

V. Stewart Fisher
JEANETTE: Anderson Fisher

Interview by Lorraine Lightcap
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V. STEWART FISHER JEANETTE: ANDERSON FISHER

My name is **Lorraine Lightcap** and I am a volunteer at Midway Village & Museum Center in Rockford, Illinois, along with my co-volunteers. We have transcribed approximately 50 tapes of interviews with World War II veterans of the Rockford area, which was a part of a project begun by the State of Illinois on the 50th Anniversary of World War II. This project is almost completed and I have wanted to do a few more interviews of Rockford area citizens for the Research Library at the museum.

Today, October 1, 2001, I am in the home of **V. Stewart Fisher and JEANETTE: Fisher**. They both served in the Armed Forces in Italy. Stewie, as he is called by his friends, was in the 62nd Signal Battalion, C Company of the United States Army while JEANETTE: served as an Army nurse. Their story is most interesting as they met while in Italy.

LORRAINE: Stewie and Jeanette, I would like to begin with asking each of you to tell us your parents names, your siblings, your year of birth, schooling and a few of the years preceding your services in the Armed Forces.

STEWART: I was born in Rockford in 1918 to Mr. and Mrs. James Fisher. I had one younger brother, Roger, who was killed during the Normandy Invasion. Both of my parents were born in the United States. After graduation from the high school in Rockford in 1936, I attended a college in Chicago.

JEANETTE: I was born in Ironwood, Michigan, in May of 1917. My father was killed in an accident when I was 14 months old so my mother, Ruth Freberg Anderson and my only brother moved to Montreal, Wisconsin, to live with my grandfather. In 1935 I graduated from high school in Hurley, Wisconsin and then entered nurses training at Augustana Hospital in Chicago. I had further studies at Northwestern University.

LORRAINE: I would like to ask each of you to tell us what life was like before you entered the service.

STEWART: After graduating from high school in 1936, I held various jobs being a salesman at retail furniture stores. Life seemed to be “promising.” At that time I was not very aware of the possibility of war in Europe.

JEANETTE: It seems I always had a desire to be a nurse. I feel I was greatly influenced by my grandfather to attend Augustana Hospital in Chicago to be trained as a nurse. I felt I had a fulfilling future. I do remember hearing rumors of war in Europe.

LORRAINE: Were either of you aware of the turmoil in England and Europe because of Hitler’s actions and speeches?

STEWART: I believe I was finally aware of this problem by listening to the radio and viewing newsreels at theaters plus newspaper articles.

JEANETTE: Being in Chicago I was very aware of the turmoil in Europe because of Hitler's speeches.

LORRAINE: Tell us more about your lives in the years before 1940 and before you enlisted.

STEWART: My life was very much involved with my church association. It provided me with much stability and many educational and social opportunities.

JEANETTE: Leaving a small town such as Hurley and Montreal and then moving to Chicago to train as a nurse was quite a change for me. Rules for nursing trainees were quite strict as to leeway of other activities but very often we were taken on field trips to explore the Chicago area.

LORRAINE: Do you two remember where you were and what you were doing on December 7th when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?

STEWART: I was in Chicago with friends when I heard about the bombing. By this time I was quite aware of Hitler's speeches.

JEANETTE: I too was in Chicago when I heard this unsettling news but at that time I was not interested in becoming an Army Nurse.

LORRAINE: What influenced either of you to service with the Armed Forces? Were you drafted or did you enlist?

STEWART: When I realized the possibility of being drafted, I decided to go to Chicago and investigate being a part of the Navy. I could have been taken in

immediately but I still had a commitment in Rockford. They more or less didn't pursue the issue. I still preferred enlisting to being drafted so I enlisted in the army at Camp Grant along with a few of my friends. At first, after being drafted, I was assigned to take charge of approximately 10 men while at Camp Grant. Unfortunately the first night it was 19° below zero and we were in unheated barracks. After 2 weeks we were shipped to Tampa, Florida, where I began training to part of the Army Signal Corp.

JEANETTE: Four of my friends from nurses' training had volunteered for nursing duties in the army. I too decided to volunteer. While I signed up in Chicago I was first sent to my home town in Wisconsin to leave from there. In January of 1943, I was sent to Langley Field in Virginia. Actually I did not need to receive any basic training as I was part of the Nursing Corp which was not officially part of the Army Nursing Corp. I became a 2nd Lieutenant and ended up being sent to the east coast to be shipped to Europe via Casablanca.

LORRAINE: How did your parents, Stewie, and your mother, Jeanette, feel about your being a part of the army and the potential dangers in this major conflict?

STEWART: I believe my parents were quite proud of my decision to enlist and overtly did not show their concern.

JEANETTE: My mother and grandfather were quite proud that I would be of help as a nurse in this war.

LORRAINE: Did you have any doubts whether our country could be successful

in winning this conflict in both Europe and Asia?

STEWIE AND JEANETTE: Really didn't think about this.

LORRAINE: Tell us a bit about your experiences when you enlisted, where were you sent for training, what other camps you attended, when you were sent overseas and how you got there.

STEWART: After attending training camps that I previously mentioned I left the United States on a journey overseas and to Europe. First stop was in Casablanca in North Africa. From this staging area we traveled by truck to Tunis and then from Tunis I took 3 crews of men back to Oran to join the 1st Armored Division convoy on its way to Naples Italy. Our mission was to establish communications from Naples to Rome and on to Milan, Italy.

JEANETTE: The nurses I was with were sent to Kilmer, New Jersey to board a ship to Casablanca. There were five of us and from there we were deployed to Oran, North Africa, to be replacements for nurses serving in the European Theater. I stayed in Algiers for 6 weeks waiting for the orders and was alone for a while before I was finally flown to Naples, Italy to be with the 118th Station Hospital Group. I stayed there in Italy 2 ½ years and was sent to 4 different hospitals in the area. I was at the 33rd Field Hospital at the end of the war in Company C.

LORRAINE: What was your area of responsibility while in Italy? Did you think the training you received adequate?

STEWART: My responsibility was to oversee the building of communication lines. I did a lot of pole climbing, sometimes with enemy fire close by. I did not participate in actual combat. While on this duty, I was promoted to captain. One time we were in the vicinity of the leaning tower of Pisa.

JEANETTE: I was in charge of orderlies at the Field Hospital. We were just 6 nurses for the 33rd Field Hospital.

LORRAINE: What was it like to live in close quarters with so many soldiers?

STEWART: Of course, officers were housed separately from infantrymen but we all ate at the same mess hall. One time I had to take a gun away from an upset man. I carried a gun but I never had to use it. I only saw one man killed. He had stepped on a land mine. I was not involved with capturing any of the enemy but I did see war prisoners in Milan.

JEANETTE: Being in the Field Hospital I saw many badly wounded men--some we could help recover, some died. There usually were 100 men in a ward. We kept so busy that we didn't have time to think about how unhappy we were to see such misery.

LORRAINE: Did you receive any leaves or passes while in Italy? Did you have the opportunity to relax at your quarters?

STEWART: We really didn't need a pass. There was not place to go. There were occasional dances sponsored by the Red Cross. For rest and relaxation I was sent twice to Rome for about a week. I did get yellow jaundice twice, once I had

to be sent to sick bay while sailing to Manila.

JEANETTE: I had rest and relaxation in Capri, Sorrento, Rome and Florence. We never had any big shows such as Bob Hope gave, but there were movies for us and we often played cards.

LORRAINE: Did you think the Allies were doing a good job? Any thoughts on what you wished would have been done differently?

STEWART: I thought the allies were doing very well and there was good cooperation. Basically we were all too busy to think about doing anything differently. While in Italy I was informed that my brother had been killed during the Normandy invasion.

LORRAINE: Where did you two meet?

JEANETTE: We originally met in Livorno [Legtown] Italy. At first we were just casual acquaintances. Both of us were sent via a ship to the Philippines.

STEWART: Actually I had enough points to return home but I was asked to take a crew to the Philippines. While on the ship, my jaundice returned and Jeanette insisted I go to the sickbay. Jeanette was not on duty at the time. We sailed through the Panama Canal and I would say we went half way around the world aboard ship. At one point the ship broke down at sea and we were delayed 1½ days while it was being repaired.

LORRAINE: Did you correspond frequently with your parents and friends? Were you able to receive packages of food or something you might need?

STEWART: I kept in touch with my parents and some friends. Also I had an 8mm movie camera with me and was able to take movies when permissible. I have about one and a half hours of film.

JEANETTE: I wrote as often as possible and received some packages. Cookies could be quite crumbled when received even if well packed.

LORRAINE: Do both of you keep in touch with your Army friends? Any reunions?

JEANETTE: Stew and I attended the 62nd Battalion reunion several times. I have kept a “Christmas Card Reunion” with my nursing friends.

LORRAINE: Did you have any contact with any Italians where you served?

JEANETTE: No.

LORRAINE: What about special holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. Were there any special activities or did you even feel like celebrating?

STEWART: About the only thing that was done on Thanksgiving or Christmas was special food.

JEANETTE: The 118th had special celebrations plus special meals.

LORRAINE: Tell us about your return to the United States and civilian life.

STEWART: At the end of 1945 I returned to Camp Grant to be discharged. We came back to Seattle via a ship and then on to a train back to the Midwest. I was discharged with the rank of captain after serving in the Army for four years.

JEANETTE: I was sent back to the United States via a ship to Louisiana. From there I went to Fort Sheridan and was discharged as a lieutenant. I had served three and one half years. After being discharged I began working at the Hines Veterans' Administration Hospital near Chicago. Stewie and I were married in my hometown in June of 1946.

LORRAINE: Was it difficult to adjust to civilian life?

STEWART: Fortunately I had a job waiting for me when I returned, at a local furniture store in Rockford. My future seemed to be secure. By June of '46 Jeanette and I were married and began life together in Rockford.

JEANETTE: I had no difficulty adjusting to civilian life. When I was working in the Veterans' Administration Hospital, Stewie would drive to see me as often as possible.

NOTE: Stewie and Jeanette are the parents of three children. Stewie was the founder in Rockford of the Ethan Allen Furniture store, is a life member of Bethesda Covenant Church and has served as church chairman for 2 years as well as serving on various boards. He was also president of the Rockford Symphony Board, president of the Cosmopolitan Club, president of Hospice in Rockford and an active Rotarian. Jeanette became a successful real estate saleswoman after leaving the nursing field. She, too, is an active member of Bethesda Covenant Church.