

**Ruth H. 'Heidi' Cole
Veteran**

**Interviewed by Kaitlyn Garthy
in 2009**

I: This is January 22nd, I'm Kaitlyn Garthy of Mr. Rozell's living history class and I'm here today with Mrs. Heidi Cole. So, when and where were you born?

HC: I was born in Cleveland Ohio, 1920. March 7th, 1920.

I: How did you become involved in girl scouts?

HC: When I was 10 we moved to Niagara Falls, NY, and girl scouts, I haven't been a scout up till then. The girl scouts at Sunday school at church were two good ways to meet friends, and so I joined a Girl Scout troop at the age of 10.

I: And you've been a girl scout ever since?

HC: I have. I registered in active girl scout I still I go to meetings, Saratoga sort of adopted me recently, and they come pick me up, bring me home, because I don't drive that far anymore. Uh, it's been a wonderful way of having friends.

I: Can you describe your life shortly after the war started?

HC: I wasn't very, I was in high school, and I don't think we thought very much about the war. Right after I went to college at Cornell, and after graduation that's when I really began to think about it because they upped our graduation two weeks because the boys were all being drafted.

I: Right.

HC: And um, so I, when I went, my first job was professional girl scouting at Syracuse, and I began to think about it and I thought well we, we befriended a gal from the waves and their uniform was so neat. So I went to apply for the waves, but I got turned down. And then this is the humorous part, because I didn't have the right number of teeth. When I was 7-8 year old I had abscessed teeth and they took for a map

I: Oh wow

HC: So my boss said to me, go across the street and sign up for the red cross, and I did and two weeks later I was headed for training and headed for overseas in a couple of months

I: So

HC: So it was best

I: Ha-ha, so what were you studying before you left um like college?

HC: I was studying, um, I was in the home economics college, but I was majoring in nursing school and heritage education

I: Um, where were you and what went through your mind on December 17th, 1941?

HC: I was in Detroit Michigan, at the Merrill Palmers School on a scholarship from Cornell. And I can remember, on Sundays there were 33 of us from all over the United

States at the school, and on Sundays we had to entertain the general motors boys for dinner and I remember we were sitting in the living room talking and we heard about the war

I: How did you feel, like what was your reaction to it?

HC: I think the boys were more concerned than the girls were, you know?

I: Right

HC: And there were boys we just met that day so you know we were attached to them. It was, it was a big happening, we knew that.

I: What exactly does a recreation worker do?

HC: Well we had a lot of fun, we planned parties for the boys, delivered newspapers in the morning and um you know we'd go around saying who's from Saint Louis, you know. It was, our job as recreation Red Cross workers was to bring a little joy into their lives. I remember one, one patient who said "oh don't come near me all you try to do is make us homesick", you know, and pay attention to it. Later, another day I found a, this bin near his, coned shaped hat, you know out of construction paper, two of them, one said, "you're ok thanks a lot", so and he was the one who, when it came to New Years, they had blue corduroy bathrobes

I: Mhm

HC: And he had pinned his up so it had looked like a tuxedo, he had taken towels and pleaded them and put them in, so he really, that was his way of saying, ok

I: And did your family know what you were doing?

HC: Yes

I: And how did they deal with you being away from home?

HC: At that time I was taking care of sort of my mother, not physically but monetarily, my brother and sister were both married and had children. But when I told them what I want to do they said, go ahead we'll take care of mom. I mean she physically she wasn't ill or anything, but you know I was the unmarried one living at home. But we had been away, all of us had gone away to college and so she was, she, my father had died.

I: So when did you leave to go overseas?

HC: I left on, in February. And I went on the Queen Mary, but the Queen Mary was stripped of everything. The only chairs and tables were in the dining room. We sat on the floor to play cards and

I: I remember you telling me that you had to zigzag across the sea

HC: She was too fast to have an escort.

I: Right

HC: We were chased by Germans

I: Were you scared?

HC: Well it was all kind of exciting

I: Right, and new. Um what sort of training did you have before you left?

HC: We trained in Washington D.C at American University, and they trained us all when the, you know, the ranks, and what the army was like and what war was like and we had classes we went every day for I think it was 6 weeks, and um and then we went to bowling green Virginia to an army base, and um got our shots. I remember big tall fellas coming out, and were practically fainting after getting our shots. But um, while in bowling green then we were introduced to club work and things like that you know, doing what we were going to do.

I: Right, so did you, did you work with the club mobiles or?

HC: No I didn't, when I landed in England, and there were 100 of us, and that group that went at that time, and um this red cross officer gave this big spiel that they needed hospital workers, so I decided I would volunteer, and um as I said when I had my interview, and I love the name Annie Lori Baker. She was the interviewer, and she's, and I said well why because I was too young in the states and I really wanted hospital work, she said because of your Girl Scout background. So, it all worked out for the best.

I: Right, uh, how long were you in England?

HC: I was in England for 11 months during the war and the bombing, and then I was, I signed up for occupation, what they called the occupation, when we occupied Europe and um I was in Belgium for 9 months during the occupation. While I was in England I was in whales, and it was a tent hospital. Everything was in tents.

I: What was that like to be in a tent hospital?

HC: Well, I was kind of used to tents being a girl scout, and I had directed camps for a few years, so, it was interesting.

I: Um, what did you talk about with your friends there?

HC: Um, gosh I don't remember. Probably what we used to do. I remember my first night, excuse me, in, in um, whales. These 3, excuse me, these 3 army boys came knocking at my door. Tent door, and said we're taking you to London. I still hear from those boys.

I: Oh good

HC: And I spent a week with one of them in the state of Washington a year ago

I: Mhm

HC: They took me to London, we went horseback riding

I: So would you say that they're the, the person that sticks out in your mind as far as who you got close to there or?

HC: Mhm

I: Um, let's see, how much of a difference was there for you transitioning from a tent hospital to the nice facility in Belgium?

HC: It was quite different, and in Belgium we were, I was in Charr(?) a lot, and it were near a city and I had used some city volunteers to, to put on program we put out a tea at Easter time, so, but uh, we're at in wheels we were out in the country

I: Right

HC: And we did have Red Cross volunteers British Red Cross volunteers who worked with us, and helped us

I: So um, what's one of the major events that you helped plan that you remember best?

HC: Say that again?

I: What's one of the major events that you helped put together, that you remember best?

HC: Well, let me see, probably that Easter Sunday. Um, gathering of local people and the soldier, and the patients, you know. We'd wheel them down in their beds and their wheelchairs. The other thing I do remember too is one year, New Year's, we planned a New Year's party for the patients

I: Mhm

HC: The officers came, wanted to know if they could come to our party, because we were having more fun. One time I had them for Easter, do you remember making a little basket when you were in kindergarten?

I: Yes

HC: Folding 16 squares, well I had the fellas doing that, and they were laughing about it. But then I had been issued red and green paper at Christmas time, and that's all I had the tissue paper during the year. And so I had them cutting up green paper to make grass. They just thought it was fun, you know, foolish but fun. And then I got the kitchen that Easter to uh, boil eggs for me. And some of the citizens, women in town, brought me some dye

I: Mhm

HC: So we dyed eggs and um so I filled baskets for the patients. I took them around at midnight and you know you'd think they were sleeping, "thanks", "thanks a lot", "oh that's nice". Things like that were fun to bring a little bit of home, to them. And uh I planned a winter carnival one time. And I made like ski hills on paper and our skiers were pencils stuck in marshmallows. I mean you divide everything.

I: Right, get creative.

HC: Yes it was fun

I: Was it hard to see some of the patients like in their condition like to spend time with them?

HC: Yes, you know, there was one I especially remember, I was delivering papers one morning and I, and he was encased in bandages from head to toe, and his eyes, his little eyes looking out and his nose and a place for his mouth. He was happy, happy to be there.

I: Right

HC: Some of them went back to the front, some of them went home.

I: Mhm. So, was your husband involved in the war?

HC: Yes but I wasn't married when I was overseas. Um my husband served in the pacific. And that was interesting because he had rheumatic fevers, senior in high school, and his mother was crying and the doctor said, don't worry Mrs. Cole, your son will never see the war. And he was drafted.

I: Oh wow, so although it was war time, do you have any fond or happy recollections from the period?

HC: Say that again

I: Although it was wartime, do you have any fond recollections of the time period?

HC: I had a wonderful experience serving in the Red Cross. I wouldn't ask for it again under those circumstances but I had a wonderful experience. I got to travel, you know in England I'm three days, a three day pass you could get all over England. You didn't have to ask for special weeks pass, which you could only have one or two of. Um, in Belgium, I got to see, travel. And before I came home through the G.I program, I had a week in Switzerland, and I went with three nurses. I wanted to ski and they wanted to sight see. So we chose a tour that was three days at Zermatt. To ski, and three day sightseeing.

I: That's cool

HC: So that was, at the end there were opportunities to do that, I had the opportunity to visit friends of my family in France. And uh I met with this lady that I grew up calling Aunt Mary she was French, I'm not French but she had served in the first World War and had met my uncle and had come over and visited my family and my grandmother's family. So I visited her. She was, I called her aunt Mary. She was doing the same thing I was. She was at the French red cross, and she was doing like I was doing, recreation work. But her job was to take trainloads of wine to the French soldiers, it was very interesting. But I visited her, and got to meet her husband, whom I had never met, and uh she showed movies to me that she had taken when the Germans had burned her village

I: Oh wow

HC: And uh then he husband buried the film, and so it was never confiscated. So I thought that was interesting

I: Wow

HC: He also buried bottles of wine, which he brought out when I was there, it was interesting

I: Do you recall your feelings when FDR died?

HC: I think we were all, felt a loss.

I: So where were you when the war finally ended?

HC: When the war ended in Europe, I was in Southern England outside of Southampton and I was serving in an American hospital, which was an annex to the big British hospital, and when D-day came the war in Europe was over. The boys in the

British hospital were celebrating, our boys wouldn't celebrate because they realized we had to go on to win the war in Japan.

I: Right

HC: I could remember that night, the British burned mattresses, they just celebrated, and our boys just stood there

I: Wow

HC: I, I can remember that night

I: So how are you feeling about the whole thing, were you having mixed emotions, or were you happy, or?

HC: Well I wondered what was coming next.

I: Right

HC: Actually our outfit was sent to Bournemouth England, which was like Atlantic City area, and we staged there but we knew we were going someplace because we had our teeth fixed, our eyes checked, our haircuts, everything to get ready to go out. But as the war ended then we went back up to, outside of South Hampton to where we had been and the boys went home, and I went on, but we discovered we were headed for the China Burma India theatre, but we didn't go.

I: What do you think about Truman's decision to use atomic force against Japan?

HC: Say that again

I: What, how do you feel about Truman's decision to use atomic force in Japan?

HC: It was scary. I think it was exciting, slash scary. Because it could happen any place

I: Right, when you returned home, did you find out that the war had changed you in any way?

HC: I think I had grown up a lot, um, I was ready for new ventures

I: Mhm

HC: And uh, I, I had experienced a lot, I had made many new friends and I, to some of them I still have to this day, and that's what 65-70 years.

I: Was there anything specifically that you learned from the war, like a lesson or like something about human kind?

HC: I think I learned that, people were important and um friendships are great

I: I don't have any more questions for you but

HC: Can I share with you what I've brought would that be alright

I: Yes, thank you so much.