

ELIZABETH BROWN

Denver, Colorado Unit

Transcript of an Oral History Interview

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Elizabeth (Betty) Brown

PREFACE

This transcript is the product of an interview conducted on 14 March, 1986, for the Women's Overseas Service League.

Signed, dated agreements of release and biographical information accompany the original cassette.

**Transcribed by Patricia Siggers
Lansing, Michigan**

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WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE

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Oral History Project

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ELIZABETH (BETTY) BROWN

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Denver, Colorado Unit

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*NOTE: Interviewer is Marjorie Brown of
the Denver Unit.*

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MB: What is your name?

EB: My name is Elizabeth (Betty) Brown.

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MB: When did you join the Denver Unit of WOSL?

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EB: I'm sorry; I really can't remember, but I think
fifteen years ago, probably, maybe even twenty.
I've been in Denver longer than that: Maybe when I
first came -- twenty five years, maybe.

18

MB: Were you in the Service?

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EB: I was a Red Cross hospital worker attached to Army
and Navy hospitals for four years and then two years
as service club director, later on.

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MB: What influenced you to join the Red Cross?

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EB: Well, to be perfectly honest, I had tried to get
into the first WAC organization and was unable to
pass the physical. Then I thought of the
opportunity of going as a civilian with the American
Red Cross. It was a chance kind of thing, really.

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MB: Before you joined the Red Cross, what did you do?

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30 EB: I was a student and a girls' director at a
settlement house.

32 MB: What were your duties when you were with the Red
Cross?

34 EB: Hospital recreation workers take recreation to
patients, both ambulatory (we had club-like
36 activities) -- and then we took activities to bed
patients: Recreation; not therapy as such, unless
38 there wasn't a therapist. Then we did some things
that might be called recreational therapy. We had
40 library carts; craft activities; arranged for
outings/travels; especially overseas, when we had
42 more ambulatory patients. Then we would arrange for
Sunday activities outside the area for them.

44 MB: How long were you in the Red Cross?

EB: I was with Red Cross for four years; two years in
46 England, a year in the States. Those three years
were with the same unit, the 65th General Hospital.
48 Then after VE-day, and after VJ-day actually, I went
to Guam and worked with the Navy in various Navy
50 hospitals.

MB: Where did your travels while you were in the Red
52 Cross take you?

EB: I started out at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, and
54 spent oh, six-eight months there. Ordinarily Red

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56 Cross personnel are not assigned to a unit going
overseas until that unit is practically on the ship.
Typically, something happened so we didn't go to
58 Africa, as was our intent. All my supplies did, but
I didn't go, and our outfit didn't go. We stayed in
60 Fort Bragg.

Then we went to port of embarkation in New
62 Jersey. We didn't pass our tests evidently, because
they sent us to Devins, in Massachusetts, where we
64 had six weeks of fairly intensive training;
particularly for the enlisted personnel, to pitch
66 tents and dig latrines and that kind of thing. None
of us were excused from any of that kind of
68 activity.

From there we went to England and were near the
70 Welsh border for three months; then over to the
other side of the island near Ipswich and Norwich
72 with the Eighth and Ninth Air Force, so that we had
primarily Air Force patients before the invasion of
74 Europe.

After that I came home briefly, went to
76 Washington State; to Madigan, which was a rehab
hospital, while waiting for oversea assignment
78 again. Then from there I went to Guam for ten
months and came home.

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80 MB: What was your uniform dress?

EB: We had a variety. We had a dark grey-blue suit,
82 very similar to World War I Red Cross uniforms, to
start with. As the war progressed and the military
84 (female military) personnel got different and more
attractive uniforms, Red Cross followed suit. We
86 had Palm Beach-style uniforms (I don't remember the
designer now) with a modified overseas cap. Our
88 working uniform was a seersucker dress.

On Guam, that dress was adapted somewhat; you
90 could cut the sleeves off; you could go bare-legged
if your legs were tanned. The nurses couldn't, and
92 I felt sorry for them. We had an outfit that I
really wore a lot after I got out of Service, which
94 was a playsuit; light blue shorts (one-piece, shorts
and a blouse). It had a wraparound skirt, and this
96 was really handy because we took patients to the
beach there frequently, and this was a good coverup
98 for us.

Our uniform coat in England was a dark blue
100 with a zip-out red lining. When we were getting
ready -- I was to go to Europe with the invasion,
102 and we were issued pants; a matching pants and
Eisenhower jacket.

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104 I did not go with the invasion: I asked to go
back to my unit because we dawdled around in London
106 for six to eight weeks, and I got really bored. So
I never got over to Europe during World War II.

108 MB: Can you relate a couple of experiences that were
particularly interesting -- funny, sad, touching or
110 whatever -- that stick in your mind?

EB: I think maybe I remember the Christmases,
112 particularly, that I spent with the military. The
first one was in Fort Bragg. Red Cross personnel
114 rotated between the various hospitals, and at
Christmastime I was assigned to Hospital #3-1/2
116 which was the venereal disease section of the
hospital. We had several hundred patients. Most of
118 them were ambulatory, but they could not, of course,
leave the area.

120 Christmastime came around, and I was to do a
Christmas program. Well, what to do with mostly
122 huge paratroopers? -- And they were certainly not
into doing the Christmas story in the traditional
124 way. I finally decided maybe we could do shadow
pictures, and got the men involved in that; and we
126 really had a very effective, very touching Christmas
Eve program using shadow pictures. The men designed
128 the sets, made the lambs, and did the programs. I

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narrated, but the men did the acting, and that
130 really stuck with me; that these guys would -- The
special touch was when we came out: It was snowing.

132 MB: What was the greatest adjustment you had to make
when you joined the Red Cross?

134 EB: I guess just being away from home. I was never
really homesick, but I had never been away from home
136 before except to go to camp briefly in the
summertime. I had never been on a train, so that I
138 had to learn that kind of thing. I seemed to adapt
fairly well to different situations, and there was
140 no great adjustment. Even the food didn't bother me
too much.

142 MB: Did you expect your Red Cross activities to prepare
you for a career?

144 EB: I didn't think about it particularly. I joined the
Red Cross because I felt that I really wanted to do
146 something during that period of time. I was in my
own field. My college education was in recreation
148 and group work, so that if I had thought about it, I
expect I would have thought that it would be a help.
150 But I didn't do it for that particular purpose.

MB: After you left the Red Cross, what did you do?

152 EB: I went to work for the YWCA in St. Paul, and
finished up my master's degree.

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154 Then I went out to Portland, Oregon, to work
for the YWCA. I talked so much about what fun it
156 had been overseas and how interesting it was and
what a great way to see the world and meet new
158 people, that one of the women with whom I worked
said, "Well, we better do this again." So we both
160 signed up and went with special services for a
couple of years.

162 MB: Tell me about your year in the Peace Corps?

EB: That's a fairly recent overseas volunteer
164 assignment, and that's really twenty five months,
actually. I was there from '81 to '83, in the
166 Philippines. I did work with rural women in income-
generating activities on the island of Negros-
168 Oriental, which is in the center section of the
Philippines.

170 The major part of my work, however, was as
director of a shelter and orphanage for homeless
172 children. I helped with their organization: I
helped develop volunteers; helped with the board of
174 directors; wrote personnel policies; worked with the
kids; taught English to the children; did some
176 social work kinds of things, like home visits, case
studies.

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178 I also did -- Peace Corps volunteers are
expected to do the same kinds of things they might
180 do at home; so I worked with Girl Scouts, with the
School of Social Work: I supervised graduate
182 students, for Psychology Department. I joined
Eastern Star, and I worked with a service club of
184 which I am a member in Denver, so that I did some of
the same things that I had done before. It was a
186 wonderful experience.

MB: What has being a member of WOSL meant to you?

188 EB: That's a really interesting question. I remember
when I first joined that one of the men in the YMCA
190 said, "Why on earth would you join an organization
of Service people; of people who have been in
192 Service. They don't do anything. They just get
together and visit." And I said, "Just getting
194 together and visit (and we do more than that), but
just getting together and visiting with people who
196 have had the same kind of experiences and have the

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198 same kinds of feelings about their country and the
military, is what's important."

200 I have enjoyed meeting new people. I have
enjoyed the service work that we have done. It's
been a very satisfying experience.

202 MB: Thank you very much.

204 End of Interview

206 Transcribed by Patricia Siggers

208 Lansing, Michigan

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