An Oral History Interview

with

ELMA UDALL (part 6)

conducted by
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Elma Udall Biography

The second of six children, Elma Udall was born on Dec. 23, 1917, in St. Johns, Arizona. She attended Flagstaff Teacher’s College and Brigham Young University, eventually graduating from Arizona State University with a degree in social work.

During World War II she signed up for the Red Cross and served in Africa and the Middle East. Following the war and a brief stint with the FBI, she joined the newly formed CIA and worked in London and Helsinki. She later worked for the Department of State in Moscow, Berlin, Stockholm, Vientiane, and Budapest. She ended her career working directly with Ambassador Kingman Brewster at the Court of St. James in London.
JF: Okay, we’re on Side B now, Tape #57. So he died of natural causes?

EU: Oh, yes. It certainly was a big funeral. I’m sure some of the people came from out of town, the relatives and stuff. I was kind of oblivious. But when anybody died—maybe not little babies and things—but it was a town—lots of times the school closed for the afternoon, some of the stores. Everybody came to all funerals.

JF: Something I meant to ask earlier: Was it called the Barth Mercantile—Solomon Barth’s Market?

EU: Barth Store.

JF: Was it a variety store?

EU: No, there was the Schuster’s [phonetic] on one corner, and the Barth across the street, and then the Andersons and the Whitings. And they were mercantile. I mean, they had groceries, they had shoes, they had cloth, they had, you know, bits of this and that—nails and whatever.

JF: I don’t know whether this was your generation, or your father’s generation. I had read that the Barth Store was for a while the only place that got the newspaper, and that people would gather there to talk news.

EU: Oh, really? I don’t remember that. That must have been earlier on. The Barths were there first. Solomon Barth brought the Mexicans over from New Mexico and settled in there. So I’m sure the Barth Store was there first, of all the others. But later on, in my day, you had other stores. See, the Barths catered a lot to the Mexican people, too. See, Sol Barth’s wife was a Mexican. But his son, Jake, was on the highway commission, but he also ran the store a lot, and he was a great guy, everybody liked him. Sol had gone. It was his sons that were running things in my day.

JF: You left home in 1938?

EU: No, I graduated from high school in ’35.

JF: Burr and Eloise were so much younger, did that affect your relationship at all?

EU: No, because I went home often— I mean, from Flagstaff, yes.

JF: I really only have one question before I want to kind of merge into what you did after high school. And that is, just around World War II, you had left; I think Stewart and
Morris were already at the University of Arizona. I just wonder how your mother dealt with the empty nest syndrome.

EU: Well, I think that Mom and Dad had each other, so it wasn’t empty.

JF: How about the labor shortage?

EU: Well, I think that…. You see, we went to Phoenix in ’47. The judge was elected in ’46, so we moved to Phoenix.

JF: But prior to that time….

EU: It was after the war.

JF: But during the war, wasn’t there a period of time where most of you would have been gone?

EU: Oh, sure. Eloise—let’s see—well, all right, I’ll go back. I went to Flagstaff a year, and I went to BYU [Brigham Young University] a year, and I could never decide—I didn’t want to be a nurse or a teacher, and there wasn’t much else. Anyway, I took secretarial stuff, and I was good at that. But going on to school after that didn’t interest me too much.

JF: Inez was married in 1940, so she would have been gone.

EU: Yes, she was. But then during the war, she came back and lived in St. Johns and lived with Mom and Dad and taught there.

JF: So she was with them. Was Eloise with them?

EU: Eloise graduated from high school in ’42, and she went to the university and graduated in ’46 and got married. Her husband had been in the navy, and they went out to California, and he went to Cal Tech, and she taught. Burr graduated in ’45, and he was seventeen, and the war was ending, and he was determined to go. Mom and Dad signed, and he enlisted. He was in for eighteen months or more and went to the Philippines. You had to have guys going out to replace the ones that were coming home.

JF: That must have been nerve wracking, I would think, for your mother. She had three sons in the military.

EU: Well, it wasn’t just you. There were a lot of people there. We sent a lot of guys off to the war. And there was three or four or five of the mothers, and every Sunday after Sunday school, they would have a mothers’ meeting, and they’d all get together, and they’d talk about what they’d heard from their sons, and all this sort of thing. A lot of them rode horses. They used to go riding and console each other. But it was something
you took in your stride. The communication wasn’t all that great, but it was wonderful when you did get a letter.

JF: Did St. Johns lose any people in the war?

EU: Yes. A Greer boy in my class was killed. But Eloise’s Warren’s group, they got hit quite hard. I can’t tell you how many. Stewart went to Gila a year, and then he went to the university. Then he went on a mission for two years.

JF: He was on a mission for two years?

EU: They all are. And I think he came back around ’40, ’41, I guess, and then the war hit. He wasn’t home very long, and then the war hit. Like most of them, they all went out and enlisted. And he didn’t come back ’til ’45. Morris had two years down at the university. And because of his eye, they weren’t going to take him. He went down and tried to enlist, and you know how they check your eyes, put this thing over….  

JF: Put your hand over one eye?

EU: Over one eye, and you read the chart. And then over the other. Well, he memorized the chart, so that was no problem. But every tenth guy or something, they would look at with an instrument. And they hit that glass and said, “Damn you, get outta here!” But anyway, he was quite depressed, because he couldn’t go. But not too long after that, they instigated a program for limited service. He wasn’t going to get a gun and go shoot, but there were plenty of things for them to do. And so I don’t know whether they drafted him for that, or whether he enlisted, but he then joined.

JF: What did he do, primarily?

EU: Well, he was in Fort Douglas in Utah, got acquainted with all the relatives. And he did administrative office stuff. But he and Stewart both had pre-law before they went to the military. And of course he was sent—well, there was an officers candidate school in Fargo, North Dakota, for limited service, and he went to that and graduated. Then after that, he was sent to Louisiana, and worked in the Judge Advocate [General’s Corp] with the blacks—you know all that story.

JF: I actually don’t know that much about it.

EU: Well, I’m not going to tell you, because I wasn’t there, I don’t know, but it’s all written up.

JF: I know he worked with blacks, I think, with some trials, defending them.

EU: Yes, he got involved in that. And then, after that, the war was sort of ending, but they were getting ready to go overseas, he was being sent. There again, you had to have
these guys go out to replace the others. So on VJ Day, they sailed out of Seattle, heading for the war that was ending—which was kind of depressing.

JF: That must have been frustrating.

EU: Here was the whole city celebrating, and they sailed into the setting sun, on their way out.

JF: Was the war over when Burr went? It wasn’t quite, was it?

EU: No.

JF: So that probably was a pretty similar time when he went overseas.

EU: Yes. Well, he graduated in May. VE Day was in May, but VJ Day was not until August.

JF: Did Mo go to the Philippines also?

EU: No, he was out in the Pacific. Was it Guam? Iwo Jima? He was in the islands there.

JF: So he was the only one.

EU: And I think they were bored stiff. I mean, there wasn’t much for them to do.

JF: Did the war affect St. Johns—other than the obvious, with the men gone—did the war affect St. Johns in any other way? Were there food shortages?

EU: Well, gas rationing. Because Dad was traveling around, holding court, I think he got a little extra. Yes, you were strapped for gas. I wasn’t there, see, but the food that was rationed. And I don’t know, toilet paper got awfully hard to find, but anybody that ever found any, when they’d go traveling anyplace else, they’d always come back with a load full of toilet paper. I remember them talking about that. I think things slowed up, but I don’t think there was any great shortages. I mean, people had to be careful, but you made do. Levis went to war, and I know that you couldn’t get any more Levis. And Burr was growing bigger, and here was Stewart and Morris’ Levis hanging in the closet, and eventually he started wearing them. When the war was ending, they were coming home, and Mom didn’t have any Levis for them. Old Jake Barth called her and said, “I just got a shipment in. You’d better get up here.” So I think she had some new ones for them by the time they got home.

JF: This is something I just thought of. Where did Mo learn to cut hair, was it in the military?
EU: Yes. Well, he must have. I think he just picked up scissors and…. I guess what was making them all so mad that the price was going up. So anyway….

JF: Just a practical move.

EU: Yes. I mean, there’s the picture of him cutting Stewart’s hair.

JF: That’s what I flashed on, was that photograph.

EU: That was the day Eloise got married in ’46, and then I think he went down to the university and cut quite a lot of hair.

JF: Well, this is probably a good time to take a break. Would you like to?

EU: Okay. [tape paused]

JF: Okay, we’re back now after a break. Elma, what I’d like to talk about now is, we’ve gone through your childhood experience up through high school. What I’d like to talk to you about now is what you did after graduating from high school, which was 1935. What did you do after graduation?

EU: I went up to Flagstaff for a year, and I went to BYU for a year, and then I decided I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I don’t remember exactly what year or anything like that, but in that period, I…. Let’s see, well, I’d always go home for the summer.

JF: Did you major in anything in particular?

EU: You know, the first two years, you take a lot of this, that, and the other. But yes, I was taking shorthand and typing and all that stuff, and I was qualified to be a secretary. Anybody could be a secretary, with so much training. And I could get a job. I think I worked for the county agent there in St. Johns—he was a friend of the family—for a while. And then he kind of talked to the guys in Tucson. Anyway, I wanted to go to Tucson. I had friends there, and I wanted to work down there. And so I think I worked in the agricultural extension service for quite a bit. But then before the war—I don’t remember whether it was ’41 or the end of ’40—Ryan—they were a primary training school in San Diego, and here was the war looming. And anyway, they moved over to Tucson.

JF: And that was Ryan Air Field?

EU: The Ryan Air Field in San Diego now is where the Ryan Training School—they were training—to be a pilot you had to go primary, middle, and advanced. Anyway, it was a primary training school, but they decided to move inland, so they came to Tucson, and they had Ryan Field. They trained out there. It was on the way to Ajo, that road out there. And they were looking for people in Tucson to work for them, and so Hattie and Merle, the girls I was living with, we all decided we might as well get involved with war
work, so we worked out there as secretaries. It was very primitive. I mean, they were just setting the whole thing up—lots of dust and what have you—and bringing in the cadets and all that. And we were getting acquainted with how the military does things. And I think we worked there for about a year and a half or something, and then Hattie and Merle had both studied at the university, but didn’t have any money. They wanted to be nutritionists, so they had a lot of chemistry and stuff. So anyway, they decided they wanted to go up to Berkeley, where maybe they could get a job to go on to school. So they left and I went on working. And then they kept telling me, “It’s great up here. Come work with us. There’s a job,” etc., etc. So I decided, “Well, why not?” I’d always been interested in San Francisco. So I went and they were living in Berkeley, and they were working at the E.O. Lawrence Laboratory, on the bomb.

JF: Oh! Okay. Did they know that’s what they were doing?

EU: Well, it was all very hush-hush and what have you, but they, with their chemistry that they had…. See, when they’d smash the atom, it didn’t come off clean—it would have to go through this chemical process—and that’s what they were doing. And so they were looking for secretaries, so I got the job real easy, and I worked there, and it was all this scientific stuff, and they had a lot of code words. I did beautiful work, but I didn’t have a clue much what it was all about. (laughter)

JF: So your friends were Hattie and….

EU: Merle.

JF: Where did you know them from?

EU: Well, they were [from] Tucson. They were Mormon girls that I’d known, that I met down there, I think. Anyway, we became very good friends. We had a house, so we roomed together and all that sort of stuff.

JF: They were chemists?

EU: Well, they’d had a lot of chemistry because they were studying nutrition. They hadn’t graduated or anything, but they had enough chemistry to get these jobs. We were still in Tucson when Pearl Harbor [happened]. This was after Pearl Harbor. And they were beginning to put this whole thing into effect, you see. And I think Lawrence had got the Nobel Prize in the thirties, sometime, but they were playing that down because this was all now hush-hush. But Oak Ridge was underway. See, they would do the experiments and all these sort of tests and stuff they needed to do in Berkeley, and then they’d go back to Oak Ridge and put it into effect. And so the people in Berkeley were having to go back and spend three months there. They weren’t very happy, because that was pretty hellish back there.

JF: This was Oak Ridge…
EU: Tennessee, where they were producing the uranium that made the bomb. We had clearances and all that sort of stuff. So it came their turn to go, and they kept stalling, they didn’t want to go, and they kept using me as the excuse, because I said, “If you go back there, I’ll go back to Tucson.” Anyway, one day the Number Two man walked in the office—I was in kind of a secretarial pool—and said, “Who’s Miss Udall?” And I said, “I am.” And he said, “Well, we need these girls to go to the site”—that’s what it was called—“and we could use you. Will you consider going?” I said okay. So anyway, they’d already left, and I had to get ready and go. And so I took the train out of San Francisco, and went to Chicago, I guess, and then took another train down to Knoxville. The train from San Francisco comes in—the Union Pacific—to Ogden, Utah, and it stopped there for quite a while. See, the train from Salt Lake comes up and meets it there. And so I got off the train and was walking up and down. It wasn’t too well lighted, but I was walking up and down the platform there, and there were these two ladies standing there. I went by once, then went by again—it was Eleanor Roosevelt and a friend.

JF: Oh, you’re kidding!

EU: They were standing there. You know, she didn’t have any security—who cared? I mean, she never did [have security]. But I went up to her, and I said, “Mrs. Roosevelt, I read your column, I’m a great admirer of you, and agree with what you say,” etc., etc. She said, “Thank you, dear.” It was not long or anything like that.

JF: What a person to meet!

EU: But I spoke my piece, and she spoke hers, and then we got back on the train and departed.

JF: How exciting!

EU: But Oak Ridge had been cut right out of the wilds there. Some of the buildings were about a mile long. And of course all this uranium comes in by train. But what goes out, goes out in a suitcase. So we worked there for three months, and it was, as I say, pretty primitive. We were in dormitories, and they’d try to keep boards so you could walk to the dormitory out to the road to get the bus, but the boards would keep sinking in the mud. It was in the spring. I came out of there with one pair of shoes. I threw all the rest of them away. But we had quite an interesting time. We went up to Gatlinburg, and up in the Smokies once in a while when they let us go. Very interesting people there. You had a lot of engineers, you had scientists. You didn’t wear name badges—you wore badges where you were supposed to go work. So we had a lot of friends. I didn’t know anything about what was going on, because of what I was working on, but the people I associated [with], I got the picture. But of course this was all hush-hush, and I think our mail had to go to Berkeley. My family would write to Berkeley, and then Berkeley would send it on.

JF: To you?
EU: Yes. Then we came home. After our three months, we came home on the train and had leave. Dad kind of asked me at one point, “What are you doin’ back there?” And I thought, well, I could trust him, I could tell him a few things. But then he decided to have a nap, so I didn’t bother. But anyway, we went on back to San Francisco. Merle was married, and her husband was off in the war. But Hattie and I allowed as to how—I wanted to go with Red Cross. I had always figured, if there’s a war during my lifetime, I’m going. You could join the WACs or the WAVES or whatever, and volunteer to go overseas. But the one way you knew you were going overseas was to go with the Red Cross.

JF: Why did you want to go overseas?

EU: I wanted to be in the war. I wanted to travel. I wanted to see the world.

JF: So part of it was wanderlust?

EU: I mean, the judge used to say to me—your brothers, and brother-in-law, everybody is going to war—“What about you? What would you like to do?”

JF: So your father encouraged you?

EU: Oh, yes. I mean, there was great need for war work, so there was plenty of that. But we’d done that. So we joined, Hattie and I. We signed up, and you had to go through all this rigmarole.

JF: Where did you sign up?

EU: In San Francisco. See, we were working in Berkeley, so they had offices. But you signed up for International Red Cross overseas assignment. And they sent us back to Washington, and we were there for about a month, and sort of orientation and getting your uniforms. They were very particular how your uniforms fit, and we were supposed to look real chic and everything.

JF: Had you signed up for a particular corps, like the administrative corps?

EU: No, no, you just signed up for Red Cross, and then they put you wherever they need you. It’s like the military and the state department and everybody else. So you don’t know where you’re going. There were girls who did recreation, and there were girls who did hospital recreation and that sort of stuff. And then they needed administrative people, which was me. And so we went back to Washington, and then we had to go get our uniforms, and you couldn’t go unless you were wearing a girdle. We were all wearing girdles anyway.

JF: Those were terrible times. (laughs)
EU: Well, it improved your looks, I’ll tell ya’.

JF: It did.

EU: And so we got winter uniforms and summer uniforms. Then when we sort of worked at the stage of finishing up the course and getting ready to go, they had a little ceremony, and here comes my friend, Mrs. Roosevelt, she’s the speaker. And she was very good. She was saying how great it was that we were going, and we were needed and all that. But she said, “C’mon now, girls, don’t let it go to your head. You go over there, there’s very few of you. To all these men, you represent American women. All of them are going to love you and enjoy you and be friends with you and everything else. But remember, it’s not because it’s you, it’s because of what you represent.”

JF: Interesting.

EU: Very good advice. So then all you knew was that you were going to either a hot assignment or a cold.

JF: And what did that mean?

EU: Well, you might be going to Alaska, or you might be going to the South Pacific. You had to get extra uniforms.

JF: So it was the temperature, not what was going on there.

EU: No, no. It was to be ready for it. So if you were going to hot, you had to have extra summer clothes. If you were going to cold, you had your extra—to begin with, you just got one uniform of each, but then when you were going, why, okay. So Hattie came home with a winter uniform assignment. I got the other kind. Anyway, so we knew we were going.

JF: You knew you were going different places.

EU: Oh, yes. And so then you started getting your orders and packing up. I knew that we were shipping out to go to Charleston, South Carolina. And Hattie was going to Washington or something. She was going that way.

And so there were eight of us, and we get on the train and go to Charleston, South Carolina, and board an empty hospital ship. See, they brought all the wounded home, and they were going back for more. There were eight of us. Most of them were—well, they were doing both—there were social workers. There were two girls that were social workers, older. Then the other girls I think were recreation—you know, USO clubs and all that sort of stuff. And me. But you were all supposed to be kind of interchangeable. Whatever they needed you to do, you did.
So we got on this hospital ship, and they gave us a state room—well, whatever—an officers’ ward for twelve people, but there were only eight of us, so we had a little extra room. We were the passengers or whatever, and then there was the doctors and the nurses and the corpsmen and all that. The ship had red crosses on it and was lighted. We didn’t have a convoy or anything like that. We were headed out on our own. I guess the head colonel, the doctor, had a pistol, somebody said, I don’t know. (chuckles)

JF: I’ll bet that made you feel secure! (laughs)

EU: We weren’t worried. And so then we crossed from Charleston to—we went through Gibraltar, stopped there.

JF: How long did that take?

EU: Over a week. It was winter.

JF: Pretty rough?

EU: Yes. And there weren’t any seasick pills either, so you just did the best you could. But it wasn’t so rough that everybody got sick or anything, but there was a lot of activity. You played cards and had happy hour and stuff like that to keep going. And I guess the nurses and doctors, they were boning up on their courses and all that sort of stuff. And then we went into Oran—we stopped there for several hours. I don’t think they let us off.

JF: That was Iran?

EU: Oran, Algeria. And then we went on to Naples. That’s where their headquarters was.

JF: The International Red Cross?

EU: No, I mean that’s where the ship was going to get more patients, was to Naples. Once we got on board, we knew that’s where we were going. But they also gave us an envelope with our assignment, and Naples was cold, so we knew we weren’t going to Europe. But they didn’t double envelope it, so two of us—or maybe there were three—we put it over the lamp. Then we had to keep quiet. Anyway, then we found out we were assigned to the Red Cross, the headquarters of the Middle East—Africa.

JF: Why was it a secret where you were going?

EU: It was war, my dear. All the ships…. You didn’t want the enemy to come and getcha. None of the ships that took off….

JF: They didn’t want you to know so that you couldn’t tell someone.
EU: Exactly. And they censored your letters—or didn’t even mail them, if you tried to write letters. I mean, you had to do everything through the military, so there was no way you could sneak a letter to the post office or anything like that. I mean, troop movements—to let the enemy know troop movements was—well, you know, that was the one thing you did not do. Because, you know, the U-boats and all that stuff were out there. But they were more in the North Atlantic, see, and we were in the south. And the African war was over, and they’d already moved into Italy.

So we got to Naples, and we got off, and I think we had three or four days there. They put us in some kind of a billet in town. It was pretty cold. We had time to sightsee a little. By then, in Naples, the war had moved on—it was in northern Italy, it wasn’t there. And then they arranged things, and we finally flew with the RAF [Royal Air Force] from Naples to Cairo. And we were allowed a musette bag. It was not exactly a backpack, but that was the thing you carried with you. Then you had a suitcase. And then you had a trunk. And you had to have certain things in it, and if there was a little extra room, you could throw in some personal stuff.

But anyway, since we were flying, we took our suitcase and our musette bag, but our heavier stuff was to go by ship. So we flew to Tripoli and landed. Man, that was a cold flight.

JF: The flight was cold, too?

EU: Well, those planes had no heat at all. One of the British somebodies let me have his big coat. And I’m telling you, it was the nicest, warmest thing. Anyway, we stopped there, and then we got to Cairo. And then two stayed there, and five of us, I think—maybe three stayed there—were sent to Tehran. See, it was the Persian Gulf Command. The object of the exercise was sending supplies into Russia. That’s one place where the British and the Americans and the Russians all worked together. The British were in charge of security. They brought in airplane parts by ship, down to Abadan and Khorramshahr. All kinds of material. The train would go up to the end, Tabriz, one of those towns up there, and then the Russians would pick it up and take it on in. Tehran was the headquarters. We lived with the nurses. We were quartered with them.

JF: What was the role of the Red Cross in Tehran then?

EU: Well, they had clubs. It was recreation. You had these social workers that were working in the hospital. But it was the headquarters of the whole area. Let’s see, I stayed in Tehran, and so did Rena. I think the others went south to work. They had troops all over, and the purpose was running this train, so that they had clubs and things for the guys, and doughnuts and what have you. But the head man was in Tehran at the Red Cross, and I worked as his secretary, among other things. But if there was a problem at home, if a family needed to get word to their son in Tehran or in wherever, there was a Red Cross representative—my mother was the one in St. Johns. You would get all the information in a telegram and send it to the Red Cross headquarters in Washington. It would then go into the military communications, and wind up with the Red Cross.
headquarters in Tehran—or wherever it was—these welfare cases. Or if they needed to get in touch with the family in the military of these—if somebody was injured or there was a problem, they’d send it back through.

See, the military—we were part of it because they supplied everything we needed. The military would rather have the Red Cross do this part of it, and they could do the military part of it. The messages would all come into Tehran for that whole Persian Gulf Command, and then I would sort them out. I knew where the different regiments were, and all that stuff, and the Red Cross people down south. And then I would redo the messages and send ones here and there, that needed to. I was the—whatever you call it. Anyway….

JF: You were sort of the command central.

EU: Well, for the messages. Then there was administrative work and a lot of other stuff. But then if I wanted to go down to the clubs in the evening, I could, but I didn’t have to. And so I had the best of both. But some of the girls, they had their schedule, and they worked out, and they—you know, the Red Cross had lots of supplies for the GIs with games and all sorts of stuff—books.

JF: Were you able to be a tourist at all while you were there?

EU: Well, of course we weren’t fighting a war in that area. One of the old colonels arranged a trip for a lot of GIs, and some of those guys had been there for years. Then he took two or three of us in a weapons carrier, and we went up to the Caspian Sea.

JF: Just for sightseeing?

EU: Yes. We were gone kind of a long weekend, I guess. They used to send—it was kind of a joke—but anyway, they used to send trucks of GIs for leave, and they would go down to Iraq, down to Basra and that area, and bring back citrus.

JF: I’ll bet that was a treat!

EU: Yes! And we were never invited on those trips, but they used to go orange picking. I mean, these guys, boredom was the problem. They needed something else to do. And so on it went. So we were there when the war ended—VE Day.

JF: On VE Day you were in Tehran. What was that like?

EU: Well, it was quite exciting. But, you see, the terrible part was that Roosevelt had died, a couple of weeks before that—maybe it was three. So the flag was at half staff, and we were kind of—there wasn’t too much activity, because of that.

JF: What was it like being overseas and learning that your president had died during the war?
EU: Well, it was pretty traumatic. It took a long time to know all the details and everything, but the word was spread very fast, and of course there was lots of talk, and we were all very interested in what happens next, and all this sort of stuff. There was a British embassy, British group there, and the Russians, and us. It was the headquarters for the thing. And so we were still in mourning for the president when VE Day happened. And to begin with, we thought, “Do we celebrate? What do we do?” But anyway, of course we did. We went over to the Russian Embassy. Man, they were drinking all these Americans under the table! (laughter)

JF: Vodka, primarily?

EU: Wow! Yes. The Russians eat all the time—they have a big table of stuff and they eat while they drink—but not those Americans. Anyway, everybody was all very happy and dancing and what have you. It got a little rough for me, so I departed at one point. So then, I guess that was in May. Roosevelt died in April, and this was in May. So the war is over, but you’ve still got to wind it down. But anyway, the whole atmosphere changed, the war was over. We’re now going home. But we hadn’t been there—I’d been there about eight months I guess. See, I didn’t get over there ‘til ’44. And so you went home on points. The longer you were there, and all, you got to go first. We were low on the totem pole. They were closing up our area, so then we got sent back to Cairo. And there the head of the whole Middle East Africa Theater—Cairo was. So I worked with the head man there, as his secretary.

JF: Now, when you say the head man worked for Tehran and Cairo, would that be the director of the Red Cross for that area?

EU: Yes.

JF: So you must have been pretty good.

EU: Well, any secretary is pretty good. I mean, it wasn’t—I was available, I was sent for that assignment. So it was interesting being in Cairo.

JF: That’s what I wanted to ask you. I mean, both Cairo and Tehran are a long ways from St. Johns.

EU: Yes.

JF: What was your reaction, what were your impressions when you first got there?

EU: Well, Tehran, I’ve been back since, and I didn’t recognize a thing. It’s at the foot of the Elburz Mountains, and it, according to the Koran, they were in the thirteenth century, as far as I’m concerned, that’s where they were. They had water—they called it the “jube”—running down both sides of the street. And if the people in the house wanted some, they came out with a pitcher. People would be out there washing their feet—and
this was the water. But we had—the camp was out of town, up against the mountain, and that’s where we were. I think there were one or two restaurants downtown where we used to go. But it was very kind of primitive and Middle Eastern—it was very deserty too. See, you had the mountains, but then you had all this desert. So when Roosevelt and Churchill and Stalin met in Tehran—the Tehran Conference, which was a year or two before I got there—and Roosevelt was there—he got in one day, and the next day when they started the conference, he made the famous statement, “When I woke up this morning, I thought I was in Arizona.”

JF: I hadn’t heard that one!

EU: So every GI I ran into, “Does this look like Arizona?!” I know what he was talking about, the terrain and everything. I mean, we think we’ve got desert, but you ain’t seen nothin’, compared to—they’ve got a little camel thorn here and there. They don’t have all this desert flora and fauna that we do. It’s desert.

JF: It’s really desert.

EU: Yes.

JF: How about culturally? Western women and Middle Eastern women were culturally in very different places at that time, weren’t they?

EU: Well, we didn’t socialize too much. There was one family, or two, who were quite modern. This one man had some of us to dinner one night, and his two daughters had been to school in Europe. One had been in London, and one in Paris, I think. So they were Western. But the people walking down the street….

JF: You didn’t really have. . . .

EU: We didn’t have any language. We didn’t have any reason. You know, with the military, whatever we had, was out at the base. And so you weren’t encouraged to—I mean, there wasn’t really much to do. We could go to the muski [phonetic] and shop and stuff like that. But you didn’t just go wander around town. We didn’t really want to.

JF: Where did you live during that time, at the camp?

EU: Yes, with the nurses, in the barracks.

JF: Okay, and what were the accommodations like?

EU: Barracks! They’d thrown up these barracks. But they did have some big oil stoves, and we got to be pretty warm. And the showers were pretty primitive. The military, I hand it to ‘em, you have all the basics—nothing fancy, but you have what you need.
JF: There were some WAC troops there at the time—Women’s Air Corps—that were in Tehran and Cairo, in 1945 or so. Did you run into [them]?

EU: There weren’t any WACs in Tehran. There were in Cairo, but there weren’t any in Tehran.

JF: Okay. I thought it said that they’d sent some....