Louise Hildun (Willison Blair)
Veteran

Interviewer
Pat Lynch

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Chemung County Historical Society
Chemung County, New York

PL: This interview is taking place at the Chemung County Historical Society at 415 East Water Street in Elmira, New York. I am Patricia Lynch, a museum member and volunteer and I will be speaking with Louise Hilden who resides at 1502 Sullivan Street in Elmira, NY. She was a member of the Army WAC Corps.
LH: The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. and then the Women's Army Corps.

PL: Louise is going to share her experiences and memories of that period with us, and also her post-war history. So Louise, could we start when you entered Service and tell us something about your age and circumstances in life then? Did you enlist or how were you recruited?
LH: Well, I was married. So I did not join the Service to find a man. (laughs) I followed my husband for about a year, and I decided I wanted to serve my country. I enjoyed being with the Veterans and the Military personnel. I was working at the Eclipse at the time and some woman there talked me into joining the WACs. She had my mother take her over so she could join, so we went for the recruiting and what happened was – she backed out!

My mother asked "What do you want to do? Do you want to join the Service?" I said "I'm in." Then my husband said "You can't join unless I say so." I told him "I'm sorry, I'm already in." He said "We will get a divorce if you are in." I said "That's fine!" But we did not get a divorce. I had every Leave that he did overseas. When he was off on Furlough, I got it off too.

PL: He was in what branch of the service?
LH: The Army.

PL: I was going to say, I'm looking at your biographical information. When you were in the Service, your name was?
LH: Louise Blair.

PL: Blair, so your married name, from your first marriage was Blair. That was your Service name?
LH: Right.

PL: Where were you assigned?
LH: First I went to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia for Basic Training. Then I went to Conway State Teachers College- Administrative Training. Then I was assigned to Aberdeen Proving Ground

in Maryland. We were close to Washington, D.C. and had a lot of inspections. We paraded for the people of Washington.

PL: How large a group was it?
LH: We had six hundred people there. They worked twenty-four hours a day, and did everything there.

PL: What age when you entered the Service?
LH: I was twenty-one. You had to be twenty-one to go in at that time.

PL: And you served all the way from December,1942 through October, 1945?
LH: Yes. When my husband got discharged from the Service, I got discharged.

PL: So he was discharged in 1945 too. Tell me what your memories were of the Basic Training, and getting into the WACs, and your feelings about that.
LH: Basic Training was something else. We were the second group to get into Fort Oglethorpe. We had to wash windows. The latrines were quite a ways from the Barracks, so we had to go through the mud and then clean off our shoes and things when we got back into the Barracks. It was quite an experience, I mean we were greenhorns. But, it was a lot of fun. We used to get a bus and go into Chattanooga, Tennessee. There was a place there that said "No soldiers or dogs allowed!" at some of the bars. But we had a lot of good times.

PL: Did you bond as a group?
LH: Oh yes! You never found such close friends as you did in the Service. I mean, just because you were in uniform, didn't mean you were out looking for a man. We had a lot of good times as a group. There were a lot of activities for us.

PL: Did you retain some of those friendships from the Service?
LH: Yes, in fact right now I am one of forty in the United States who belongs to the National WAC Honor Guard. I travel throughout the States, I represent the group in this area, but I go to National Conventions all over the United States.

PL: So only forty is left from that group of six hundred?
LH: No, this is about forty members who served in the Army, so we are the National WAC Honor Guard. We perform in all kinds of ceremonies. In fact, at the parades I always wear my uniform. I brought my hat with me today.

PL: What other kinds of functions do you attend as part of this National WAC Honor Guard?
LH: Well, whenever they need somebody, I usually go and we are very active at the National Conventions. We do all kinds of escorting, and I am very proud to be a member. I am also very active over at Bath, Pennsylvania with the Veterans Hospital. We have parties once a month over there for the Ribbon patients. We provide gifts and refreshments. It's just like a social hour.

PL: You also have a local ladies group?
LH: I've been over there with Bath for about eighteen years having these parties and activities. In fact, I am on the Executive Board over there. In Elmira sixteen years ago, I was

recruiting for the Women's Army Corps. Membership and also for The American Legion. I was on the Membership Committee. I have close to four hundred names of the Women Veterans in the area.

It started out with Chemung County, I have six Counties that these women come from. Not all at one time, but bi-monthly we have a luncheon and we have thirty-five to forty attendees as a rule there. We do all kinds of volunteer work.

PL: What are the six Counties? You cover of course, our County of Chemung.
LB: Chemung, Tioga, Schuyler, Steuben, Broome and Bradford that is on our border with Pennsylvania. I have a file at home with all the women who have ever joined us and those who have deceased that I know of and those that attend every luncheon.

PL: Tell us more about your personal experiences in the Army life, like the food and your living conditions. How did you relate to the male soldiers?
LB: We worked with the males, we all worked together as a Unit. While at Aberdeen, I was a Drill Sargent and taught calisthenics. We were a Model Detachment. We worked on the Heavy Artillery Range. I was in charge of a warehouse. I used to drive trucks, up to two and a half tons. Sometimes I couldn't reach the pedals! In fact, my first assignment on a two-ton truck I was out on a highway. They had to put pillows behind my back and underneath my feet. They had to lift me up, and I did not know how to double-clutch. So I had to stop somebody to show me how to double-clutch. But after three days, we had a birthday party. It was our first-year anniversary. We used to do a lot of parades.

PL: So you said your original training was at the college?
LB: At Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. The Administrative Training was at Conway State Teachers College.

PL: Did you have a chance to put that to use?
LB: Yes. I was in Procedure Auditing at The Proving Grounds. Nobody could tell me where I could not go, or what I could not do. There was five of us, and we went into any room. Just because he was a Colonel and told me I could not come in and do something, I'd sit down, make a phone call to my boss, and would do what I went in to do!

PL: So you had considerable authority?
LB: That's right.

PL: Did you keep a diary at all?
LB: Yes, that's what I brought with me.

PL: Your scrapbook with pictures, and your diary.
LB: We had a lot of good times. They used to ban us, when we went into Baltimore or some places. You had to show your I.D., but the women in uniform did not have to show your I.D. because they were already twenty-one to get into the Service at that time.

PL: Your biographical form indicates that you earned various medals and citations. A Good Conduct Medal, a Meritorious Unit Emblem, a WACs Service Medal, an American Campaign

Medal in World War II, and a Victory Medal. Were they awarded under special circumstances?
LB: Yes. After you got out, you applied. You had to send in your Discharge Papers to some sort of Headquarters and they would check it and send the medals to you. I have them on the wall at home. (laughs) I have some on my National WAC Uniform too.

PL: While you were in the United States, you were able to keep in touch with family and friends?
LB: Oh yes, in fact my mother and father came to Aberdeen. They ate in our Mess Hall and went places they were not supposed to, but this Captain from Battle Creek, Michigan took us around.
I rode in the back of a truck and they rode in the front and saw the ammunition things.

PL: Where was your husband assigned during this time? Could you keep in touch with him?
LB: He was over in Germany where he got injured. He was hit with shrapnel. I kept in touch with him. In fact, we got along wonderfully. Here is a picture of the both of us. It seemed like wherever we went at home in Battle Creek, Michigan we went into a building and there was a larger picture like this of us there.(Louise references a black and white photo with them both in uniform.

PL: You were both from Battle Creek, Michigan where you were born?
LB: He was from Illinois. In fact, he got drafted. He went to the Draft Board to get permission to bring his first wife home down to Elmira, New York to her folks. We were not married at that time. We were going to wait until he got out of the Service, but then we eloped. But in January, he got drafted anyway. (laughs)

PL: So that was in 1942?
LB: Yes. He went in January of 1942. I went to San Antonio, Texas. I made the rounds with him.

PL: You've traveled quite a bit!
LB: I have traveled to every state in the Nation. Through that time, and with conventions, and that sort of thing. In Aberdeen, we were at the 44th Ordinance, where we lived. The fellows used to loan us their cars so we could drive to our Barracks. It was about a half a mile from where we lived. We could not hitchhike. That was a "no-no." But we would buy one bus ticket in Aberdeen and everybody picked us up and took us to Aberdeen. But we needed a ticket back to Aberdeen from Baltimore.

PL: So the people in the location near the Base Camp were very friendly to you.
LB: Yes, there were many civilians there working on the Base. I worked out on Heavy Artillery and one day we got into quite a discussion with this Lieutenant I worked for and I come to find out he was from Battle Creek, Michigan also!

Then we had one of our Captains, (unclear), she went over to Germany. If you remember hearing about the Hesse Jewel Heist? They stole all those jewels and everything? She was involved. In fact, I was sort of a go-between between her and a Lieutenant she was going with in Aberdeen. I was on the inside of quite a few things! (laughs)

PL: So you adapted very well to Service life?
LB: I loved it! I'm just sorry I did not stay in and retire. I go to conventions and all these gals retired and got that good income coming in. I really wished I stayed in then retired, because I loved it.

PL: Your decision to come out was because of your husband?
LB: Right. He got discharged, so I got out.

PL: Was he discharged because of his injuries?
LB: Right.

PL: How did you arrive in Elmira, New York?
LB: Well, my father was a salesman on the road. He was gone from home so much that mother said to him one day, "Wherever you are, I am willing to come." So Gordon Sheelee from the greenhouse/florist over on Hudson Street, says "I have an apartment you can have if you get your wife here." A neighbor offered to bring my mother here with our trailer and whatever she could get on it for sixty dollars.

PL: What year was this?
LB: I believe it was in the Thirties, about 1937.

PL: So you lived here when you Enlisted?
LB: Yes, I lived here and then my two sisters came here with my mother and have been here ever since. Because my father was living in this area. My mother got real active in church work.

PL: So you came out of the Service in 1945, but wished you had stayed in?
LB: I wish I had stayed in for all the benefits. I still contact some of the ladies but most of them are gone that I really knew.

PL: Then you had to adjust back to civilian life?
LB: We went back to Battle Creek, Michigan and stayed there for four years. In fact, I think the week I got out of the Service, was the week I got pregnant with my son. (laughs) When he was about four and a half years old, my folks talked me into coming to Elmira, New York so my mother could more or less take care of him. I said "You can't work if I come home." and came to Elmira then so he could start school in Elmira.

PL: Did you come with your husband?
LB: No, we were divorced.

PL: So you, obviously remarried?
LB: Yes, after sixteen years. There was this bachelor, I thought he was a "Good-Time Joe" who never wanted to get married. But we have been married for thirty-eight years!

PL: That's a pretty good record! So have just the one son, and his name is?

LB: Michael Blair. He lived in Florida and retired from the Police Department there after thirty-two years. He couldn't get his mother to move there, so he moved up here to Millerton, Pennsylvania, and bought ten acres of land. He just loves it up here he's a retired policeman. It's right on the border line of Lawrenceville. I'm happy to have him that close. I have a granddaughter with two great-grandsons in Elkland. Then I have a granddaughter in Battle Creek who has twin girls. So that's my family (laughs)

PL: What are your best memories of the Service?
LB: Oh, the good fellowships. We did a lot of activities. We went to a lot of parades and parties. We lived right on Chesapeake Bay and had our own, private beach. Of course, you were not supposed to date Officers, but one of our gals married the Head of Aberdeen Proving Ground! But at that time we could take our uniforms off. We would go into Baltimore, and two of us would get a room and then four or five of us would show up. (smiles)

We would take off our uniforms and go out as civilians. It was a good fellowship, and like I said, we worked twenty-four hours a day. There was nothing the girls did not do, like test-driving tanks. Aberdeen was a test place. The Heavy Artillery, with the time-fuses, I had worked on them at the Eclipse. Then I got up to Aberdeen, and here they were testing them.

PL: Yes, it was a Proving Ground?
LB: Oh yes, they proved everything from tanks, trucks, etc. I remember one time we had a foreign Officer who came and was late in arriving. I had to get him to the group where he was supposed to be.

PL: Where was he from?
LB: I don't recall, but he could not speak English. I had this vehicle that I had not driven before and I almost went through a building! I went in reverse instead of going forward.

PL: Sometimes I guess you just had to teach yourself driving these things!
LB: Well, all these vehicles had a panel on the front to tell you how to drive it. When I took my license test for driving I had taken a two and a half ton truck. I didn't get very far when the Instructor said "That's far enough." I said "No, (unclear)" He was glad to get rid of me! I only weighed one hundred and five pounds then.

PL: How tall were you?
LB: Four eleven and a half. They pulled up my bangs and said "Five foot". (laughs) When I went into the Service, I was about ninety-eight pounds. You had to be one hundred pounds to get in. So I drank water and ate bananas.

PL: So you were really strongly motivated to go in?
LB: One day I was with a woman who was very unhappy that her daughter wanted to join the Army. So she came to me. I said "Well, let me put it like this, I would never advise anybody to join the Service, but I did it one hundred percent myself and would do it over and over again."

The other day she said "Louise, twenty-four years ago you gave me advise about my daughter" Well, she loved it. She was educated and everything. The Army was the best thing that ever happened to her.|

PL: Did she make a career out of it?
LB: Yes, she is still in.

PL: How do you think your Service experience affected your Civilian life afterwards? What kind of impact did it have on it?
LB: I don't know exactly how to say it, but I have all kinds of respect for everybody in the Service. Men and women. And since I have been out, I get telephone calls with questions about the Service and Veterans.
I have been very active in Veteran Affairs, Chemung County Veterans Office, the State Veterans Office members (names unclear) and I'm pretty good on all the Veteran things. I'm trying to keep up with them. I'm not young like I used to be!

PL: You had a lot of training and learning experiences in the Service. Have you put some of those to use in your Post-war life?
LB: Yes, I has helped me a lot. Like I said, I am still active in many Veterans Affairs and keep up.

PL: Did you go to work at all after you got out of the Service?
LB: No, not right then. I had to have my son. (laughs) But then I went to work at Fort Custer, in the V.A. Offices. But first I did go to work at Kresge's Five and Ten Store in Battle Creek, Michigan. I had twenty-one employees under me. They talked me into being a Manager. They put me in there to fire some girls, and I wouldn't fire them because I didn't know what I was doing and they helped me.

I was bowling and a friend of mine was in charge of the Civil Service out in Fort Custer. I went out there and got started in the kitchen. I was thinking they were going to put me in the Finance Department, but then I came to Elmira, New York. Everything I have done has been connected with the Veterans one way or another.

PL: What year did you arrive in Elmira?
LB: I came to Elmira in 1945. And I have been here ever since. Everything has been connected with the men and women Veterans. The Service did help me out a lot about learning things and procedures and friendships. There were people in civilian life that I associate with, and then there were people in the Service. You pick your friends regardless. But I have never been as close as with women in the Service. You lived together in the Barracks where you learned instructions and how to get along with people. I just loved the cadre.

And then, you were not supposed to have a two or three day leave together, but I always got them.
But if somebody else wanted to do something, I would do it for them. If there was supposed to be something special going on, then I would not take the Leave. So when I wanted time off, I always managed.

PL: So there was a lot of camaraderie and solid friendships?

LB: Oh yes. You never had that in civilian life. I shouldn't say it, but you're never as bonded or as close friends. Everybody's problems were everybody else's problems. We were all angels in the Service. You did not go into the Mess Halls at night, but we would go into the fellows' Mess Hall maybe around twelve o'clock at night. We would go into the kitchen and eat without the lights on
or anything. They would invite us over. We would do the same in our Detachment.

PL: You mean like a social get-together?
LB: Yes, just something like that we figured why not try it.

PL: How was the food in the Service?
LB: Ours was very good. We had no complaints, the cook lived in our barracks! All the food was given to all the Companies like that could be the same food. That was how they prepared it.

PL: So the Chef was pretty important?
LB: Yes, and like I said before, we had a lot of Dignitaries from Washington come down to see how the women's' Army Corps was doing and come down for inspections. It was really nice, I loved it.

PL: It's wonderful that you had such great, positive memories of those experiences.
LB: Nowadays I go to Fort McClellan, Alabama and everything is Co-ed. You get in the Mess Hall and get the choice of what you want to eat. You see the women telling the men what to do. It's so much different. I mean you have nice places to live now, we had Barracks.

PL: They don't have to go through the mud to the latrine and back to clean your shoes! It was really rustic back then.
LB: (Laughs) We had all that experience. It was fun, everybody had to do it. When I was at Fort Oglethorpe, a lot of the women got shipped overseas. But as long as they had their quota, you did not have to go. I heard they had to climb up the side of a ship! I hate water, so I backed out then. I got by without going.

PL: Was that a voluntary thing?
LB: No, if they needed two hundred people, they had to have two hundred in their Detachment. If they did not have that many, they could make you go. At Aberdeen, they had another Enlistment to go overseas, it was about the time my husband was coming back. We would have passed each other on the ships. I should have gone! (laughs) That was my first husband.

PL: Hindsight huh?
LB: It was a wonderful life and I would do it all over again myself. Except, nowadays, you have more education, more training, and you have a lot of things like benefits, which we did not have.

PL: You can see a big difference then, can't you?
LB: Oh right, it's as different as day and night. Something else we were not supposed to do was, you could not get off the Post at certain times. So when the fellows came in, or when

somebody got a car, we would get in the trunk of the car. We would hold down the trunk until we got off the Base.

PL: You did manage to have a pretty good time!
LB: Oh yes I did! (laughs) I got Discharged from Fort Dix, New Jersey. At the time, you were quarantined for about a week. You could not get off the Base. But the M.P.s (Military Police) knew us. So sometimes we would lay down in the back seat of a car with a blanket over us and they would wave us on through. Or we would get in the trunk, one way or the other. Oh, I could tell you quite a few things!

PL: But you couldn't tell me you never were caught?
LB: When we worked we worked, and when we played, we played. But we had to do things together. There was one woman, I don't recall her name, she lied about her name to get in, and she used to sing the song "Ave Maria". She was a celebrity. They finally found her in the Service so they made her get out.

PL: So she was in the Service illegally you are telling me?
LB: Well, you know, she did not want to keep up with being a celebrity. I have a lot of memories to remember. My scrapbook here tells you an awful lot. We went to see the gas chambers for example.

PL: Where was that? Was that a part of your training back then?
LB: Yes. My father was out one night and heard some guys running down the women in Service because they believed women were only in there for what they could get out of the men. A guy said to my father, "Do you know anybody who was in the Service? We know what they do." My father said "My daughter was in. Have you ever been to where they eat, and where they live?" They answered him "No." My father said "Well, we have." They never said another word.

Do you know Myron Wright? Well, he was stationed with us and every other weekend, he drove home. Back to Elmira from Aberdeen! So he would bring about five of us. We would all chip in money for the gas. We would get back in time for Revelry at six o'clock Monday morning.

PL: A quick weekend trip home.
LB: Yep, he would bring about five of us home. Anybody who wanted to and would fit in his car.

PL: Well, that meant you kept in close touch with your family and friends back here then.
LB: Right. I worked at Eclipse, and when I went into the Service, they had a big surprise party at the (unclear) Tavern. It's not there anymore. It was a lot of fun.

PL: The Eclipse Machine Company was one of our wartime industries. It was famous for making the Norden Bomb Sight I think.
LB: They made things like time fuses. In fact, I came back here when I worked for the Army Ordinance in Elmira. They had a building near Ward LaFrance, NY. I had six inspectors that I worked for. There was one down in Binghamton. They had a girl down there but somebody

wanted to go on vacation. So I went there for two weeks. The inspector that I worked for told his daughter about me, who described me to a tee. I used to be her Supervisor at Eclipse. It's a small world. She came to see me then.

Every time I came home on Leave or something, we would get a group together, have a card game. I always knew how to win at cards! Winning was all I knew how to do… I couldn't play without them accusing me of cheating!

PL: You have kept a whole, big scrapbook about your years in the Service and Post-war Service! There is a lot of history in here!
LB: These are the Barracks we lived in at Fort Oglethorpe. (Louise begins to flip the pages of her scrapbook. We had to go clear down through here through those mud flats. Here is a photo of our ball team when we used to play ball. We used to sing around the piano in the Playroom.

PL: You have a lot of memories of having good times!
LB: Oh boy, yes. Here a picture of one of our WAC Reviews. We did a lot of Reviews. You can see the Barracks then are not like they are nowadays. Here is the Conway State Teachers College. Our beautiful uniform! (laughs) Here is a card from my Dad.

PL: A postcard from home!
LB: Yes, from my father. Here are some photos from the Aberdeen Proving Grounds. We did a lot of Reviews. We were a Show Troop.

PL: Now that means what? You were a Show Troop
LB: We danced, we went to parties and sang. We entertained when they had a program.

PL: Where would you go? To the U.S.O.? (United Service Organization, Inc.)
LB: Wherever they sent us. Maybe in a city, or right around the Base Camp. Here is a picture of Colonel (unclear). She was one of the first Colonels we had.

PL: This was out of your Unit?
LB: No, these people came from Washington D.C. for reviewing and inspections.

PL: This photo is of the 44th Ordnance who did all of our Reviews. Here are some of us girls. And the good, old Barracks. We had to wash windows back then and build the fires.
LB: Right, build fires in the Barracks. That was K.P. Duty (Kitchen Patrol). There is a Jeep. There I am working on Heavy Artillery. This is a photo of one of our parties. Here we are testing rifles. There is a car I drove a lot. There is my Jeep, that was the one I could turn around on a dime!

PL: That was easier than the two-ton truck, right!?
LB: I got turned in a couple of times. There were five of us as Auditors at the Proving Grounds, and you were only supposed to have four people in a Jeep. I always had five. (smiles) We had this one Captain who turned me in because I did not salute him. So I just old my Captain who was in charge of me and he said, "Just continue what you are doing. You have been balled out, now go on and do what you were doing!"

PL: So there was no other punishment?
LB: No! Here are pictures of some of the parties we had. This one is from Baltimore, from the Two O'Clock Club. Here is a picture of us girls at The Silver Dollar in Baltimore. We used to have a lot of fun, we used to travel together. I've written down here a lot of the girls' names. This book has a little bit of everything.

PL: Well, it certainly chronicled your whole Service life! It's wonderful that you kept things like this.
LB: This Officer here, Kathleen Nash, she was the one that got involved with that notorious Hesse Jewel Case over in Germany. And then this is McClutchen some of the girls did get pregnant, and she had the contacts in Baltimore. But she went to borrow money from the wrong person who turned her in, so they let her go.

PL: This headline reads Aberdeen Welcomes the WACs so you were the first group?
LB: We were the second group in. These are some of the things that we did and our Jeep. (Louise continues to flip through the pages of her life). I just loved to ride in that Jeep! We tested some big guns. I worked over there on the Heavy Artillery Range. I loved it. I had control over the warehouse and things like that. Some of the soldiers did not like that idea of having a woman for their boss.

PL: Did the men make it difficult for you?
LB: No, I just insisted they do what they were supposed to do or just tell my boss "So and so did not do that. This woman here was the most photogenic, so she was all over having her picture taken.

PL: She was part of your Unit?
LB: Yes, in fact, she was in the same Barracks I was in. Here is a photo of the WAACs as we sang. This guy was our "pin-up" boy

PL: So the first name was WAAC which stands for ?
LB: women's Army Auxiliary Corps

PL: What made them change to WACs?
LB: Because we were not in the Regular Army. It was a women's Army Auxiliary. Then in August of 1943 we had a chance to get out in Civilian life or become an official part of the Regular Army. That's when they changed it to WACs. We had six hundred women in Aberdeen and only about six of them decided not to go into the Regular Army and all six of them came back in.

PL: Isn't that something for the record?
LB: We were real strong then. Look at this photo, that's the one that got everybody. This was the one posted around in Battle Creek, Michigan.

PL: Well, you certainly covered a lot of your experiences. Is there anything else you think you should mention?

LB: I could not even begin to tell you a lot of things. (smiles) That's all I can think of at the moment. I just loved it. I was a Drill Sargent. I always did everything right. But I had these training steps, and I had another way of doing it. Sometimes I would forget and give the wrong command right in a parade, which was a "no-no". But we sure had a lot of fun as we kept people going and interested.

PL: Basically, did the male Army Corps accept you?
LB: They did not have any choice. Some people will never accept women in the Service. We went to a convention once, and the Department Commander would not accept Women Veterans in the Service. There must have been at least fifty of us there. He had been warned, all he had to say was Veterans. If he wanted to say "Gentlemen" he also had to say "Ladies". But the term "Veterans" would cover all of us. So, even though he had been tipped off, he had to say it "Gentlemen, be seated". Then all of a sudden he would not say either one. So the fifty of us stayed standing up until he came back and said "Veterans, be seated." Oh, there are still some men who don't approve of women being in the Service today.

In fact, I was in the Chemung County Veterans Council, I won't reveal his name but he could not stand women. It was regarding the Woodlawn National Cemetery which I was on the Council there and he completely ignored me. But I did not ignore him.

PL: The women Veterans are as eligible to be interred there as the male Veterans?
LB: Oh yes! I believe it was in 1977 that ruling came under the Army, not women or anything separate. That bill where get one hundred percent disability, V.A. (Veterans Administration) benefits.

PL: You were never injured were you?
LB: Oh no thank goodness. We had a very good Outfit. One of our Commanders was Lieutenant Nash. Anyway, when you left the Post for a night out or the weekend, you had to go through Inspection before you left. Back then we had the stockings with the seams up the back and if you had them turned inside out, you could not leave. They would stop you right there and then.

You could always tell a women who was from Aberdeen because our skirts had to be a certain length, our hats had to be on the right way, our jackets would have to be all buttoned up, not just hanging open. We were well known for the way they kept us properly dressed.

PL: You must have had an outstanding reputation.
LB: We did. I brought my hat with me. I could not find the hat I had while I was in the Service. My whole uniform that I had in the Service is up at (museum name unclear). This is my National hat that I wear now. Yeah, we are a pretty nice looking outfit. I'm a little on the heavy side now. (laughs)

PL: Well, you had an Outfit that you took a lot of pride in!
LB: I'm in every parade around here. In fact, on the 26th of May I am going to be over in Corning, NY in a parade in honor of Memorial Day. They say they want to get a bus or something for the World War II Women Veterans. I don't think there are enough of us. But

my husband always drives me in the parade and I have a sign outside the car stating I'm in The women's Army National Color Guard.. We usually have about three or four cars in the parade with Women Veterans with flags and signs.

PL: Was your current husband in the Service?
LB: No, he worked for the Navy out in California. He was with the government, but not in the Service. But he is active with Veteran things. They don't know if he is in the Service or not because he is so involved with everything that I am. He is very good-hearted. He takes me everyplace. I am very proud of this here Honor Guard title seeing as there are only forty of us.

PL: When was that Group established?
LB: I think about twenty-five years ago. I've been in it for twenty years. I have Slash Marks on my jacket. If you see me anywhere in a parade, you will see my Uniform. (smiles)

PL: Well, I look forward to that!
LB: People say, "I saw you in the parade, it can't be a parade without you!" (laughs) I can't walk, but I ride. I go to all the free dinners and things afterwards at all the Veterans organizations.

PL: What do you call your Regional Organization?
LB: We are not organized at all. It is a friendly get-together. It's a hobby of mine, but I have committees which I am on. They are in Bath, Corning, it makes no difference where they come from. A group will get together, they plan what they want their meal to be. We usually go to the Holiday Inn where we always have Program Speakers. Everybody pays for their own meal, except the Guest Speaker. We usually give them their meal, and a little gift. It's just a friendly get-together, like when you go out for lunch someplace with a group.

PL: That's a nice custom to continue.
LB: Some of the girls have met people at our groups that they were in the Service with. In fact, Helena Moran who just died, I was told by one of the girls "We were in Service together!" She had been over to Bath not too long ago. We had a woman in our Bath group who had been in World War I! She's been gone a long time now. But we get big enjoyment going to Bath and being with Women Veterans. My husband usually goes along too except he will go and visit with the men. As long as we can keep active in the Veterans activities and Veterans Affairs, we are enjoying it.

PL: I thank you for sharing all your memories of your Service experience and as a Post-War Civilian. I have to compliment you on keeping so active with your lady Veterans both locally and nationally.
LB: That's just a few of my memories. I received a National Award once at the Women Army Corps Convention for Outstanding Work and Activities. I have also been a Chairman and Members at Large, that is for those who have no Chapters in their area, I have been in charge of that.

A long time ago we had articles in the paper about Members at Large. I couldn't think about just how big the United States was, but they would send me articles. Sometimes we had two pages of articles that the Members at Large had written. When I go to Conventions, I feel

right at home because I know so many of them. Of course the younger ones I don't know, but the other ones I do. It's something.

PL: So you see a lot of familiar faces when you go around?
LB: Not anymore.

PL: No, unfortunately, time has changed that.
LB: It sure does.

PL: Your comparison of the time when you were in the Service and current Service….
LB: Oh, there is no comparison at all! I mean there is so much difference it is like day and night. We did not have any of the benefits they receive today. When I was in, and you got out of the Service, you had to go to college within two years. I did not take advantage of the G.I. Bill. I thought, well, if I have a child, then after that I could take advantage of it. But that was a "no-no" after the two years.

Now, a lot of these people go in just for the education, the college degrees and things like that. We had nothing like that. I think we were getting around twenty-one dollars a month when we went in. I was getting the allowance from my husband, and that was fifty dollars a month.

PL: That was the living allowance for you?
LB: Yes, I got that even though I was also in the Service. Oh, how times have changed! But they don't have any better times than we had. We lived within our means and we had good times.

PL: Yes, you certainly did.
LB: In fact, one girl taught me how to knit. She bought my yarn for me out of Philly, one hundred percent virgin wool. I knitted it so tight, you could not even get into the sweater. Afterwards I learned I was just paying for her transportation back and forth from Philadelphia to see her folks. The yarn was just cheap, Red Heart yarn. I didn't know the difference. (laughs)

We had one girl (name unclear) from Fremont, Ohio, a Polish girl who would not do anything she did not have to do. My folks had invited her home for Christmas one year. Just before I got ready to go she had asked "Louise, can I go with you?" I said "Sure" and called my folks who got a few little gifts for her. At the breakfast table she cried like a baby, we could not figure out why. She said "it was the first time in my life that I ever received a gift at Christmas. My folks always put $25 underneath the dinner plate, no gifts wrapped up like you folks are doing." Afterward it got so she did do things she didn't have to do, like relieve people. I told her "Lucille, all you gotta do is do things you don't have to do and that helps other people out."

PL: The Service brings people of all different backgrounds together doesn't it?
LB: Oh, it sure does. We had one girl who looked like a tomboy who would never leave the Barracks. She would always shine your shoes for a quarter. You could not do anything with her like reprimand her because she never did anything wrong. I was telling you about our clothing…Well we had free alterations so if your uniform did not fit you right, there was someone on the Base who would alter it. The Officers made sure of that.

PL: How soon did you make Sargent?
LB: Less than two years. I was in Procedure Auditing which was just like a Warrant Officer. If I had taken a test in the end, I could have become a Warrant Officer. My husband was a Private overseas. He could not come home with me being a Sargent so he got Sargent rating a week before he came home. (laughs)

PL: Then you were both equal. I certainly appreciate you coming in and sharing all this with us Louis. They are going to be documented for the Library of Congress Veterans History Project and maybe leave some pictures or document. I thank you very much. I know you are going to share your scrapbook with our Archivist.

LB: It brings back memories. I might leave some pictures here or something.
PL: Thank you again.

LB: I probably broke your camera though! (smiles)