

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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File name	B-L	007	0002M0.WAV	Interview date: 07/10/201
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[00-00-03]

So perhaps first of all you could just tell me your name and when and where you were born?

[00-00-12]

Yes, my name at that time was Brenda Logie, and the surname, I was born in Southampton, but the surname comes from Orkney. My father was an Orkney Islander (laughs).

[00-00-30]

When were you born? Do you mind me asking that?

No, 21/11/24

Thank you (laughs). A bit of an inquisition isn't it!

[00-00-44]

At the outbreak of the war were you at school or were you working?

No at the outbreak of war I was at St Anne's. And at that time that was what I would call a proper convent school with teaching Nuns etc., and I was very happy there. But, you want me to go on?

Yes, if you carry on.

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CHAIRMAN JULIAN JOHNSON CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

[00-01-14]

At Southampton as soon as war was declared, Southampton filled up with troops and they had built a massive great camp on the common to contain them all. So of course money was very scarce and I gather they didn't get very much in those days and of course there was no television or anything of that nature, so the only thing to do was go to the pictures, go to the pub and that all cost money, or go to a dance. So any free entertainment was marvellously popular and my singing mistress formed a concert party, mostly of her pupils and we used to do two or three shows a week. Which were always packed out. We usually did them in what used to be the Avenue Hall, I think it's all been changed now but it was the Avenue hall attached to the Avenue Church.

[00-02-28]**Key Words:**

21/11/24

Southampton

St Anne's Convent School

Entertainment

Concert Party

Avenue Church

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[00-00-00]

If you could possibly tell me your name and when and where you were born?

Yes, my name at that time was Brenda Logie, and I was born in Southampton on the 21st November 1924 (laughs) a long time ago. Anyway, when the war broke out I was at St Anne's Convent School and eventually, when they were going to evacuate which was later on in the war, I was allowed to leave there because my mothers' health wasn't very good and my father had been called up into the Navy. So I was allowed to leave there if I finished my education. Which I did by going to commercial school and doing ordinary lessons in the morning and shorthand typing in the afternoon. On the other hand, I had had two friends who were at St Anne's and when they left they were given the choice of being in the WAAFs or the ATs, etc. or going to a training establishment that had been set up by the gentleman who owned the Powerboat Company in Hythe and that was at Marchwood Park and they had instructors etc. to turn ladies into either electricians or woodworkers. So my two friends went there and then they eventually contacted me and said they were in great need of shorthand typists. So although I was still only fifteen and a half, over I went and got the job. Up until then I had been in my singing mistresses' concert party. Which was as you know pretty girls etc. pretty dresses quite nice. But the powerboat company had their own concert party which was mostly made up of stage people doing their war work but they didn't have a female singer so they asked me if I would join them. Which I did.

Thank you.

Did the group have a name?

Yes they were called "Laughter Express" and they used to work for southern command. In other words Southern command told Jeff Bellingham who was in charge of us, where to go, you know, for all the different shows and I presume gave them petrol coupons and everything. But as far as we were concerned the whole thing was voluntary. We all did it voluntary it was sort of extra war work you know. Our area at that time was from Bournemouth in one direction to Portsmouth in the other direction and back as far as Winchester. Which is quite a hefty load of places. There were tons and tons of different camps and things in there.

[00.03.25] *How many people were in the concert party?*

(laughs) We had Jeff Bellingham who was our female impersonator. Not the Danny la Rue one, more like your pantomime dame one you know. We had Win Cooper who was a very good dancer of any description, tap or ballet or anything else and a very good pianist. We had a gypsy violinist. She wasn't a gypsy but I mean she had all the costumes and everything you know. And we had a souffleurs which if anyone doesn't know is a female whistler who was very very good also. She was married to the pianist which was very handy because they could practice. Yes, and we had three of

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the heavy gang. In those days they didn't have all the machines that they've got nowadays to move everything so the heavy gang were great big blokes who used to have to hump round all the heavy stuff you know, and we had three of them. They used to wear artificial busts, blonde wigs, tutus you know, and on their feet massive great hob nail boots (laughs) to complete the ensemble, and they used to do this funny little song called "I'm the only girl left in the ballet" and they were an absolute scream because they, you know, didn't mind making a fool of themselves and the chaps used to really like them, and little me, so that was us.

[00.05.12] *What did you do? What was your performance?*

Well I was the singer. I used to do songs from the shows and that sort of thing you know, nothing too highbrow, but anything like that. It was a very very happy party, we used to, it was much easier for me than working with my singing mistresses lot, because to do them I had to go back to Southampton and then go off somewhere else etc Whereas with us, we were taken directly from the factory to wherever we were going and then taken home again afterwards you know.

And that was home, all the way back to Southampton?

Um,

Gosh

Um

That was a long trip.

I think actually I was... We had two that lived in Totton the pianist and his whistler wife they lived in Totton. But I was the only one that lived in Southampton but apparently they thought I was valuable enough to them to be taken home (laughs).

[00.06.24] *Did you have a collection of costumes that you took around with you when you went out to the troops?*

Oh yes you had to have lots and lots of clothes. One of the difficulties was that Jeff Bellingham always used to insist that we wore long dresses. Because of course pre-war everybody had worn long evening dresses for entertaining you know. It was very difficult, we used to sort of say well a skirt from this and a top from that and join the two together and that's another ensemble you know. I remember doing an interview once for a paper, well there were quite a few papers actually, and I was saying that and one of these stupid men said "why didn't you buy the material"? And I said "well for your information we had sixty six coupons a year you gave up fourteen for a frock, no fourteen for a coat, twelve for a frock even two for stockings so there was nothing for buying yards of material" So if you could get hold of a parachute that was alright. All white of course, but

You could make that into a costume?

Lots of different things, yes.

[00.07.52] *So you went out in the New Forest did you to entertain the troops out there?*

Well now, strangely enough we had to go everywhere Southern Command told us where to go and we had to go to the camps everywhere all along that stretch of country you know. Some of the camps were in the forest yes definitely. But we never thought anymore about that than anywhere else we went. You know. And it was all sort of, excepting for Netley Hospital, Eastleigh Barracks and HMS Collingwood, they had real theatres in their establishments. But everybody else the chaps used to make up sort of stages for us. Probably with packing cases etc. and so forth. Put a carpet over the top of it and that was your stage and that's what you performed on. So we got quite used to that.

And would that be inside a tent or did they have a hut for you?

Well mostly of course they had sort of barrack buildings and things that they were in but yeah we did have a tent at one time, quite funny actually. A big marquee it was, and luckily it was in the summer, and they had it done off with different sheets and things so the chaps you know and then us and then our bit was divided so the men could be one side and the ladies you know on the other. And we had this toilet (laughs) but actually it should have been two toilets joined together in the middle with two seats going out like that you see, but we didn't have a partition so it was just there and if you had the misfortune to have to use it, if you perched yourself on it when you got up the other seat came up and wacked you over the backside (laughs) so I think quite a lot of them used to use it just for the laugh you know they got afterwards.... Such is life.

[00-10-15]

Key Words:

Brenda Logie
Southampton
St Anne's Convent School
Entertainment
Powerboat Company Hythe
Marchwood Park
Concert Party
Laughter Express
Southern Command
Jeff (or Geoff?) Bellingham
Win Cooper
Clothing coupons
Costumes
Theatres
New Forest Camps

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Filename	B-L	007	0004M0.WAV	Interview date: 07/10/201
<p>[00-00-00]</p> <p><i>When you went out to entertain the troops in the New Forest, did that happen throughout the war or just before D-day?</i></p> <p>Oh yes there were various camps out there all the time. But these were different ones. As far as I know, the things that the secret camps were for, was people that were manufacturing the equipment that was going to be used in the Invasion. You know, the things that fitted up the jetties and everything that had to be used. We were never told exactly what it was all about, but instead of our nice comfortable little minibus that we all used to get into to go to the different shows, we had (laughs) to make do with those massive great big army lorries you know. They used to roll up and open the back and sort of hoist you into the back, tie up all the stings again and off you went. So of course I don't think we'd have known where we were going in the first place. But it was right in the, sort of in the depths of the forest as I've always said you know, the far thicker parts of the forest that aren't generally used. But of course, they still needed some form of light entertainment so we used to go out there. And then when we'd finished we were all hauled up again, stuck back in the lorry, and you know, back to the factory. And then the minibus used to take us home because that was, I suppose you couldn't expect this lorry driver to go round all the different addresses, but it certainly wasn't a very comfortable form of transport for all that (Laughs).</p> <p>[00:02:09] <i>Did they ever have any trouble getting fuel for the lorry?</i></p> <p>Well, I suppose that, well the army had their own fuel obviously, but, as I say, I think ours, because you used to have petrol coupons you see. I presume Jeff must have been given them by the Southern Command people who wanted us to do the shows. I don't know as I never concerned myself with anything like that.</p> <p>[00:02:39] <i>Do you remember any of the particular camps you went to?</i></p> <p>No, they never had any names,</p> <p><i>You never knew the names for them?</i></p> <p>No, and especially those because as I say they were in places which I've always said in my talks were deep in the fores. Where you wouldn't normally have been going you know if you were just sort of on an afternoon out or anything like that.</p> <p>[00:03:08] <i>So those were the secret camps, then did you go to the bases like Stoney Cross?</i></p>				

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Stoney Cross was an airfield of course at that time and that this is coming to the end of the war when everything was being closed down. And we went... I was also singing as well as the concert party, I was also singing with Eddie Gulliford and his orchestra only on various times when they were doing sort of dances. In those days you see they used to have you started the dance and then you had a sort of cabaret in the middle and then you finished the dance. So I was sort of singing with his band then and we got asked to do both the final farewell dances. Both for the ordinary blokes and then later on for the officers. And as I say we did both of those at Stoney Cross in their big mess hall.

So they had completely separate performances, you'd do it once for the men and once for the officers?

Oh yes, yes absolutely. I think there was about a week in-between or something.

[00:04:42] Do you want me to tell you the funny thing that happened?

When we were doing the officers dance, the band used to be on this sort of makeshift plinth that had been put up for the band to put all their gear on and everything. And I could dance if I wanted to, they didn't mind if I danced, but I used to like to sit there and watch everybody else you know. And there was this young orderly. He was going round delivering the glasses on his tray and then going round with his tray and collecting all the glasses and bringing them back. And I was watching him because as he was collecting the glasses there were some dregs in the bottom of most of them and he was just knocking back the dregs you see each time. And I thought if he goes on doing that he's going to be absolutely blotto by the end of the evening you know. And I was really watching him. And as I thought, towards the end of the evening suddenly one minute he was standing up. And the next minute he was absolutely flat, like that. Just all happened sort of quickly. And of course the RAF were well known for their jokes and one thing and another. And the officer sort of came and looked at him, so anyway they put two forms together and they laid him up, laid him out on the forms, and then they put his hands across his chest you know. And then some wit said there's a couple of Lillie's in the chapel. So they went and got the chap the Lillie's And they put them down underneath his arms, and put his arms across them and I said to my mum, I remember when I saw her the next morning, I said "when he woke up he must have wondered whether he had gone up or whether he had gone down" (laughs).

A lovely story

[00:07:00] *When you were performing to the troops in the forest what was their attitude to you particularly as a woman entertainer, were they polite to you?*

Oh yes, yes, they were lovely. Yeah I once did a show in an aircraft hangar. And believe me, you can get a lot of men in an aircraft hangar! (laughs). Before the show started, and that funny enough was with the band. I was doing the sort of middle part and then singing with the band. They used to

like band concerts and all that, and there were hoards of them and the noise was tremendous. But as soon as it was announced you know that there was a soloist, and as soon as the music started they were as good as gold. Lovely and quiet. Um. Oh yes it was a pleasure to do those shows. We used to have some lovely evenings.

[00:08:10] *Did you have any risqué costumes to wear when you were performing to the troops in the forest?*

When I did, um, when I had grown up a bit. When I did Funiculi Funicula which was one of my favourite songs I used to wear a costume that was black net with a black net mantle and the costume was very sort of see through lots and lots of leg and it was the first time I'd ever had to perform wearing anything like that. First of all I wouldn't even go on the stage, but it was always a terrific hit I used to say I didn't know whether it was the song or the costume! (laughs).

[00:09:00] *Do you know which troops they were that you were entertaining out in the forest? Were they British or other nationalities?*

Yeah, I think they were all British at that time, we used to do the Americans as well. As I was saying in a talk I was doing yesterday, strictly segregated, black ones one concert, white ones another concert. Never together, but that's got nothing to do with the forest. But they were all definitely, well, English ones.

So presumably most were there for the build-up to D-day but did you go there after D-day were there still troops that you were entertaining in the forest later in the war?

Probably, you know. I don't remember. I mean things went on...Everybody seems to think that it well, especially after the war was finished in Europe that everything stopped but of course nothing stopped as far as we were concerned because, there was still an army of occupation in Germany and troops were still going out from Southampton. So the camps, well not all of them, but a lot of them were still around, you know, still inhabited as it were.

[00:10:31] *Do you remember any other camps apart from Stoney Cross? Did you go to any..?*

Not the actual camps no. I couldn't tell you because well, we never really knew I mean Jeff Bellingham who ran the show, he knew exactly where we going. But as for us, excepting when it was as I say somewhere like Netley or Eastleigh or HMS Collingwood, places like that, that you knew, otherwise they were just another camp and you know, you didn't really take much notice of what they were called or where they were or anything (laughs)

Presumably you didn't see much on the journey out to visit the troops in the forest?

No, we didn't see anything

Was it always at night time?

Yeah and anyway, as I said, they put us in the back of the lorry and tied the strings and there we were you know (laugh) All in the dark (laughs).

[00:11:36] *Did you go out to the forest at any other time during the war? Into the New Forest?*

Not that I can remember really, I think there must have been some camps in that area you know. But as I say when you're doing about three a week you just go and do the show and you're not particularly bothered exactly where it is you know. You just sort of get out of the transport go in and do it and meet the men. And then in any case you weren't supposed to ask any questions or anything of that kind, "careless talk costs lives" used to be in great big placards all over the place (laughs) so you just didn't, you just did it, you know.

[00:12:35] *I understand you performed at Marchwood?*

Yes. Now that was because, I started doing that when I was very young. As I say, when I started work at the Powerboat I was fifteen and a half. And I was of course a very junior shorthand typist at that time. And this particular day I was delivering some memos and it was a lovely day and I thought I'll walk round the yard instead of going through the factory you know. And we had been told that these chaps were at Marchwood. But we had never seen them. You see what had happened was, as I said, the green girls were there to start with to learn to be electricians and woodworkers, and the burnt airmen.. because it was a first, the start of plastic surgery, cosmetic surgery. And the chaps, but it used to take a lot longer in those days, and the chaps had quite long waiting periods in between the different operations. Scott Paine, who was a very sensible man, he offered the Air Ministry, in between their operations if they liked, they could go to Marchwood because he still had it all set up there, you know, sleeping accommodation and everything, and the machines. And he said that he would put the instructors up there . And if they liked they could just be there for recuperation. If they wanted to learn a trade, because most of them had gone straight in after leaving school, straight into the Air force or anywhere. And so they you know, they could learn something that might do them a bit of good when they came back to civilian life. So they went to Marchwood. And this chappy that was walking around the yard he was one of them. And he looked... I mean plastic surgery I those days wasn't like cosmetic surgery these days they even when they were finished they still looked, you know pretty different . And so I thought to myself the only I remember thinking was, I didn't want him to think that he looked any different to anybody else. And we passed one another and that was that, and then when I got back to the office the boss of our bit he said "you've got to go to Personnel this afternoon, they want you up there" and I thought what have I done? Because usually you only went there if you'd done something wrong you know. Anyway when I got there the chappy in charge said "you passed squadron leader whatever his name was this morning in the yard" and I said "yes", and he said "you smiled at him". And you know if I live to be a hundred, I can't remember that I smiled at him. I knew that I didn't want to look as if he didn't look, you know, very nice. But so I said "I can't even remember that". So he said, well he

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said, "obviously you weren't horrified or anything like that" he said, "we don't usually ask people your age, but would you like to go up there if your pianist would be willing to give a couple of do a few songs, you know and dance with them perhaps, and talk to them" so I said, "yes, sure I'll go". And so that's what started me going up there. I had such an admiration for them because well some of them really they looked absolutely awful. And I mean you know what it's like if you have got a sort of spot or something you think everybody's always looking at it. So everybody did look at them, some people tried not to but you know lots of people just stared at them, horrible creatures. But they were really marvellous. Once they realised that you would go on going there, you weren't just coming to have a look and that would be the last time, they would tell you, you know. I remember one chap coming up to me once and telling me I'm going to have new eyelids next week Bren, and all such things as that which would be horrifying normally but no, I thought they were very very brave and I did go up there on quite a number of occasions.

[00:17:37] *Did the place have a name in those days? I know its Marchwood Priory now isn't it, but what did you know it as?*

Well, It was called Marchwood Park because that's what it had been called before, you know. I gather it must have been a stately home of some description, Because strangely enough one of the offices I worked in at the Powerboat, there was a lady there called Miss Towers, and her father, he had been the lodge keeper and they still lived in the Lodge House, But I don't know who the owners were at that time or anything. But it was a lovely place. Well it is a lovely place.

And were they able to use the whole of the house? They took over the whole of the house for the plastic surgery?

Yes it was like a boarding school you know. They had the whole place he must have bought the whole place.

[00:18:41] *You obviously continued the concert parties after the war...*

Yes because, well of course, there was that and there was the Japanese prisoners of war coming home and we did some shows for them. Well I did. Of course this had got nothing to do with this, but I think after I went to Marchwood the powers that be decided I was shockproof because the next thing they asked me to was to go to Netley (Phone rings interview stopped)

[00:19:23]

Key Words:

Brenda Logie
Southampton
Entertainment
Concert Party
Secret Camps
New Forest

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D-Day Preparations
Eddie Gulliford Orchestra
Stoney Cross
American Troops
Segregation
Scott Paine
Plastic cosmetic surgery
Burnt Airmen
Powerboat Company Hythe
Marchwood Park
Marchwood Priory

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<p>[00:00:00] they wanted me to do to the psychiatric patients at Netley hospital which was around at that time. D block at Netley Hospital, I think it's still in existence actually. Apparently somebody decided that music was good for them. So I went there, but nothing ever out of the way ever happened whilst I was there. The orderlies used to stand around the walls in case anything did you know, but other than they'd probably somebody would decide to clap right in the middle of a number but you just had to carry on and take no notice, nothing un-toward ever happened to me anyway.</p> <p>[00:01:00] <i>So when you were out entertaining the troops in the New Forest did you ever see any signs of military activity or anything? Was there ever any air-strikes while you were there or anything like that?</i></p> <p>No, we were very lucky in that I suppose. No we didn't have any air raids or anything of that nature. Not while we were there.</p> <p><i>I think we've probably covered most of your memories of the New Forest have we? Um,</i></p> <p><i>That's very interesting, very interesting (laughs)</i></p> <p>[00:01:32] <i>You told me about some of the characters that performed in the concert party, were there any other memorable incidents apart from the drunken waiter (both laugh)</i></p> <p>Well, I tell you one funny thing that always used to happen and this was sort of general. When you'd finished entertaining you were always given refreshments in the Sergeant's Mess. That's excepting HMS Collingwood then you went in the Officer's Mess. But it was normally the Sergeant's Mess, and then they would suddenly say to you, of course this is when I'm with Jeff Bellingham's concert party, not the one where they had the clomping dancers, that was for the right at the start. So we hadn't... by that time... I don't know what happened to them, by that time we didn't have them. Anyway these camps, they would always say and we'll give you a bit of entertainment now. And it was always their chaps dressed up as hula-hula girls (laughs), which was much the same as this other lot used to do at the beginning. And it was so funny because, I remember only a few years ago one of comics on the television, I can't even remember what his name was now. He'd just been out to the Falklands to entertain some our troops and people who were still out there, and he said after he'd finished his lot, they'd given him a little entertainment which contained a hula-hula dance (laughs) and I remember saying to my husband, good God they're still doing that! You know (laughs)</p> <p>[00:03:34] <i>So was there a particular time when you changed from the dancers, the group with the dancers at the beginning, then to the band?</i></p> <p>Well, I only went with the band when, in those days, they used to have big bands, and you used to</p>				

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have an entertainment that started with the band and dancing. And then in the middle you always had what they called the cabaret. And in those days I was quite often the cabaret. I used to do some numbers with the band as well. Oh yes, and one day a week, in the last year of the war, I used to do a Wednesday nights at the Guildhall with the Blue Start Orchestra, just the one night - Burt Osborne's band did all the other nights. So I did that just for the one night, That was with the band. And when I started up I was so nervous I wouldn't even sit on with them, I used to go on, do my numbers and come off, but I soon got used to it you know.

[00:04:50] *Is it the group that you performed with from Hythe, some of them were ex-professional performers were they?*

Oh yes, apparently before the war they were you know. I mean I didn't know any of them then so I don't know, but they'd all been in stage work and knew what they were doing, you know. Jeff Bellingham did quite a bit after that. He went to live, when he retired, to live in the Isle of Wight at Sandown I think, or Shanklin, one of those two. And he still use to do pantomime right up until her was quite an age I think.

[00:05:47] *So when you went out in the truck out into the forest, you'd done a full days' work during the day and then you were not paid for the entertainment, you just did it as part of your part for the war effort?*

Yes, it was all voluntary and we just thought it was extra war work. Especially me seeing that I was so much younger than anybody else, I used to have a whale of time you know. I thought it was marvellous. They were a very nice crowd of people it was a very happy little concert party that was.

It was nothing to do with ENSA it was just set up by the organisation at Hythe?

Yes, ENSA was a lot that was, well all of them were paid. No, it was purely voluntary there were quite a few little groups around at that time you know that were sort of entertaining different areas but obviously I only know mine but everything was completely voluntary.

Interview ends **[00:07:07]**

Key Words:

Netley Hospital
Concert Party
New Forest Camps
Entertainment
Dancing
Bands
Blue Start Orchestra
Burt Osborne Band
HMS Collingwood

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CHAIRMAN JULIAN JOHNSON CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

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