

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*

1 June, 1989

WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE

Oral History Project

ELIZABETH (BETTY) BROWN

Denver, Colorado Unit

NOTE: Interviewer is Marjorie Brown
of the Denver Unit.

MB: What is your name?

EB: My name is Elizabeth (Betty) Brown.

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

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. MB: Were you in the Service?

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.

MB: What influenced you to join the Red Cross?

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

28 *Red Cross. It was a chance kind of thing,*
really. MB: Before you joined the Red Cross, what
did you do?

WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE
ELIZABETH BROWN, Denver Unit

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*

WOMEN 'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE
ELIZABETH BROWN, Denver Unit

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, whilewaiting for oversea
 assignment
78 *again. Then from there I went to Guam for*
 ten months and came home.

WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE
ELIZABETH BROWN, Denver Unit

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MB d a dark grey-blue suit, very similar to World War
: I Red Cross uniforms, to start with. As the war
Wh progressed and the military (female military)
at personnel got different and more attractive uniforms,
wa Red Cross followed suit. We had Palm Beach-style
s uniforms (I don't remember the designer now) with a
yo modified overseas cap. Our working uniform was a
ur seersucker dress.
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es
s?

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

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

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WOMEN 'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE
ELIZABETH BROWN, Denver Unit

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
114 personnel rotated between the various
hospitals, and at Christmastime I was
116 assigned to Hospital #3-1/2 which was the
venereal disease section of the hospital. We had
118 several hundred patients. Most of them were
ambulatory, but they could not, of course, leave the
120 area.

Christmastime came around, and I was to do a
12 Christmas program. Well, what to do with mostly
2 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
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WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE
ELIZABETH BROWN, Denver Unit

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
146 wanted to do something during that period
of time. I was in my own field. My
148 college education was in recreation and group
work, so that if I had thought about it, I
150 expect I would have thought that it would be a help.
But I didn't do it for that particular purpose.

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

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

WOMEN 'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE
ELIZABETH BROWN, Denver Unit

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 wor Id 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 Orientaal, 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.

WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE
ELIZABETH BROWN, Denver Unit

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

WOMEN'S OVERSEAS SERVICE LEAGUE
ELIZABETH BROWN, Denver Unit

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

I have enjoyed meeting new people. I have
200 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

INDEX BROWN

Locat ions

England, 2, 3

Guam, 2, 3

Ipswich, 3

Norwich, 3

Philippines,

7 Stateside

Massachusetts, 3

North Carolina, 2

Washington State,

3 Service

Peace Corps, 7, 8

Red Cross, 1

Uniforms, 4

