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

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Oral History Project

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ELIZABETH (BETTY) BROWN

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Denver, Colorado Unit

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

12 MB: What is your name?

EB: My name is Elizabeth (Betty) Brown.

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

EB: I'm sorry; I really can’t remember, but I think

16 fifteen years ago, probably, maybe even twenty. I've been in Denver longer than that: Maybe when I

18 first came -- twenty five years, maybe. MB: Were you in the Service?

20 EB: I was a Red Cross hospital worker attached to Army and Navy hospitals for four years and then two years

22 as service club director, later on.

MB: What influenced you to join the Red Cross?

24 EB: Well, to be perfectly honest, I had tried to get into the first WAC organization and was unable to

26 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?

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

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

34 EB: Hospitalrecreation 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/1rave1s; 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 hospi tals.

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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Cross personnel are not assigned to a unit going

56 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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MB: What was your uniform dress?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EB: I guess just being away from home. I was never

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

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

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

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.

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| **160** |  | **said, "Well, we better do this again. So we both signed up and went with special services for a** |
|  |  | **couple of years.** |
| **162** | **MB:**  **EB:** | **Tell me about your year in the Peace Corps?**  **That's a fairly recent overseas volunteer** |

Then I went out to Portland, Oregon, to work for the YWCA. I talked so much about what fun it had been overseas and how interesting it was and what a great way to see the wor Id and meet new people, that one of the women with whom I worked

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assignment, and that's really twenty five months, actually. I was there from '81 to '83, in the Philippines. I did work with rural women in income­ generating activities on the island of Negros- Orientaal, which is in the center section of the Philippines.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MB: Thank you very much.

End of Interview

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers

Lansing, Michigan

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