

**TRANSCRIPT: INTERVIEW WITH
MILDRED MANNING
23 NOVEMBER 2012**

QUESTION:

How many nurses were stationed with you in the Philippines?

MILDRED:

I think there were 68 Army and 12 Navy.

QUESTION:

How did men react to having women there?

MILDRED:

They were glad to have us especially the sick people. They were nice, always wonderful.

QUESTION:

What was your job?

MILDRED:

Taking care of the bodies injured, I didn't do surgery but I was on Bataan where the guys were on carts under the trees and they were very, very ill. I stayed there until the Japanese came in and we just looked after the patients.

QUESTION:

Why did you join the Army?

MILDRED:

Oh, I was a nurse from Georgia, I was a farm girl and I had to borrow the money to get through nursing school. When I got through nursing school they gave me a job. I was 3rd in my class of 15 and they made a job for me. They made me head nurse of the med surgical ward. I stayed there for two years and I had friends out at Fort McPherson. We used to go visit them and they said they had such a wonderful time. They only worked half a day, they had a month off, and was paying for all this stuff. I said, boy, that's me, I want to see the world and I asked to go to the furthest place I knew about, the Philippines. So, they called me and I joined and was shipped over.

QUESTION:

You were there when the American Army surrendered, were you afraid?

MILDRED:

Of course I was afraid, scared to death. Scared to death you could be killed or be raped or what not. I mean anybody says they're not scared, they're crazy.

QUESTION:

What was life like for you there before you were captured?

MILDRED:

I got there six weeks before the war started so I didn't see anything but the fort until the war started. I had gone up to have some boots made, I wanted to learn to ride. When I was coming home somebody yelled at me, our fort had been bombed and we couldn't believe it. So, I went into lunch and put on my uniform to go on duty and as I left my place, the bombs started falling right on to us.

QUESTION:

The Japanese attacked the Philippines right after Pearl Harbor, right?

MILDRED:

Right. The same day except it was a day later over there because of the time difference.

QUESTION:

What did you think?

MILDRED:

I didn't have time to think. You had to rush to the hospital and I cut so many clothes off of Soldiers with wounds and I can't use scissors as much today. So, we just went to work.

QUESTION:

When they surrendered Bataan, you were evacuated to Corregidor, what was it like saying goodbye to the wounded Soldiers?

MILDRED:

We didn't have time to say goodbye. I heard the rifle fire from the Japanese before they got us out. They took the nurses first and we got in trucks and traveled a long way to the bay to get across the bay. So you had no time to say bye to the Soldiers, it was night. We got to the bay and there were no boats open. We had to wait for the ammunition boats to be blown up, but we got there about daylight. I was in the last boat across and the Japanese were striking up and down the bay while we were going across.

QUESTION:

So there were bullets flying around while you were leaving the island?

MILDRED:

Yeah. Then we got across and I remember I was so tired I laid down on the concrete floor and went to sleep.

QUESTION:

Tell me about the hospital in the tunnel.

MILDRED:

Well, I think you have to almost see it to believe it, you know, big tunnel with tunnels off to the side and one of those were the hospital cell and it was just a big tunnel setup with beds and I had no supplies except for what was left from WWI. So, we were eating corn baked from WWI and rice, you know. So, we weren't there very long because they surrendered shortly after that.

QUESTION:

Did you meet General MacArthur?

MILDRED:

I didn't meet him but I saw him everyday, he and his wife and son ate at the same place we did.

QUESTION:

What were you thinking when you found out they were surrendering Corregidor?

MILDRED:

We got scared to death because we didn't know what would happen, we were all scared. We were told to stay together and we did, of course.

QUESTION:

The Japanese had a reputation of treating their prisoners terribly, terribly badly.

MILDRED:

General Wainwright put it in the papers, we were nurses, part of the Army, and we were not to be molested and so they didn't, but one of them tried and the girl started screaming and she got back to wherever she was. Then when they took all the nurses outside and lined us up and walked up and down looking at us, up and down, you know. It scared us. We had one girl that was very beautiful, tall, dark, she's a big girl but dark, and they looked her up and down and said, the next generation of Japanese will be tall and scared her to death.

QUESTION:

They weren't expecting to find women?

MILDRED:

No, they didn't have any women in the Army at all so they didn't know what to do with us. So when they first put us in the convent when we got to Manila, and we were there for a month, they had a guard, of course, and finally they took us into Santo Tomas.

QUESTION:

Did Santo Tomas house civilians or soldiers?

MILDRED:

When they moved into Manila, they took all of the foreigners in Manila and businesses and put them in Santo Tomas, about 4,000 people.

QUESTION:

Were you aware of the terrible things happening to the American Soldiers in what's now known as the Bataan Death March?

MILDRED:

We were there but we really didn't know what was happening. We did know that they took out people but never brought them back out of the camp.

QUESTION:

What were camp conditions like?

MILDRED:

Monotonous and, of course, you had nothing, absolutely nothing except for what you had in the little bag. They had I think it was 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 about 12 or 14 people inside of this little room and we were on the floor with nothing but a little straw bed.

QUESTION:

How did you get along with your fellow nurses in these tight living conditions?

MILDRED:

Most of them got along well, very well. I had one very dear friend that came out with TB and she died at 60-something, so, you just make friends.

QUESTION:

How did you deal with the times of great despair?

MILDRED:

Well, I'm sort of a loner, so I dealt with it, I think, better than most people did because I knew you're either going to get killed or you're going to go home. You might as well, like somebody told me, do your work and keep your mouth shut. So I thought I did that.

QUESTION:

What can you tell me about Colonel Ruby Bradley and her service?

MILDRED:

She was an older nurse than me and I was never around her very much. At one point, after I married, she was stationed at Fort McPherson because she stayed in the Army. I invited her out to my house a number of times and I went out to visit her a number of times.

QUESTION:

The last year you were in camp, was food scarce?

MILDRED:

There wasn't any food. I was fortunate, I was on the men's ward and I had a patient, a Dutchman, and he asked me one day, can you cook? I said, no, but I could sure try. He said, I have some canned food and if you would help me cook my rice I will give you some of the food.

So, everyday, I cooked his noon rice, I was working nights at this time, and we'd open a can and put a teaspoon of butter on the rice and I did that for the last year, it saved my life, it saved my life because that last year we did not have a thing to eat except a cup of rice twice a day.

QUESTION:

How did your fellow nurses deal with that, the ones who didn't have someone to help them eat?

MILDRED:

I don't know. A lot of them came out in bad shape. I did too really. I mean, today I have osteoporosis from lack of calcium and I've had it since then. I just didn't know it until I learned I lost three inches in height. I had Beriberi, bacillary dysentery, and, you know, I lost all my teeth within a month.

QUESTION:

How did you keep your spirits up?

MILDRED:

We'd have somebody's birthday, somebody would come up with some pancakes or something, and the first year we had a little more food. Some of the people were permitted to come up to the gate and sell food, and if you had any money you could buy food like extra rice, fruit or vegetables, things like that. But we never had much, you know.

QUESTION:

Were you able to communicate with your families?

MILDRED:

I wrote them several times but they never got a one of them. After the war I heard that there was a house full of mail that never went out.

QUESTION:

Did your family know what happened to you?

MILDRED:

They didn't know where I was or what I was doing, not until the surrender.

QUESTION:

That must have been terrible for them?

MILDRED:

Yeah, yeah it was.

QUESTION:

How did you know your captivity was coming to an end?

MILDRED:

Well, I was on night duty and they took over the gymnasium, which was a little removed from everything else. I didn't know the Americans were in there until I got up in the morning and came out and there were all these American Soldiers and tanks. But I hadn't heard it and I ran up and kissed a boy from Georgia, that's how I knew it. But then, the Japanese wouldn't surrender the camp people, they took hostages up on the second floor of the building they were in and wouldn't let them go for about three days before they had to surrender.

QUESTION:

Were these hostages nurses?

MILDRED:

Just men that lived there, living on the second floor.

QUESTION:

What was your first thought when you saw the American Soldiers?

MILDRED:

I thought, oh boy, we're going home. Yeah, and food, they had food, they set up camps, food all over the camp, I think that was the main thing.

QUESTION:

How did it feel to come home?

MILDRED:

Well, it was good to come home and I just wanted to get out of that darn Army and go back to work as a nurse, but what happened was they gave us three months off and to sell war bonds. I had to go around from Kiwanis clubs and all sorts of things. I was furnished a card to do this and I was sent out to Atlanta where I was living. They sent a newspaper report with me and I took on a husband and a child all at once and then they wouldn't let me out of the Army after I got married. So, I just gave up and went to work everyday and he went to work everyday, but it was a long way to go to work and I really didn't want to work because I had this child and was with somebody else and wanted to come home. So my head nurse there said, we got to find some way to get you out of here. She went through all the rulebooks and found a law or something that said if you have a child, dependent child, you could get out. That's how I got out of the Army.

QUESTION:

What was your rank?

MILDRED:

I went in as 2nd Lieutenant and came out as 1st Lieutenant.

QUESTION:

When you joined, were you entitled to benefits or anything?

MILDRED:

No, not when I got out.

QUESTION:

How did they acknowledge the terrible price you paid?

MILDRED:

Well, I didn't get anything until the 70s, I think, I finally got \$73 a month. But then in the 80s, I think it was, or maybe it was a little earlier than that, I joined a group of POWs in Florida where I had moved and they went to work for me and finally eventually got my pension for me.

QUESTION:

Knowing you paid this terrible price, how did it make you feel not being entitled to a pension?

MILDRED:

Well, I didn't even think about it until I was invited for a physical to get one.

QUESTION:

How do you think your wartime experiences shape the rest of your life?

MILDRED:

Well, unfortunately, I'm sorry about all the physical ailments I have, but I don't regret it. I learned a lot of things. I learned about a little piece of soap is so good to have and we didn't have any toothbrushes or clothes, you know, before we got those skirts in the camp where we were, we wore Army coveralls for men and the big old boots they wear. It's all we wore over there in the jungle and we had our bed setup away from the Soldiers, with mosquito nets all over, mosquito nets out under the trees with the snakes and the big lizards. I came home one night and opened my mosquito net to go to bed and there were one of the lizards in my bed and then you

go in to work and there's snakes falling out of trees. So it was not a happy time. We had to bathe in the river, ate all the horses in the cavalry, didn't have any food.

QUESTION:

Did people know your story and the nurses' when you came home or were they surprised?

MILDRED:

No, they were not surprised because there had been so much publicity by that time. And there was another one from my hometown, a guy that sat right behind me in high school.

QUESTION:

What happened when you finally got to see your parents?

MILDRED:

Well, they met me at the airport and my daddy couldn't come, he was sick. But my mother met me and it was so good to see her, yeah.

QUESTION:

Tell me about the letters your parents wrote to the government, President?

MILDRED:

Well, they wrote letters to the President and to Senator Russell who was from Georgia and I don't know to who all up there in Washington. Everybody wrote back, they didn't know where we were.

QUESTION:

When you finally came home and talked to your family, how did that make them feel when they got the letter back saying they had no idea what happened to their daughter?

MILDRED:

Yeah. Well, they were so glad to see me I don't think they thought much about it anymore.

QUESTION:

What can we as a Nation do to better acknowledge and honor the service of women such as yourself who paid a terrible price?

MILDRED:

Well, I don't know. I don't know. I think they ought to teach it in school. When I was living in Jacksonville, Florida, I went to the clinic there for my drugs and what not, and I went in to the office one day and told the girl, she must have been 18, 20, who I was and what I wanted, that I was in the war, and she said, what war was that, I said WWII. I never heard of it, she said, 18 years old, I never heard of it.

QUESTION:

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us.

MILDRED:

Well, thank you.