

## Bette C. Horstman

World War II
U.S. Army-Medical Corps
Pacific
Physical Therapist
148th General Hospital, Saipan
1st Lieutenant

### Bette C. Horstman

Veterans
History
Project
Transcript

Interview conducted June 19, 2014

Niles Public Library
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#### **Veterans History Project Transcript**

<u>Veteran</u>: Bette Horstman <u>Rank</u>: 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant

Branch of Service: U.S. Army Theater: World War II - Pacific

Unit: Medical Corps, 148th General Hospital, Saipan

Interview Date: June 19, 2014, 1:30-3:30 p.m. Place: Board Room, Niles Public Library

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

"This Veteran's History Project interview is being conducted on Thursday, June 19th, in 2014 here at the Niles Public Library. My name is Neil O'Shea, and I am a member of the Reference Staff, and I am privileged to be speaking with Mrs. Bette C. Horstman. Mrs. Horstman was born on December 6, 1921 in Hibbing, Minnesota and now lives in Morton Grove, Illinois. Mrs. Horstman has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project and it is a banner day for the project here at the Niles Public Library because we are interviewing two American heroes who were married to each other and Mr. Henry Horstman is present here at the table in the board room while we're conducting this interview." (Interviewer's words)

So Mrs. Horstman when did you enter the service of the United States?

I was in Physical Therapy school when the war started and it seemed like the thing to do. There were 32 in my class at school. I had chosen the school of physical therapy, probably because I am frankly afraid of needles which stopped me from becoming a doctor so I chose physical therapy. (Veteran's words)

In your class of 32 were there half men and half women?

No, my school was very selective. Probably in this day and age they could be sued for discrimination. But they only took a limited amount of men because they assumed the men who entered our field would immediately go in to private practice instead of working in hospitals. I think there was one man out of 32.

So this was after high school, then?

No, I attended and graduated from the University of Michigan. From there I went to Mayo in Rochester, Minnesota.

This medical training school that you attended for physical therapy,

The University of Michigan did not yet have a physical therapy curriculum so I had to look elsewhere. I looked at the University of Wisconsin but that was in a big city and I did not want that so I chose Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. I completed my training at the Mayo Clinic taking the Physical Therapy curriculum under the Medical School.

So you were originally from Minnesota?

My family moved to Illinois when I was six so I had lived in the Chicago area since I was six, then I went to Ann Arbor for my B.S. intending to go on into some medical field. My father wanted me to be a dentist. But I didn't like dentistry. I didn't like x-ray because there were no hands on with people, so I chose physical therapy. There were limited schools at that time for physical therapy. I graduated from Ann Arbor and then I went into physical therapy.

And most of the ladies in that class went into the service?

The entire class went in all but two people and they couldn't go into the service because they were Dominican nuns so the whole class went in. The sole male in my class could go into physical therapy in the service. He could go in but he would not be commissioned so he would have gone in probably as a sergeant or something.

At that time that was the Army Medical Corps?

Right, but we were under the auspices of the Nursing Corps.

And you achieved the rank of 1st Lieutenant?

Correct, we all went in as  $2^{nd}$  Lieutenants, and then with additional training and time in the service, we could be promoted.

Did you have additional training in the Nursing Corps, beyond that at Mayo?

Yes, they sent us to Houston, to Brooke General Hospital, in Texas where we received additional training, mainly amputee and burn training.

Did you find that you learned a lot there or that you already knew it?

Yes, I was appalled because of the number of amputations and burn patients. We received specialized training in burns which came in handy later when I was in the South Pacific.

So you had three months at Brooke General Hospital in San Antonio, and then you were sent to?

We were sent to a General Hospital in Longview, Texas, for six months. And from Longview we went to Ft. Lewis, Seattle. There we had to remain on base until noon with added training. After

12 o'clock we were not apparently going to be shipped out. We could go into town and do whatever we wanted until 8AM the next day.

I spent literally every afternoon at the base bowling alley. I liked bowling. The day that I shipped out I bowled very well. I've never done as well. I bowled 243.

We didn't know where we were going. We were from all over the country. We thought we were going to a cold climate because they were issuing us this cold weather gear and teaching us how to hold a rifle, use a rifle and gas masks.

And did you know that you were going to ship out that day?

No I didn't know until I was told the following morning.

Did you find life in the nursing corps, different? Was it a big change for you?

It was a significant change. It was very regimented. I was not used to being told that I had to go to breakfast between so and so hours and the same thing for other meals. And the food was appalling. Horrible, basically when I was overseas not in the United States.

And the therapists all got along well with one another or were there different types of people it took a while to get used to?

Yes, we got along.

And that training was because you might have to fire the rifle?

Yes, and they taught us how to crawl. I thought "what is this crawling for?" - just crawling like through a tunnel. This was at Ft. Lewis before we shipped out.

So if you are a good bowler, are you a good shot. Does it follow?

I don't think so. And I am near-sighted. I had actually wanted to go in the Navy, and I took the Navy test. This is before I enlisted in the Army. And the Navy rejected me because my vision was poor. I said, "What's that got to do with Physical Therapy?" I really wanted the Navy because I looked better in blue. When they rejected me, I accepted the Army. Two weeks after I took my oath of office in the Army, the Navy waiver came through but it was too late so I spent all my time in the Army Medical Corps.

So when you and your fellow therapists nurses were thinking that you were going to a cold climate, could that have been Europe? Not the Pacific?

I thought we were going to Europe.

And then when you heard you were going to the Pacific...

I finally found out when we landed in Hawaii. No, I had no idea. They didn't tell us at Ft. Lewis. They gave us an envelope which we couldn't open. It was to be given to our commanding officer. I was on a train for a very short time and then on a ship. For at least four days I was as sick as a dog. My roommates moved me to the lower bunk because I was vomiting so consistently. It was a miserable, miserable trip. I ended up in Hawaii and was sent to a clinic in "Mosquito Gulch," located in Oahu. It was filled with Italian prisoners of war.

#### Italian prisoners of war in Hawaii?

In Hawaii, yes, most of them had had malaria so I guess they came from Africa. I don't know since I didn't speak Italian, communication was tough. They were poor patients because they saw no reason to get well - no motivation. I was there six weeks and then told I had to report to Hickam Air Base. There was one other therapist there and the rest were five or six nurses. I don't know how many hours we were in the air, but we landed on Johnson Island about one or two in the morning. The field was brightly lit, and all the soldiers were out there. I couldn't figure out. When we got off the plane, we actually landed to have something to eat. I said to someone in the mess hall, "What are all the GIs doing there?" "They want to see American women. They hadn't seen American women in months and months." We were only there long enough to eat and I guess for the plane to change pilots.

Next we landed on Guam. I was there for one day, and then they flew me to Saipan, which was not very far from Guam. I was at Saipan the rest of the war. As the war wound down, I volunteered for Japan, but they wouldn't let me go because I was the only physical therapist on the island.

When I first got to Saipan, I was at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Station Hospital. They had minor wounds, fractures, sprains, things of that sort. The major wounds went to the General Hospital on the island. I believe there were two General Hospitals, one Army, one Navy. I was at the station hospital for months before being transferred to the 5<sup>th</sup> Convalescent which was the rehabilitation hospital.

Then the war was winding down and headed for Japan. At the 5<sup>th</sup> Convalescent Hospital the morale was terrible at the Station Hospital among the American GIs because a rumor went through the Army. They knew something was coming. What was coming turned out to be Iwo Jima and so obviously the American GI did not want to get well because if he got well he was going on to further action. So it was very difficult to be a physical therapist, to try and motivate them to walk or strengthen their arm or legs because they absolutely did not want to get well. So it was a relief to be transferred to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital where it was acute care, major fractures, things of that nature that we treated. If they were seriously wounded, like Hal (Mr. Horstman was in Germany, head and back injuries) they would be flown out or taken out by water, back to the United States. Morale was better and attached to that hospital was a prison ward where I had Japanese prisoners of war. They were fantastic patients. They absolutely refused to believe that the war was over plus they were Imperial Marines. I don't remember the height. They had to be almost six feet to be in the Imperial Marines which was very tall for the Japanese.

We were given a book which I still have, a primer on how to converse with the Japanese and I still remember the word for pain "EV-A" I could never, I won't say never but I could say rarely did a Japanese prisoner of war say "EV-A." Their tolerance for pain was very high. Those days in physical therapy we would force or stretch to get movement. Today we do it differently. They would never say "EV-A." I'd have to read the body language to see if I was hurting them. There would be the sweat, the redness, the flushing, the grimness of the mouth, but they would never admit to pain. They were fantastic patients. I am sure today people would be appalled if I said my best patients in the war were Japanese prisoners of war, honestly, it's true. But then on the other hand you recognize that the American GI did not have the motivation to get well; he'd go right out into battle. It was different motivation on the two parts.

So you were in Saipan then when the bombs were dropped?

Yes.

So that must have been good news that the war was coming to an end.

Yes, the bomb was loaded on an island we could see in the distance — Tinian, seven nautical miles away. It was good news. To this day I remember the smell of burning flesh. The planes coming in would have injured or would crash on landing. We'd get these terrible burn patients, but not for long, because then they'd airlift them back to the states.

When I came out of the service, after a hospital stay, I went to work at a new hospital opening in Park Ridge, Illinois private practice and then began teaching weekends for the Illinois Department of Public Health what we call restorative nursing. I would teach nurses rehab techniques. We were at a restaurant in Des Plaines when a plane crash-landed. It had just taken off from O'Hare and crash-landed. We immediately ran out into the street, Oakton Street, which is not that far from O'Hare. I immediately flashed right back to Saipan with the smell of burning flesh. It was terrible.

What year might that crash have been?

I believe in the 70's. It was a major air crash. I think it was an American Airlines that crashed shortly after take-off. They all perished. (Perhaps, May 25, 1979)

And the food in Saipan wasn't very good.

Horrible. I blossomed up from a 110 to 140 because I lived on the chocolate milk, avocados and pineapples. My mother was shipping me food. And to this day I cannot eat lamb because all we had was mutton, mutton.

Yes, strong tasting.

Terrible, terrible food

Were there ever any USO shows or visiting entertainers on Saipan?

We had some, nothing major that I can think of, no major entertainers, no, not really. Our biggest form of entertainment was Officers' Clubs where they would have non-commissioned GI bands.

So were you allowed to fraternize with other male officers?

Male officers, but not the non-commissioned GIs. I could not go out on the island without two GIs, both carrying weapons, as if the Japanese were going to capture me. Forget it. Our compound, of Quonset huts was ringed by a fence of probably 8 feet to keep the Japanese out. At that time there were just eight other nurses, and one Red Cross and myself, females in that compound. But the Japanese were not interested in breaking into our Quonset huts; they were interested in breaking into the kitchen for food because they were starving in caves on the island.

It was very restricted on the island. As I said, I couldn't go anywhere without two men escorting me.

You mentioned that your mother sent you packages of food from home. So was it relatively easy to stay in touch with people back home with mail?

Right, it was very easy except I sent tons of pictures that my mother never received because they were apparently confiscated.

Because of censoring?

Probably the pictures of Japanese two-toed shoes and helmets we'd see on the beach, of the barges, landing craft that was still cluttering the beaches. I liked beaches so I would try and get to the beaches. But they were restricted to officers only. I was dating an enlisted man at the time so I would have take my bars off and put them on his shirt so he could get in to the officers' beach. He was one of the men from the band playing at the Officers' Club and we'd sneak into these beaches which in hindsight was not smart because they were still littered with landmines. I lost a physical therapist friend because she was careless on a beach and was killed.

I enjoyed my time in Saipan because I prefer warm weather and could practice my physical therapy and bowling, using coconuts as bowling bowls.

But there was still this regimented, restricted kind of existence. So how many hours did you have a day or did it depend on the number of cases?

No, they had regular hours. I would think, I don't know for sure, but I know we started at 8 and then we worked until late afternoon.

Were they able to show any films or movies?

No, not in my area, no. We had literally no entertainment except the Officers' Club that I mentioned. But I was just a little over 21 so I was not into drinking yet.

Smoking?

No.

My mother had contacted our relatives in Minnesota. It turned out that I had a cousin on the island in the Army and he would contact me regularly. Officers were allowed three bottles of liquor and one case of beer monthly. Since I didn't drink I was very happy to give it to my cousin. He was delighted. He must have been a hit in his unit.

I interviewed one veteran who finished up in Europe and they were telling them that you're all going to go to Japan now for Operation Coronet and they reckon there would have been a million American casualties. It must have been a relief for you all when the war ended in the Pacific. Do you remembering hearing the news that the war was over?

Well, when I heard the news that the war was over, of course, I wanted to come home because I wanted to marry this enlisted man who had already shipped out. So I wanted to get home. They sent me back to Hawaii, to Fort Shafter in Hawaii. And I was stuck there for I don't know how many months. I had to stay until my replacement arrived in Saipan. My father finally pulled some strings and got me discharged.

When you went in, what were the terms of your commitment?

Until the end of the war.

So you weren't released until early 1946. I suppose they still needed your services.

Right, there were still very few physical therapists. They wanted me to stay in, and I said, "No."

And you didn't want to make a career of it.

I did make a career of physical therapy but not in the service.

I came back to Illinois. They were just building Resurrection Hospital so I applied and they accepted me as Chief Therapist. I opened the Physical Therapy Department and was manager of the Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy Department.

So unlike some of the other veterans you didn't have any difficulty finding employment?

No, not as a physical therapist, especially as one who graduated from Mayo which I had and I think still has a prestigious name so I had a very easy time.

At that time were you living in Morton Grove, Niles or Chicago?

I was living in Chicago with my parents until I married that enlisted from Saipan, and we lived in Chicago. Well, I did marry that enlisted man and we lived in Chicago. Then, unfortunately or

fortunately, I met Mr. Hal, (referring to Mr. Horstman who is sitting across the table during the interview) at the American Legion. So then when Hal and I were married we moved to Morton Grove.

Were you were able to stay in touch with the other therapists that you worked with in the Army?

Yes, we had annual class reunions at Mayo, and the few that were still in the close proximity would come back for the reunions, and that went on until the 1970s when the class reunions were stopped. Now I see them at my Annual Physical Therapy Conventions. Just yesterday we buried, not one of my classmates, but one of my fellow military PTs, lived in Barrington. She was 90. So we stayed in touch because of the profession and the fact she had worked for me for years.

Would you have been able to avail yourself of the GI Bill?

Yes, but I did not. Well I did go with my education but I didn't use the GI Bill. I went to the University of Illinois in Chicago for master's degree.

Your promotion from Second Lieutenant to First Lieutenant did that take place in Oahu?

In Saipan.

I think you were going to mention earlier your worst experience or an interesting experience.

The worst experience was the seasickness, the seasickness that was the worst. And the second worst experience would be what I thought were the stupid rules. You couldn't do this unless you went to this officer. You couldn't do this...the chain of command was horrendous, and unfortunately I had a Chief Nurse as my immediate boss who knew nothing about my profession and tried to tell me what I could and couldn't do. So I simply quit communicating with her. They replaced her with an M.D who I could talk to or who had least understood our field. So I had a horrible time with that nurse who later became the head of the Women's Military Association. She was pretty bossy.

So I think we're approaching the end of the interview, Mrs. Horstman, and there are always the same two questions we address to all the veterans as suggested by the Library of Congress. How do you think your military service and your experiences in the military affected your life?

Significantly, I began to realize. I have to make a side note. I grew up comfortable. My father was wealthy so I really didn't have rules or lack money when I grew up. The Army taught me that you had to adhere to rules in order to get along with people. Yes, it affected me significantly.

And then Mrs. Horstman how do you think your military experience influenced your thinking about war or the military in general?

Well, I think the military in general is too divided. I don't think they communicate very well. In our war we knew our enemy. I don't think in later conflicts we know the enemy. My other

thought would be that I think they should bring the draft back. I think young people need to learn what I learned. I am strongly for the draft.

And I have given back where I can. I volunteer. I've had 14 years at North Chicago as a volunteer. I joined the veterans associations to stay in touch.

Mrs. Horstman, you also made an Honor Flight to Washington. Was that the same flight as Mr. Horstman?

Yes, that was a tremendous experience. Like he said (during his interview) when I came out of the service there was nothing, nothing to recognize our service. My family was glad to see me and that was it. The flight made me appreciate really my time in the service. Especially, the mail call, that was tremendous. That was one of the greatest experiences of my life — Honor Flight. I hope every veteran gets to do it.

The library here and the Friends group make a small contribution every year.

It's an outstanding experience. When you think about you, it gives you goose pimples. And they have these fire trucks shooting the water over your plane. You're just awestruck.

Mrs. Horstman, is there anything that you would like to add that we may not have covered in the interview?

Well, only that I would like to mention with the current fiasco that is in the newspapers about the Veterans Administration. I myself have found nothing but wonderful care from the Veterans Administration so there must be different administrations at different hospitals. The hospitals that I have been associated with have been wonderful and the staff, the doctors, they listen to you at the VA, not like private hospitals.

On that positive, heartening note. I think we'll conclude this interview. Thank you very much, Mrs. Horstman.

My pleasure, no my honor.

Mr. Horstman, sitting across the table then commented on the topic, offering an example...

The VA hospital, before we left Florida, I went to the VA just for blood work, just blood work; you know they check your blood - routine work. That night the doctor called me and said, "You get out of here and get into Bay Pines Hospital," which is a big one in Florida, that's about 100 miles from our home or "go to an Emergency Room. You need a blood transfusion." So I went to the local hospital emergency room. I got two blood transfusions and a platelet transfusion. Back home I went to the hospital and I went to the Emergency Room at Lutheran General. I get a call that they had sent down there for my records. I get a call from the doctor to see how I was doing — now that's the kind of help I've had.

Mrs. Horstman: The doctors are dedicated. The difference is they are salaried. They are not profit-sharing.

Mr. Horstman: Then, the day before yesterday the same thing, out at Evanston Hospital your blood count is too low. Yesterday, I am at North Chicago and my cell phone rings. It was the doctor who was at Evanston, same thing, "your blood count is way low. You better get to Emergency." I said, "I'm in Emergency now." She says, "Where are you?" I said, I'm at the VA I'm at VA. She said, "I'll be right down." She was out there. She had followed me through on that.

Yes, the major difference is they're salaried.

You would know this from your experiences in the medical profession. It seems that the news media may be painting with too broad of a brush about the VA Hospitals.

They are apparently bad hospitals but they are smearing everybody.

I live next door to Viet Nam veteran and he said that sometimes they could be a little faster but he couldn't complain. They're good, but then they should be, you deserve it.

Mr. Horstman: I remember that time in Paris. This Sergeant from the 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division walked in and he had been wounded 2 or 3 times. He walked in stripped his back pack off and said, "I've had it; I'm through." Now that's the kind of guy Patton slapped because he wouldn't go through with it. Is that right? How can you blame somebody for that? Now they got these allfancy words for it now; there they called it battle fatigue.

Mr. Horstman, you're wearing that pin; is that the Big Red One?

Yes.

Mrs. Horstman worked in physical therapy and volunteers with the VA and then you had these experiences with the VA just after the war. Would you say that you got good care then?

Yes. I would say very good. And now what we're talking about there's my nephew in Port Washington, Wisconsin. He is a Korean veteran. He was wounded two or three times, ten years younger than I am. But all he can do is, these guys are crazy, "What's a matter with him." but the VA treated him and pays for it.

What did they sent me out for? Oh, my back. They gave me shots in the back. The VA didn't have a pain clinic so they sent me to this clinic that takes good care of me and the VA pays for it.

They did that to him too. He had something wrong. They had to call a doctor in.

Even when I first got out of the service, I had back trouble with this concussion I was blown into a pit. But the hospital downtown, the VA down there, I don't know the name of it. I had a doctor there who was at Rush. And the only time he could treat me was on Thursdays. So he said that I could see you at the hospital or I can set up an appointment every Thursday. I could come on my own then. No, they have always been good to me.

I don't know of any my friends at the VA or American Legion who would say anything bad about the VA. But this smearing them, why fire the head of the VA in Washington? It wasn't his fault. It was down below. Terrible. (Mrs. Horstman)

Mr. Horstman, you said with the concussion you were thrown into a pit. What kind of a pit was it?

We had our gun in it. For a 40mm you had to dig and you had outriggers on it, and I did a landing across the outrigger.

And that 40mm gun. They could shoot a shell

It is automatic; you have 8 rounds in a clip. Probably the best gun we had for low flying aircraft. The 50 was a good one too. The halftrack with a 50 you had power off it the turrets they had on a plane well we had that on a halftrack. You could swing it in different directions.

Well, I have enjoyed each of the interviews and deepened my appreciation of the Veterans Administration and the heroes they serve.

There was the time in England with the Barracks, that's the Women's British organization. The sergeants were having a party so they invited sergeants from our outfit. So we got a bottle of this kind of wine and a bottle of another kind and mixed them. Needless to say, I got a little inebriated. But this friend of mine was making a play for the Lieutenant and she was going with one of our officers. And he didn't go for that.

Anyway when they picked me up I was walking along holding my blouse with one sleeve and walking down the road, but they put us in jail over night. The next morning, "C'mon, get cleaned up. The old man wants to see you." From the jail we had to walk through the mess hall to get to the captain's office. "Hey there's the two guys they got in for rape." I was kind of scared then, but there was nothing to it.

But one little incident like that so they break for crying out loud.

Mr. Horstman, while you were in the cavalry. You said you were up in Mt. Rushmore.

Yes, we would guard the President while he dedicated the first two faces.

So that would have been President Franklin Roosevelt?

Yes,

You must have been a respected member of the Army to have been honored with that

duty?

No, you had to do your job and that was part of it.

And we all had a rifle loaded and locked and a pistol loaded and locked. The platform they were speaking on, and I was at the bottom of the platform. No one was supposed to go up or down. So this gentleman comes up in a suit and tie says, "I'm going up there." I said, "Well, you can start, but you'll never get to the top." And I showed him the rifle and he came back down. It was a Congressman, some Congressman.

Mrs. Horstman: And then you were in charge and everybody else went to Chicago but you stayed

That was the National Guard, Officer of the day. They always have to have a charge of quarters. So when I got with the Kentucky National Guard, the first weekend they made an acting corporal so I was charge of quarters. They usually do that with their junior officers. Next week they got me down as Acting Corporal. So I went into the Captain and said, "What is this?" He said, well, you're an Acting Corporal aren't you." "I said, well, you can shove that up your butt if you think I'm going to stay here every weekend." Then I was busted from Acting Corporal!

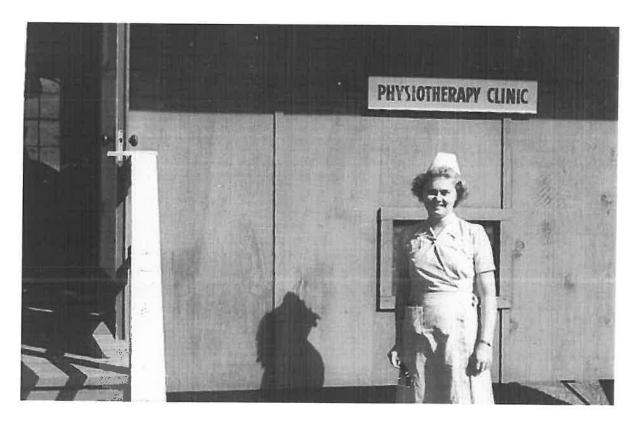
Thank you.

#### Reader's Note:

Mrs. Horstman was previously interviewed in Florida by Don Moore. The interview appears in part on his copyrighted blog at <a href="http://donmooreswartales.com/2012/04/27/bette-horstman/">http://donmooreswartales.com/2012/04/27/bette-horstman/</a>. The story was first printed in the *Charlotte Sun* newspaper, Port Charlotte, Florida on Monday, April 23, 2012. Mr. Moore also submitted his interview with Mrs. Horstman to the Veterans History Project. Mrs. Horstman was not aware at the time of this interview that she had previously participated in the Project in Florida. A copy of that record follows along with wartime photographs of Mrs. Horstman and her Honor Flight with Mr. Henry Horstman on May 12, 2010.



Suicide Beach was the perfect spot for the young nurse to carry on a romance with the Chief Petty Officer. The name and landmines kept prying eyes away. Photo provided



1st Lt. Bette Horstman at a hospital unit in Saipan at the close of World War II. Photo provided



Bette Horstman and Harold Horstman in Washington, DC on the day of their Honor Flight, May 12, 2010.



Annual Veterans Day display at the Niles Public Library during November, 2014, honoring the military service of the Horstmans.

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# VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

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#### **Biographical Information**

Name:

Bette C. Sachs Horstman

State of Birth:

MN

**Home State:** 

FL

Gender

Female

Race

White

War or Conflict

World War, 1939-1945

**Military Status** 

Veteran

**Dates of Service** 

1944-1947

**Entrance into Service** 

Commissioned

**Branch of Service** 

Army

**Unit of Service** 

147th General Hospital; 22nd Station Hospital; 5th

Convalescent Hospital

**Location of Service** 

Fort Sam Houston and Harmon General Hospital, Texas;

Saipan (Northern Mariana Islands); Fort Lewis,

Washington

Highest Rank

First Lieutenant

Service Related Injury

None

Prisoner of War

No

Service History Note

Veteran organized first physical therapy department in

Saipan.

Last Edit: 2015-01-09

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Subjects:

Horstman, Bette C. Sachs

World War, 1939-1945--Personal Narratives

United States. Army.

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