

Interview with **Phyllis Sultan**, April 2, 2003

By Deborah Miles

1:50

What are your earliest memories of the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

It was a shock.

We had this program with Camp Croft. We were getting ready to go out when they announced it. We were all shocked. Of course the soldiers immediately went back to camp. We didn't understand what Pearl Harbor was but we knew it was something really bad. We had already started our program for the soldiers at Camp Croft.

Describe this program

A bunch of people got together at the Jewish Community Center in Asheville where every weekend soldiers were invited – they were bussed up. We called around and got homes that would take them - it was no problem. We had committees who organized programs like dances at the Jewish Community Center.

I remember a few of us who were involved in the programs – Sylva and Doris Patla, My sister Helen May. Helene Lees was a big organizer. Just as many soldiers as we could house would come up – maybe 20. The host would give them a place to sleep and breakfast – some folks with big houses would take more than one. In this picture – this is maybe at a bowling alley – there are four of us with Camp Croft soldiers.

5:30

Tell me about your work at City Hall

The Government took over City Hall. Two departments took it over. The one where I worked was called the Weather Wing – I was a civilian employee of the army. I think the other was in communications. I was a secretary to one of the officers. This is a picture of the Officers Club with a bunch of wives and friends at a party there maybe. I am not sure where it was. I think it was on one of the castles on the hill – I have forgotten.

8:20

During these programs at the JCC or in Asheville were there ever any issues of anti-Semitism?

No we never had a problem. My kids ask me this. – I guess there were some things - you didn't get invited to certain parties or to the country Club.

Did you ever hear about William Pelley?

Yeah – I heard about him and there were the Silver Shirts – the Building is still down in Biltmore but I never knew much about it.

Did the Jewish community respond in any particular way as the news was coming out about what happened in Europe with the Holocaust?

Like everybody else – We were all Americans.

9:50

Talk about the Red Cross.

They gave us training for a Nurse's Aide program – I went in at 6:00 in the morning. In those days, they had wards and we did all the grunt work so the nurses could go into the army. The Red Cross initiated this to help the nurses – they gave us good training. We worked shifts – we would go in early morning shifts. I did that and other work like clerical stuff and switchboard. I did a bunch of stuff but this was the most valuable. I still have my pin. This is what we looked like. We had blue bibs and white tops with a cap and white shoes. The Red Cross does a lot of good stuff. At that point the hospital was where the Parkway office building is now. They did everything – Bundles for Britain, sewing rooms but I was not involved in that part.

It taught me one thing - I never wanted to be a nurse. But it was great. Everyone wanted to do whatever they could. It is not like this war. With this nut over in Iraq. I try to explain it to my children. It had nothing to do with being Jewish - we were Americans. All the boys went. My husband, we were not married at the time or hardly even knew each other - he minute they bombed Pearl Harbor he went right down and signed up.

14:32

How about when the war was coming to an end?

I will never forget when it was over. I was over at a friend's house on Stratford Rd. We walked downtown and everyone was congregated there. Just like every town in America – lots of people downtown, everybody headed for town. We just thought it was never going to end. Of course we had rationing. I didn't have to deal with all that because my parents dealt with that. We didn't have nylons. I remember that.

I had one sister – she now lives in Tennessee – Helen Mae. She was involved in this group with Camp Croft.

16:60

How would you describe the ways the war changed your life?

It changed my life in one way – everybody wanted to pull together – everybody wanted to do what they could. There was no dissension. It is hard to explain. My grandchildren ask me. We

were one country and one nation. Most of the guys were off to war – everybody wanted to do what they could. Most of correspondence was with the guys I met from Camp Croft

18:10

Tell me about Norman

He was off at the war and we married in 1946. He was in northern Africa and Italy. Hardly any boys was drafted – anybody enlisted they went down and volunteered except maybe the men with families. Norman was from eastern North Carolina. My mother was from Norfolk and they met in New York.

Oh another thing I did was take civilian flying lessons – It just seemed like it was a good thing to do. I could do landings but the spins and stalls that was the end of my career

It seemed like a good idea to learn how to fly a plane. I logged about 9 hours. I never made it but I did try

After the war was over did everything go back to normal?

Pretty much

Any words of wisdom?

It is hard to explain to your generation about my generation. It is probably difficult of ya'll to underrated the wars were so entirely different

My kids grew up with Norman telling them all the wars stories. He had a little box of medals they would play with. So as children they did hear a lot and they grew up and things like Vietnam the world took a turn

I think the closest thing my generation ever experienced to the way you speak of America was Sept. 11 (2001)

Very close. Exactly at that point we all pulled together. Because we were attacked. In this war we were not attacked. In Vietnam we were attacked. When this country is attacked everybody pulls together, you get a lot of Guillians and it will always be that way with Americans. But when you get into things like lately it just tears the country apart. It is just so sad. When I try to explain how we were – when this country is attacked we Americans pull together.