I will eat the orange." We gave penicillin out every three hours, there was no such thing as a big dose. On farther down on the floor was the orthopedic ward, but most of them were ambulatory. I just wish I had made notes back then but we were short handed. There approximately six weeks I had the entire floor. We had ward boys to help. We also had what was called the locked ward on this floor. There were maybe 10 to 15 patients at one time. These were the severe psychiatric cases. Some of the patients received "Shock therapy."

Mr. Tombaugh

How many beds were on a floor?

Mrs. Burkett

It was a large facility, maybe 4,500 patients or more on all floors.

We were close to the train station. When we would receive a convoy of patients, if the injured could walk, they did - from the train station. The others would come by ambulance. It was about a half mile to the hospital.

I had a patient commit suicide. He was a captain, a dentist, of Italian descent. The cots had the foot and head rail. He took a sheet and tied it to one end of the bed and had it so that his body would hang above the window below. There was a road located in back of the hospital. A ward boy ran up from the second floor. I was doing the medicine for this particular ward and he told me there was a patient hanging out the window deader than a door nail. Captain Harris had interviewed him the day before for a discharge, but he wanted to go back. He had been in the African campaign. he

Another time at the hospital, I had a patient that was a 1st Sgt. You knew a lot of them had really been through it and they wouldn't talk about it. One day of the fellows that was in with him told me

that he had to check the dog tags casualties from his outfit. After you heard what they had gone through then you could start to understand their actions. One night he came in after a weekend pass, he was on crutches and a patient in the orthopedic section. He came in about 2 o'clock one morning and those old crutches never hit the floor as he was drunk. He had money coming out of both sides of his pants pockets and I couldn't help but laugh at him. I often wonder what has happened to many of my patients.

It was almost Christmas when we were receiving a convoy of 1500 patients. I went down to the lobby which had crystal chandeliers and carpeting. This one young man came in the front door and looked up and said: "Have I died and gone to heaven?" He was totally in awe of the beauty of the place.

It's funny how some things just stick with you. So many of my friends were going overseas and it seemed like I was stuck in the psycho ward. One night I came on duty and was told to report to Major Wildgoner's office, chief nurse. I went down to the office and I hadn't been in service very long when this happened. She read the riot to me first and then told me I was going to the officers' ward. She said: "They are coming in at all hours and the nurse has not reported anything." She also told me that if I didn't follow instructions I could be court martialed. It scared me too death.

I went down there and the nurse that was on duty was a 1st Lt. She told me some things that didn't put my mind at ease. I reported a 1st Lt. for trying to come in through the window. We had a back door to the rec room where they played cards and I was putting the window down when he wanted to come through the window. I closed the window and reported him.

Another time a Brigadier General came in late and his name went on that list to be turned in. He had gone to meet his wife at the train station and the train was late.

The fellows would hear me coming while they were playing cards when it was about time to break it up. They would say here comes the "Gestapo". One was from Cleveland, Ohio and if I would say something to him he would say: "Now Lt. I'll blow my titanium plate if you keep that up." They had to be in there room by 10 p.m. and lights out by 10:30 p.m.

After being there for one and half years, I asked Captain Wildonger for overseas duty. It wasn't to long before I was sent for more training at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, went on bivouac and dug trenches. I wrote home I never wanted to go camping and I never changed my mind. We had quonset huts overseas.

Mr. Tombaugh

At Fort Knox's you had the old wood barracks with the sgt's room at the end?

Mrs. Burkett

Ours was the one-story and yes, wood barracks.

The advance party for ETO had gone to New Jersey. We had been issued winter clothing for the ETO and the advance party never came back. Our orders were canceled and we were sent instead to the

South Pacific.

Mr. Tombaugh

You turned all the winter clothing back in?

Mrs. Burkett

Yes, for summer clothing. We were sent there for the invasion of Japan. I give President Truman credit for dropping those two bombs because it saved thousands and thousands of American lives.

At Fort Knox we worked on the wards there. I did get to come home; it was a short furlough. Upon returning I had a notice that I was promoted to 1st Lt. I was surprised.

At Fort Knox we had German prisoners; they were just kids and one of them was so nice and the next one was just like Hitler.

We went to Fort Lewis, Washington via train. I remember we had to go over the side of a ship with one of those disembarkation nets and it wasn't the greatest.

I gained 15 pounds out there because I thought I would never see ice cream or soda's again and boy, I had my supply of them.

The band played "It Had To Be You," when we boarded the ship.

I went overseas on the USS Matsonia and there were 500 hundred women with 5,000 troops on board and that didn't count the crew. Most of the women had to have their shots the second day out and the sea was rough.

When we went in to have our meal we would go in and there would be a table cloth, etc., for us. The GI's would be waiting in line when we were at sea. They would start singing and we would join in and two days, later they put a halt to that. I'm surprised we got to do it that long. There was no fraternizing allowed.

We stopped at Hawaii and Guam but never got off the ship.

Mr. Tombaugh

How many days did it take to cross?

Mrs. Burkett

It took 17 days to cross. They must have found a shorter way home, it only took 14 days to return.

Mr. Tombaugh

In a quonset hut it was a metal skin and during a heavy downpour it had to sound like Niagara Falls hitting that roof?

Mrs. Burkett

Yes. On Tinian, we had the tail end of a typhoon that hit Okinawa. Winds were 120 knots. We had water that ran down between our beds. One little smart gal made a boat out of paper and sailed it between the beds. The captain didn't like that too much. We had high side openings for air and the only thing that didn't get wet was in our foot lockers.

Mr. Tombaugh

What ribbons did you receive?

Mrs. Burkett

Just South Pacific is all I remember.

Mr. Tombaugh

You were discharged where?

Mrs. Burkett

Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

Mr. Tombaugh

How did you travel here in the states from base to base?

Mrs. Burkett

By train. I don't remember all the stops but we did stop at Pocatello, Idaho where we were allowed to get off and stretch and get back on the train.

On the train out to Washington, I believe it ran along the Columbia River, it was beautiful scenery as we had what they called the open car.

You never saw more beautiful scenery.

I remember when I was in nurse's training I had two good friends that roomed together. They later went into the Air Force and were in a field hospital during the Battle of the Bulge. They made it home and never talked about their experience either. They are both gone now.

Mr. Tombaugh

What did you do after the service?

Mrs. Burkett

I worked at Woodlawn Hospital, Rochester, Indiana.

I retired from Argos School, Argos, Indiana as school nurse on May 30, 1986 after twenty-one years.

Mr. Tombaugh

You were married when?

Mrs. Burkett

I married Devon Burkett on June 24, 1950 and he died December 15, 1986.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you have children?

Mrs. Burkett

Yes, Cathy and James.

Mr. Tombaugh

Did you use the GI Bill?

Mrs. Burkett

Yes, at North Manchester College, North Manchester, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

Did you ever see any USO show?

Mrs. Burkett

Yes. Don Budge and Jack Kramer were on Tinian when I was there. We also had a few movies on Tinian. In West Virginia they had Les Brown.

-END-

18 hours