

Betty Cranmer

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Cohen: Today is December 14th, 2018. My name is Leah Cohen, and on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library I'm very pleased to interview Betty Cranmer who was a nurse in World War II in the British [Royal] Air Force. So, nice to meet you.

Cranmer: Very nice to meet you, and actually, um well I... it's a picture of me on the front of book. Have you seen the book?

Cohen: I saw a cover of the book online and I read the first few pages of it.

Cranmer: Well, the picture on the front of the book is from when I was a nurse but then that was when I was just volunteering, and then I joined uh the air force and uh and went to uh, how to march and salute, and then um... They had seen that I had been at a burn and plastic surgery hospital [i.e., Queen Victoria Hospital] and they said, "Well, were very, very needing people in that er facility, so would you be willing to?" So I went right back to the hospital that I had left, but I went as a medical person instead of a nurse. And now do you want me just to talk on, or do you want...

Cohen: Well, well, you know, how about we start a little bit about your background. Like where and when were you born?

Cranmer: Oh, all right we can go very, very back there. I was born just outside of London, Southwest 70, um and I had... I was the youngest, two older brothers, um and I went to a girl's private school, um and then the war came...

Allen [son]: Born August 29, 1921.

Cohen: Okay, thank you. [laughter] What kind of work did your father, or if your mother worked as well, did your parents do?

Cranmer: No, my mother was a mother. She took care of us. My father was in the film business. He was a distributor of the news reel, called Pathé. P-A-T-H-É. It was a French... Pathé. And so he did all the... that... uh... finding out the news...

Cohen: So in light of his profession, was there a lot of discussion about events happening in Europe when you were a girl, like with the rise of Hitler?

Cranmer: No. Well, see, we didn't think about Germany very much then, um, you know when I was a little girl. Uh, I was very much, in a... just in a family. My mother was the oldest of eight girls. They had a little boy and he died, so my grandparents thought it would be nice to replace him, but after eight girls... And so, I was... we were very much in a family, um with all these aunts and cousins, and that's what we spent a lot of time with uh, walking down to my grandmothers, and it was just so very much in the family.

Cohen: Did a lot of your aunts and uncles live nearby, as well?

Cranmer: Yes, yes, there were quite a few that were very close nearby. One lived a little way away, Redding, which is about 70 miles out of London.

Cohen: You know you mentioned in the book that from a young age, you loved babies, and you liked helping to take care of your baby cousins. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Cranmer: Well, do you want to hear... Yes, I loved... That was what I would do every Saturday that I had. You know, we went to school, then Saturday I would go down where my aunts lived and get the children and sometimes, I would have five of them. Putting them in bed, and walking them inside, I loved that. It was what I wanted to do when I grew up. I wanted to be a nanny. You know what nannies are, don't you?

Cohen: I do, but do you want to talk about it a little bit or what part you thought you would like.

Cranmer: It's up to you, you're the one that's got... I mean, I've got all the time in the world.

Cohen: Well, maybe to say what um, what you envisioned what being a nanny would be like?

Cranmer: Oh, well, I looked at the uh, royal family nanny, and I had a friend, one of my aunts, very, very good friend, was a nanny, and she was a nanny to, not royal, but a lord and lady. And so, she did tell me, that she said, "it's kind of a hard life when you're in a family like that, because you don't mix with the servants and you don't mix very much with the family, they're too busy." And so you're in the nursery, which is where the babies were brought up in. Uh, you know, two rooms, and things like that. And it's kind of a lonely life, unless there are other nannies in that area that you could meet. I wanted, so wanted to be a nanny. So

that's what I said to my father, "I want to be a nanny to take care of babies." And so my father's reply was, "I'm not gonna pay for you to take care of somebody else's children. You get married and have your own." And so that was that.

Cohen: That was that. And you had mentioned that there was an incident where I think your brothers and you had invited some people over when your parents were away, and they objected to that. Could you talk a little bit about that please?

Cranmer: I can tell you, you want... I don't know... Yes. Well, my parents were away, and around the corner, there were two girls, they were twins, and they went to my school, and actually their father was in the film business, he was doing that. But these girls were quite attractive so my brothers said, "Could... would [you] invite them to come to the house to play cards and eat baked beans." And you know... it's been kind... and so they say, "Oh yes we'd love to." And so they did, they came, but we did have a maid, and she was not a young one, because we did have some that were sixteen, but this maid, I think she was probably in her twenties or her thirties, I don't know, but she saw the girls coming in. And we, that's all we did we just sat around and ate baked beans and played cards, and then they went home. Well, we had a woman who lived next door who was kind of a little bit nosy and she saw these girls go into our house. So when my parents came back, she called my mother up, and said, "I'm surprised that you the McFarland girls at your house." Um oh, my mother said, "I'm sure not." So of course they asked us and we lied. We said, "Oh no, the McFarland girls no, never." But the maid said, "Oh yes they were here. They came and played cards, and ate baked beans." So my father lined us up and he said, "You will hear your punishments on Saturday." So we had the rest of the week thinking, "Oh my goodness, I wonder what he's gonna do." Well he didn't have a very good education about bringing up children, uh, and so he didn't really know. So he did some pretty ridiculous things. My older brother was an apprentice, and so he was earning a little money. So he had to give half of what he earned to his mother. My brother, the next brother, was in the Scouts and loved it, so my father said, "You won't go to scouts anymore." I mean ridiculous. And then to me he said, "I'm going to take you off... out of that school so that you won't have those as your friends and he said, "um, I think there's a convent over in Hampstead," which is not too far away, where my cousin goes as a day student. Um, so he says, "So well we'll go over and look at that and you can board over there." Oh my goodness, I can see it now.

Cohen: So he was determined like to separate you from those two girls?

Cranmer: Pardon?

Cohen: Your father was determined to separate you from those two girls?

Cranmer: Oh, absolutely and take me out of the school that I loved. So we went and looked at this convent and oh it was grim. It was in the big dormitory and the dens went in a long, long row, head to toe, head to toe. It was going down. Well then, we went to see Mother Superior, oh my goodness, she was very, very, strict. And oh yes I would have to be up very, very early, no contact with the outside world really.

Cohen: Oh, my goodness.

Cranmer: I know, and my father started thinking, because my cousin went there, but she was just a day boarder. She was just going to school. This was sleeping and eating there [at night- 11:28]. And, so then he gets, he said, well, we'd go home and discuss it." Well, his heart softened, and he said, "No I don't think I'll send you there, but there is a technical school, Domestic Technical School, [was this the name of the school or just the type?] not too far away from where we live. I think you'll go there." Uh. I didn't want to go, but there were no... I had to. So I went to this. It was kind of like a, as I say a [12:01: inaudible]. All kinds of things that you do, learning to do the laundry, taking care of a house, um ordering the food, and we'd have other girls come and stay at the house and it was... I didn't board there, I had to go on a bus every day, but that was the hardest thing for me to leave all my friends and to this domestic science school. And so that's what I went to and I graduated from there. When I graduated, the war was about to come out, and so we moved to the country then. We had a place in the country.

Cohen: So before we go on, like, at this school did you also learn subjects like, English literature and writing, and math?

Cranmer: Say that again?

Cohen: Did you also study English literature, or composition, or math?

Cranmer: Yeah, we had that, and we also had what we called Scripture. Where you would study the bible as a book. So yes. So any rate, then the war came, and I had to go into the service.

Cohen: Were you um, drafted into the service?

Cranmer: No, no I knew I had to do, I had to had to do some war work, so I decided to go into the Air Force. My brother was in the army, my other brother was in the navy, so why don't I go in the air force. But I was very interested in what they were doing, so when I had to go and get trained. Um, we went up to, I'm sure you've heard of Blackpool, um, it was up there, in a, in a village. We didn't... there was not room in the other places for us to go, so we uh, went to this

woman's house. There were three or four of us, and we had the same meal for six weeks.

Cohen: So you were billeted at somebody's house at Blackpool, and then you would do um, I don't know, exercises and drills, on a base.

Cranmer: Oh yes. We had to learn to march and clean the toilets for the lavatories. Through all that time, pretty grim, but the thing was we had the same, which was okay, we had the same meal every day. We peeled the potatoes, so it had boiled potatoes, carrots that came out of a tin or can, and corned beef. And we had that for six weeks. [unintelligible] But it was food.

Cohen: What had your brother been telling you about their service in the navy and in the Army, like what had you heard?

Cranmer: Well I didn't hear a lot. My brother that was in the army, he was in the Royal Corp of Signals and had done this on a basis volunteering to get some idea of what it was like before the war, and so he was in that. And my brother was very keen to go, my next brother was very keen to go in the navy. Um, because he liked the sea, going to sea and stuff like that. And actually, the boat that he was on was a destroyer in the South Pacific so around in that area, and he was on the same boat as the Queen's husband, Prince, eh whatever his name is, uh Phillip, yes.

Cohen: Ah okay.

Cranmer: And he said he was very, he was very nice, Prince Phillip, he was uh, just like one of them, because he wasn't really royal blood, he was uh, you know [16:26 inaudible].

Cohen: You mention you had grown up outside of London. Was this an area that was being bombed as well during World War II?

Cranmer: Oh yes, oh yes, that's why we moved down to the country, with my mother, my mother and some aunt and cousins. We had a place in the country which was about thirty miles... East Green Street, actually it was very close to East Green Street. That's where we uh... That's where we were, but you know we still had friends coming over and I think, is there a, I don't know um in the book. I have been... Is it all right for me to talk like this?

Cohen: Sure. Sure thank you.

Cranmer: Well um, this is when I was working at the hospital in the burn center, and um, this uh person, and that's another whole story of what happened to him. Just, he

was out in the North Sea, but that's a whole, that's a long story and I can tell you about it. And it's actually in the book on the side, I think. Is it? Does it have it, I can't remember. It's on the side of the H page, just that and the whole, that was amazing how he survived. But you should read that in the book.

Cohen: So, so just to be clear, at this point in time, you're living in the country with your mother and some other relatives and you're volunteering in the hospital when you met the person who unfortunately had been burned?

Cranmer: Yes, I was volunteering, but then when I joined the Air Force, then I wanted to go... I wanted to be on a fighter pilot station, to see the actions for spitfires to go off and stuff. But when I was perusing my training up in the Air Force in Blackpool, they said, "Oh, we see now that you have been working at the Burn Center and we are desperate for people to go in that area." So I was sent back to the hospital that I had left.

Cohen: What was the name of the hospital again?

Cranmer: But I was going then, not as a nurse, I was going then as a, a, um, in the Air Force. I was going as a medical person, to give people what we call Brine Baths. And they wheeled the patients into the bathroom. We had two bathrooms, one for more for women and one for more... And they'd wheeled the patients into the bathroom and take off their bandages and put them in and it was saltwater, but it was healing. And then, we would take of their dressings, and then clean around their burns. We had some amazing, amazing cases. I could tell you some... I could tell you all kinds of ones. There was one, I mean, can I talk on?

Cohen: Yes, yes.

Cranmer: So this...

Allen: Mom, what were the books that you used to get or the pamphlets that you used to get about the burn victims when we were young? What were the name... **Guinea Pig [Club]** or something like that?

Cranmer: Oh yes that what it was?

Allen: So yeah, you might be able to look that up.

Cohen: That they were called **Guinea Pigs**?

Allen: **Guinea Pigs**, yeah. These were soldiers, sailors, that were badly burned, and you can see some pictures of them in those periodicals, and I would think you'd be

able to find them somewhere online... on the internet. And they came from England, right Mom?

Cranmer: Yeah

Allen: Yeah, so they're a British publication titled **Guinea Pigs**.

Cranmer: All right. I'm pretty sure... Or the other person that you could look up, he's a sir now, but he wasn't, is Archibald McIndoe.

Cohen: What is the last name please?

Cranmer: M-C-I-N-D-O-E, I think. I'm old and my spelling isn't all that great. Sir Archibald McIndoe, a plastic surgeon.

Cohen: Oh okay.

Cranmer: And he was knighted by the queen.

Cohen: Oh okay. Okay. So when did you start to work with victims of burns, was it when you were still a volunteer or was it later when you joined the Air Force?

Cranmer: Oh, I started working... When I was just a volunteer I was just in the ward and would be giving them water or whatever, they wanted, but when I went into the Air Force, then I went into the bathrooms and that's when we did the cleaning up. We used and they... the famous McIndoe Forceps... We used... We'd scrape around the area of the burns. These are all, I don't know if you're familiar, these are all third-degree burns.

Cohen: Wow. Did you know what caused the burns?

Cranmer: Oh, yes. I can tell you one that was really bad. She was a little, she was fourteen, fourteen/fifteen. A young girl, in London, and she was working in a toffee factory, sweet factory, and it was bombed, and the boiling toffee went over her from the top of her shoulders but, her face wasn't too bad, but it burned all the way down her body. And actually, yes, her hip bones, one of her hip bones was there, you could see her hip bone. And that was Doreen. And she would start screaming. As soon as we walked, wheeling her into the bathroom because she also came in my bathroom, where I was working, and she would start screaming, and these men, the two orderlies - men that I worked with. Oh, they would say, "Dory, you're just a little sunburnt, be quiet." But she survived. She had different grafts taken from the back of her and stuff, and she could survive. We did have some pretty bad cases.

Cohen: Were most of them the result of the war itself or more like the war effort. Like working in factories?

Cranmer: A lot of them were, the Air Force, the Army, the servicemen were from that, but we had, uh, we had... I shall tell you this case, if you've got time, I don't know how much time you have.

Cohen: No, this is good.

Cranmer: This is the most amazing case that I ever saw. This woman, she was uh, epileptic, and she fell in the fire. She was drawing... And so she had, all of her head was burnt, from around. They didn't...coming into us right away but when she came in, she was burnt, one ear was gone, but all she had was a skull.

Cohen: Oh my god.

Cranmer: This is absolutely... [Phone Rings] Absolutely true all she had was a skull and then I said [Phone rings], "There's no way that you could..." What could we do? You can't put skin on bone, but our, our, [McIndoe] was just an amazing man. And so what they did, he drilled little holes in her head the size of small peas. And all over her head, little pieces of, what we call granulating tissue. That raw flesh came out of that bone. And so as it came out, we would place this Vaseline gauze right on it, so it started to spread, pretty soon. she had a head of raw flesh all over that skull.

Cohen: Wow, so this was done by the, by Sir Archibald McIngle?

Cranmer: McIndoe.

Cohen: McIndoe, I'm sorry.

Cranmer: McIndoe. M-C-I-N-D-O-E, McIndoe, yeah.

Cohen: Wow.

Cranmer: They put that... and so then we, she would come in, and we would put that Vaseline gauze tied over her head. And so pretty soon she had a head of raw flesh, and then we did what they called, well I did. The doctor did... He did what [inaudible] grafts and he took like a little size of a pea, flesh, uh, underneath her arm, right in that area and right underneath arm, and up by the legs. And so, he had these little grafts all over her head, and they grew out, and pretty soon she had a head of flesh. And then she had a complete... when the grafts grew out, she had a head of skin, and fine. She didn't have any hair, naturally, so she wore a wig. But she had a... Yeah that was the, an amazing, one of the most amazing

things. Well, there were so many. Oh I should... I can go on and on, but now I want to listen to what you want me to say.

Cohen: Well, I was wondering, um did you get any training to work with the burn victims?

Cranmer: Well, um I had, not really. Because I had been at that hospital, and had been with burns, and been around patients with them. They said, "Oh we're desperate, [for] somebody to go in a burn center." Because a lot of people do not like to work with uh burns.

Cohen: Well that was my next question. Like, you're an eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl, um who grew up, you know, it's a very close-knit family, uh how did you feel working with the burn victims?

Cranmer: Well, as I say, I started just as a volunteer as a nurse. And it kind of got me interested, but I didn't want to go back to that, as I said before I wanted to go on a [28:39 Pike station?] and be a medical help there on a Spitfire. But because, when I finished foot slogging and "slooting" [28:51] at Blackpool, they said, "We need people in the Burns [Center] and you have been there." So, I didn't have, didn't have any uh, I, I mean, I wasn't told... I was told... I was sent there. I didn't have a choice. That's what I wanted to say.

Cohen: Okay. So you didn't have a choice. Yeah. Yeah.

Cranmer: "You're in the service and that's why we're sending you back." And I thought oh. But there we are.

Cohen: Where did you land up living when you were already, at this point, in the Air Force? Were you able to live at home? Was there a special residence for other...?

Cranmer: No, but when I went back to work at a, in the burn center, no I had a... what was called a billet. I was posted into a house and so, very close to the hospital, um and they were, they were given a, you know it... they paid these people uh for me to stay there.

Cohen: Were there... Were you with a few other girls as well, at this?

Cranmer: No. I was just alone, in this situation. I just lived with this woman, a man and a woman... Yes a man and a woman. I mean, a husband and wife, that's what I was... They were older people, but I was there alone, but that's where I had to be. I didn't have any choice.

Cohen: And what were your hours like? Like at what time would you have to arrive at the hospital and when would leave and so on.

Cranmer: Oh, we would go... We would... I would have to be on duty at eight o'clock in the morning and we would finish sort of around four in the afternoon. It depends upon the patients. You know, how much we had to do, and uh, the sort of things like that. So it was uh, yeah it was good. Yeah there is one incident in the book, um but I don't know how much time you have.

Cohen: I think; I think this is a good place to describe it this way. It will be the oral history itself.

Cranmer: Pardon, say that again?

Cohen: Oh, I think it would be good to talk about it here because although you wrote it in the book, this way it will be in the oral history.

Cranmer: Well, one of the most scary times, I guess. I had taken the patient, [clears throat] to the cinema. Uh, he was in a wheelchair. You'll see pictures of him in the book. Um, and he uh, because he, his story and his story alone is an amazing story, how he was out in the North Sea for fourteen days, but I can't go into that because it's a long story, but you'll read it in the book. Uh, and when he came into the Hospital, our hospital, um, the uh, the nurse, the night nurse said, "What's your name," and he said, "Frederick Hollbrook Mahn." And she said, "Ah, we can never get a name like that. You look like Henry Fonda, so we're gonna call you Henry." [Laughter] So that's what his name was. And anyway, I didn't do a lot with him because he was in the other bathroom with more of the men, but I did take him out to a local cinema one afternoon. He asked me if I would took him. So, he was in a wheelchair, so I had to, um, push him down, it was about a mile and a half to the cinema, and we watched the film, and I can't remember what the film was, um and then it was time for me to go on duty, and I said, "I've got to go," and he said, "But we haven't finished the film." And I said, "Well, you can find your own way back. I have to go, because the sergeant is very strict." Uh. So he asked... So he said, "All right." And we were walking back, and it was kind of a hill, and it went down, under some very tall trees, pine trees, at the bottom. When all of a sudden, this plane came over. We didn't have a siren or anything, this German plane came over and he came very low, and he opened fire. And I got scared and I let the chair go. And there was a lamppost there, and I hung onto the lamppost with my eyes closed. And he turned around and came and fired, again. But I don't know whether he intended to hit me, or he just wasn't a very good aim. Anyway, I um, he didn't get me, and then he flew off. I went down and grabbed Henry, he hadn't fallen out of the chair or anything, he grabbed the front wheels. And when we got back to the hospital, I they started bringing in the casualties. He dropped one bomb and he dropped it on the

cinema, and the people that were sitting next to us, they were completely blown to pieces. If we had stayed to the end of the film we wouldn't be talking.

Cohen: Oh, my goodness.

Cranmer: Yeah, we had casualties. They were, yes, they were all... We had... We didn't have enough beds. We didn't have enough doctors. Several doctors had gone off on a onto a meeting or something like that. We had poor people lying on the floor. And, but we didn't have enough tourniquets. We were putting fingers on blood that was squirting. No, it was pretty grim, but uh, we were just... I mean, we all survived, and people got uh, they were in the hospital, got blood supplies and stuff like that, but that was a scary time.

Cohen: That, that was. Do you think the hospital itself was a target?

Cranmer: No, no, I just think, um I think he thought that uh, a cinema where there would be a lot of people, you know going to the cinema. I don't think he was interested in, you know, killing more wounded people. I don't know what they... I don't... Anyway, that's what happened there.

Cohen: Oh my. And it's also amazing that um, the Henry Fonda was this... I mean, this Henry guy, was okay as well. Like going down the hill. He stayed in the chair and everything.

Cranmer: Oh yeah, oh yeah, he was fine. And then quickly, because he had gangrene in his feet. And you can read... when you read... when you look at the book you'll see all what happened to him because he was out in the North Sea for fourteen days, but I can't go into that because that's another story, but yes he uh, uh he was... it was great that he was in there, in the wheel chair, that he was able to stop himself from falling out. I don't know if I could have got him back in, because he, you know, he was a big man, so and there we are.

Cohen: So there we are. So—

Cranmer: And then later I happened to marry him.

[Laughter]

Cranmer: But you'll see that in the book. Wasn't he...He proposed to me, and I had just lost my first love, who was an Australian in the Air Force, and he would go missing. And so, and I wasn't interested. And I said, "Well you can ask me in a couple of years. I am not interested right now.

Cohen: But this brought me to like another question. Like, was it typical that the burn patients would ask, you know, the staff to take them on outings? Or was your husband basically going to... going on a date with you?

Cranmer: Well um it was. To begin with, it was just taking them. To the... He wanted to go down to the local pub and taking him. But as I say, um, no I was not, I was not interested right then in him because I was still in love with my Australian that I had lost.

Cohen: How did you hear that your Australian love had been, had gone missing?

Cranmer: Well, because his very, very best friend called me and because I couldn't get ahold of him. And he said, "Oh he went on a big mission in Holland and went uh bombing." And he said he went down very, very low to make sure that he got the Maastricht bridges because that was a very important bridge, and um, he said the whole plane, you know, just blew up. Um, and he was then reported missing. But then uh, you know, reported missing for a long time, and I never heard anymore. So my heart was broke.

Cohen: Yeah, no I, it must... I'm sure. Wow. Were you in touch with your, with your family while you were working at, you know, at the Burn Hospital?

Cranmer: Well, we did. Some of, yes, I, yeah, some of my um, my aunts, uh, uh one of, and uh cousins. They came down from out of London to live in our little place, uh our little house. Uh, in the country. So we did have a little family down there. For a while, and then, as time went on they started uh going back and uh, and head back to where they're at, they're uh normal lives.

Cohen: Just um, maybe I'm a little mixed up. Was the country house close to where you were being billeted when you were working with the burn victims?

Cranmer: No. Um we had to... where we lived, it was attached to a farm, very close to a farm, not a big house at all, um but it was uh, attached to a farm. And it was about, uh, oh five miles or so out of the, out of the town. It was a little town, Felbridge and it was about three miles from that, but that was just a restaurant. It was very, very tiny.

Cohen: So, Felbridge was where your family house was, or Felbridge was where you were billeted?

Cranmer: No, Felbridge was where my family lived. No, I was billeted right in East Grinstead.

Cohen: So were you able to communicate with your family in Felbridge when you were at the East...

Cranmer: Oh yeah, oh yeah, and you know when I had days off, I could go and uh, stay there. Yeah. In fact, my first love, he, when I was on, uh, Sir [Ted] Oakley, before he did crash, uh he would go stay there, from his billet or what he was so and so. Here we are.

Cohen: Wow oh my. Um, so, how many years were you in the Air Force?

Cranmer: Uh, well I went in, when did I go in?

Allen: We were trying to figure that out.

Cranmer: 1940?

Cranmer: Yeah. And so then, until I uh, got married, uh in what year did I get married.

Allen: Well we were trying to figure that out.

Cranmer: Okay. [Laughter]

Cohen: Was your husband British, or was he you know, Australian, Canadian, or American.

Cranmer: My first husband?

Cohen: Yeah.

Cranmer: Oh, Henry. No he was an American, and he went to Harvard, and had a good uh education and he was working actually in Salt Lake City when the, when England came into the war. And he thought that America might not come into the war, so he went into Canada, and went into the Canadian Air Force. That's when he got sent over to England.

Cohen: Okay. And when was he hit. Like when...

Cranmer: Pardon?

Cohen: Um, when was your husband injured. Was it in a particular bombing?

Allen: Leah?

Cohen: Yes.

Allen: This was the other story she was talking about where she could tell you this whole story of how she met Henry and all, and all about Henry. Eh, because he was an American as she said. He went to Canada, joined the Air Force there, then got shipped over to Britain. Um, because he thought the US should be, should be in the war and should be helping out England, but, so that's why he went north. But that's the whole story about how...

Cranmer: He survived.

Allen: Yeah, about how he survived. So, um--

Cranmer: How he ended up in my hospital.

Allen: Yeah, that's... They met in her hospital, and got married and two kids, but uh, That's another long story.

Cohen: Okay, so I will read it. I will read it. That does sound like quite the story. So when you were...

Cranmer: That other story, the thing that's the most amazing with Henry being in there. He um, a seagull really saved part of his life. It was a seagull settled on him when he was in the dinghy. The others had died. They drank seawater and went over, and he was alone. And the seagull settled, and he waited for a minute, grabbed it, took its head off, drank its blood and ate what was in there. So that's another story.

Cohen: Yeah, like a story of survival. Yeah. When you were working in the baths, did you only treat women um patients, or did you treat men as well. Like, what was the...

Cranmer: Oh... no, men came in, no, no, because there wasn't enough women. Oh no, we had men. We had, oh yes, we had all kinds of strange thing happen. Men, oh yes. I could go on and on.

[Laughter]

Cranmer: Some of our patients, they were invited to Buckingham Palace and they went out for and had tea with the queen.

Cohen: Some of the patients were invited to Buckingham Palace, oh.

Cranmer: Mhm.

Cohen: Were you part of that, as well?

Cranmer: No I didn't go; I wasn't one of those.

Cohen: That's... and what was it like for them? Were they just very happy to see like a, like a pretty young woman you know, working there?

Cranmer: They didn't see much of me. The only thing they saw were my eyes.

Cohen: How was that?

Cranmer: Well, because I had to wear, uh, a white, type turban thing on my head, and mask on my face, so the only thing that came out was my eyes and that's, that's not a whole story, but that's when I had to go and help Henry out. I was up in his bathroom. I was never up there. I was only up there once, because they were short up in that bathroom, and I was usually with women's bathroom, but I had to go up there, and uh, work on him because of his feet, uh, because he lost all his toes and stuff. But any rate, I was working on that, and he, after I finished, he said to the uh, to one of the other nurses, the male nurse, "Who was that?" And they said, "Oh that's Betty from the bathroom, with the women." "Oh," he said, "I fell in love with her eyes." My blues eyes. He said, "I hope she doesn't come back in this. I don't want her seeing me in the bathroom." That was the beginning of the romance.

Cohen: Wow, so, out of curiosity, did you want to continue to study medicine or nursing after, after the war was over?

Cranmer: No, no. My dream was to get married and have children.

Cohen: Okay

Cranmer: I wanted at least six.

Cohen: Well how many children do you have? Is it two?

Cranmer: No, no, six.

Cohen: Oh, okay. Okay six. I didn't... wonderful.

Cranmer: Two from my first marriage, and then uh, four after I married Chappell Cranmer.

Cohen: Oh, so your dream—

Cranmer: I wanted more after we had the six. When the youngest went to school. I said, "How about another baby?" And he said, "We've got six, and I want to educate these six. I want to send them to good universities." And that's that. So he said,

"Why don't you go and do something with somebody else's children?" So that's what I did, I branched out, and went and got a certificate, er ah, went to school for a while, so that I could teach preschool or kindergarten. And I ended up here Granby. [Colorado]

Cohen: So how long have you been living in Granby?

Cranmer: In Granby? We've been living here [inaudible] We moved up here in 19...?

Son: '69. '69, '70 is when you came here. 1970.

Cranmer: Yeah, but Chap came before me. Yeah. 69, 70.

Cohen: Wow. Um, and when you were still in the Air Force, did people talk a lot about what was going on and did they for example did support Churchill? Did they... What were people...

Cranmer: There wasn't a lot because when I was in the... We did do a lot of that when I was training. And then when I was down in the hospital I was talking really more with the patients and what they had gone through. Uh, you know, how they got, how they got burned, or how they got shot down. Or, or, what happened to them. So, that's uh... you know just listened to them, yeah. All right. I just got, where was he from, proposed to me. I says, "No." So uh, that person, you know, had been burned badly, but here we are.

Cohen: Yeah. Well, um, how do you think, being in the military helped prepare you for civilian life?

Cranmer: Well, there's a lot of discipline and Allen can tell you. You have to, you know, you've got a lot of dirty work to do, some of it. Cleaning up other peoples' messes, in toilets, you know. It's not, it's not all cream and cookies and things like that. Don't you think so Allen?

Allen: I would say so.

Cranmer: Yeah, he would say so.

Cohen: Um so, so one concept that the Pritzker Military Museum and Library supports is that of the Citizen Soldier. That were all citizens of a country, and when needed we join the military and make our sacrifices. Um, I don't know, what did you think about your service?

Cranmer: Oh the, what I was doing?

Cohen: Yeah.

Cranmer: Well, you see, mine really, you know mine was more on the medical side, and what were you going to say Allen?

Allen: That you're still in the military, helping out.

Cohen: So what was the moment of which you were the most proud?

Cranmer: Well, I just. I don't know whether I was proud. I was just glad that I was helping, I think.

Cohen: Yeah, that's nice. Is there something that you would like to talk about that we did not yet talk about?

Cranmer: Um, Allen do you think I missed, what have I missed?

Allen: Um, can't think off hand other than, talking more about Henry but we can do that another time. You can, I'll send you the book, and you can read through the book, and then maybe that will raise some more questions, Leah.

Cohen: Okay, we could do that. That's...

Cranmer: Yeah. With Henry. He's on the side of the page. Somebody read my book and thought that was just advertising. They never read the side of that. And I think you know, after all I don't think she should have put it on that side, I think she should have put it in somehow differently, but there we are. But she's the author, so I don't have any say in it.

Cohen: Okay, well I look forward to reading about him. Maybe I'll just ask here, um, how did your brother fare in the war.

Cranmer: Oh, they did. My brother that was in the Royal Corp of Signals, he did go to Italy. Uh, and I think I told you, the other one, he was on a destroyer out there and did well, and then came back to England and got his commission. So then he was then a Lieutenant, but he was in the Battle of Britain. But he was a decoy. They were in a boat, um going down the English Channel and they went a long way away, to try and take them off the boats that were trying to escape, so he was there... on my brother in the navy was not... was very much in D-Day but he survived.

Cohen: Okay, well that's good. The other thing I was wonder about, is, was the house that you normally lived in, the one that was outside of London, was the house

intact um, or had it been bombed. And where did everybody live after the war ended?

Cranmer: No, I think the house that I lived in in London, that survived. Yeah. Well, they were, it was a, well you know the houses attached to each other in a row and uh, yeah, that uh. I hadn't... Because I think somebody went by there, or maybe I went by there now. 55, yeah, 155 Currency Road.

Allen: Yeah, I think we did go there.

Cranmer: But I went there. I went there when I was up in London one time. Yeah, it was fine.

Cohen: Oh, so that's good. I assume your parents had moved back there?

Cranmer: No, they never went back. They sold the house. They moved right... They lived in Chelsea right in London.

Cohen: And had you gotten married right like after the war itself? Like '45?

Allen: Married. When did you get married to Dad? That was 1948.

Cranmer: Yes '48. He helps me. Yeah, dear. Because he asked, that's right, I think I told you. He asked me if I... If he... If he wanted me to get married that October. And I had, you know dated him, gone to symphony concerts, and things like that, and I thought he was nice, but he was kind of quiet and shy, and uh I said, "You know, a couple of years, give me a few years." But my mother and my father were here for another occasion, by, somebody was getting married, and then, um, my uh, yeah, my sister-in-law, they all said, "It'd be great for you to join the family."

Cohen: Oh, wow so they took turns...

Cranmer: I have to admit, I really, they were... I got married to him, I really was not what I call in love with him. I liked him; he was very nice. My family thought it would be great for the children to have a father, so there we are. But then I did fall in love with him. Later on.

Cohen: Later on, so it's all good. Well um, unless there is something else. Do you have something else to add? Otherwise, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Pritzker Military museum and Library for your interview, and of course your service, and help to other. And I will read the chapter, about your brother, and we can speak again.

Cranmer: Yes. Thank you very much for all of time and your curiosity.

Cohen: Thank you.