Australians at War Film Archive

Helen Fraser - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Okay Helen, we'll make a start today. Can you tell us a brief overview of your life this far?**

Well, I was born in Hughenden, in North Queensland, in August 1925. We lived in Hughenden I believe for nearly 25 years, then my Father was transferred to Townsville. We were in Townsville seven years and I

01:00 went to the Northwood State School, and then we transferred to Brisbane only for 11 months and I went to Toowong school for 11 months. Then we were transferred back to Rockhampton. I went to the Hall school there and then to the Central Girls and the Rockhampton High School and Technical College. I did a commercial

01:30 course. Ultimately I worked for the New Zealand Insurance in Rockhampton with the glorious title of 'office boy'. The office boy was called up, so the position was office boy; there weren't boys around then so I was the first girl in that illustrious position. Stayed in the Royal Insurance for about two and half years, not always as the office boy, and then I enlisted

02:00 in the navy. I arrived in Brisbane on the 22nd March 1944, after a week's more or less induction course. I was sent out to ATIS [Allied Translator and Interpreter Section] at Indooroopilly, which is an allied unit where there's army and navy air force, male and female. The Americans, male and female and also the second generation Japanese, called the

02:30 'Nisei'. And most of the people that were there, they could read and write, anything to do with Japanese. And they used to bring likely lads down from the islands for further interrogation before they shipped them off down south, probably to Cowra. And I was

03:00 involved in typing up the depositions from the interviews of the interrogations, if you'd like to say. Also later on there were captured documents that had been translated. Ultimately I went to the information section, where I dissected these, this information with regard to the navy and more or less - I'm getting a bit lost now.

03:30 **That's all right. So the 'Nisei' did you say?**

'Nisei': they were second generation Japanese; American citizens but they are second generation Japanese. They were born in the United States and they could read, write Japanese so they were over here but they couldn't have them to fight the Japanese because you wouldn't know by their facial structure who was

04:00 who. So they were in translating captured documents.

I hadn't heard that name before.

I think it's Nisei, I think that's how you pronounce it; how it's spelt, I'm not sure.

So you were brought up in Hughenden?

Hughenden, it's on the western line on to Mt Isa out from Townsville.

A country girl?

Yeah way back. Of course Townsville in those days

04:30 would have been not the Townsville of today, it was very much a country town, but it had a lot. In those days milk used to come by the horse and cart, the bread would be delivered. The milk order, the meat order would be delivered, the groceries would be delivered, they were probably the golden days of getting goods delivered.

Can you tell us

05:00 **about growing up there? Did you have any brothers or sisters?**

I only had one brother, he was 14 months younger than myself and unfortunately there didn't seem to be any little girls around where we lived, so I got involved in all the boys' pursuits. Cowboys and Indians and various other things, like I s'pose I was a tomboy.

That's probably why you got the office boy job.

Yeah probably was. Yes.

So if you were born in

05:30 **'25 then I suppose you would have experienced some form of the Depression?**

Yes, the tail end. My Father, as he was in the Department of Public Works, he was in constant employment, but I recall the relief workers. Because we lived in a street in Townsville that didn't go right through to another artery, we had people, what they called relief workers, who did the road works,

06:00 to put the road in. I remember those. But I suppose I was sheltered a fair bit from it, seeing that my Father was in full employment. In those days there weren't too many pennies to go around. I mean, you looked after your pennies very well and another thing, in those days when you went to school, the Commonwealth Bank had a savings account and my brother and I had a little passbook and we used to put two shillings in a week or a month, I can't remember whether it was a week or a month

06:30 but my Mother always said your bankbook was your best friend, so she started [us] on that track rather early.

Were you close to your little brother?

Oh he and I got on very well, yes and..

Is he still alive?

He died a couple of years ago from melanoma; living in the north has some compensations, but it has some drawbacks too and we're only finding out about that now. Melanoma is

07:00 a dreadful thing and you really have to watch your skin very, very carefully.

Yes I've heard Queensland has the worst reputation for that?

Well we didn't know in those days. My Mother was always making sure we had a hat on, put a shirt on when he went in in his swimmers, but in the language of today, it wasn't 'cool' to do that.

What about if you got sunburnt, what was

07:30 **the remedy that they'd use?**

I think it was bicarbonate of soda I think, pasted bicarbonate of soda on, my Mother used. I didn't like, I didn't go sunbaking but living up there in the tropics you're running around, it was inevitable you got badly burnt.

And were your family second generation Australians?

No my Father was a Scot, he came out from Scotland some time in about 1910.

08:00 My Mother: her mother was an English lady and her father was a son of an English soldier I believe, he's a bit of a mystery man, I haven't kind of tracked him down but I'm working on it.

And was your dad a strict father?

I s'pose so, yeah, both our parents were fairly strict, we couldn't get away with too much, there was always a strap on the door

08:30 just in case.

Did you ever get the strap?

Oh if I was bad, if I was naughty enough I suppose I did, but my Mother threatened so we knew we would get it. She didn't make idle threats. If we were bad enough we would be in for great trouble.

Was the strap on your bottom or leg?

Probably in the - it was conveniently reposed on a knob on the kitchen door, it was a reminder

09:00 that it was there and Mother didn't kind of make threats wildly.

And what about your mum, was she a good thrifty cook during the Depression?

Oh yes. My Mother yes, no one wasted any money then. We didn't get any pocket money, that, and in those days I think a pie would have cost thruppence, that's less than

09:30 five cents now, and maybe as a treat we might buy our lunch at school; very much a treat. And she didn't believe in children eating things when you went to town. Town was an occasion; you went in with your best dress and your shoes and socks and she didn't believe in us eating ice-creams and things. We might get a penny ice-cream on the

10:00 last shop on the way home.

So what do you mean, if she was sitting down to have lunch, you couldn't have lunch?

Oh we wouldn't have lunch, oh no, no. A journey to town, that's what it was, we were there to buy this, this, this and that was it and then we came home. We might have a malted milk or something at a milk bar but as for eating ice-creams in the street

10:30 that was a no-no as far as my Mother was concerned. As I'd say, the last shop would be couple of hundred yards from the house and suitably out in the suburbs and we could have our penny ice-cream.

Aren't mothers funny sometimes, the rules. Well my Mother never liked chewing gum, we were never allowed to chew gum.

You see when you look at our parents, they came from a different

11:00 generation again and they were more hidebound in those days. I mean on Mondays you did the washing and you'd put the washing out beautifully on the line because Mrs So and So next door would [say], "She hasn't done it properly on the line." And then, "Oh yes, oh yes." And then there'd be ironing the next day and then they'd have various other things. Oh yes it was kind of regulated

11:30 in a social way, let's say.

I've never thought about it but I suppose that's where that old song comes from 'Monday's washing days…'

Yes. And then there may be an occasion when the wife was sick or something and the husband would do the washing and he would not be aware that there was a pattern; all the socks together here. Well the neighbours, they would get a little laugh to themselves at the

12:00 expense of the poor fellow who was doing his best. It was rather cruel in a way.

'Big brother is watching'?

Yes.

Did your mother have one of those old coppers?

Oh yes, we had a copper and a proper stick and it was a wood fire, yes. We [had] that in Townsville and even when we lived in Rockhampton, too, during the war. That was the way you

12:30 did the washing, you had the washtubs under the house, the copper and you boiled things in those days and they had quite a potpourri of things you put in. I can't remember what my Mother used, there was vastly different from what we use today.

I've heard of the coppers and the strong arms that the women would end up having?

Oh yes. And another

13:00 thing, we used to use kerosene tins for carting, I was quite happy to walk, a bit like you know how Chinese used to carry two things of equal weight, kerosene tins full of hot water and another thing in those days we only had a chip heater and sometimes if you wanted to boil up water in the copper, chippies were in the bathroom.

How does a chip heater work?

13:30 **Was it little bath chips?**

I've got to think how it works now. It would have been. A chip heater, it must have been chips or something, it wasn't gas fire, some of them in later years were gas fires, I just can't recall that. But if it was gas fire it would be, look I just can't recall on that,

14:00 I'd have to give a bit of thought to it if I was going to be asked a question just what happened there.

Well I've heard about the chip heaters in honesty but I don't think I've ever had it explained how they really worked, if you know what I mean?

You had to be very careful if you had a chip heater, I mean because you could more or less set the house on fire if you didn't watch what you were doing.

So you moved to Townsville when you were seven did you say?

No,

14:30 we were in Townsville when I started school.

So you would have been about five?

When I started school I was a bit under 5; my birthday's in August and I started on the 1st of July of that year, but we were in Townsville then, I don't know, maybe the family were in Hughenden nearly five years, but by the time I arrived I s'pose I would have been there less than five years. I

15:00 went to school in the Hall in Townsville, in what? 1913 I suppose.

And how did you find Townsville, growing up there?

Oh it was great fun. It was rather hot, I really didn't like the heat. I learnt to swim in the salt water baths that were then in Townsville, I believe they were wiped out by a cyclone later on, but whether they've got further

15:30 salt water baths there, that's there.

And how were you as a swimmer?

Oh well, my Mother made sure that both of us could swim because she could not. I don't know whether my Father could swim or not, I never inquired about that but she made sure that both of us learnt to swim, so I wasn't much of a swimmer as such but I did learn to dive in and ultimately later on there was a

16:00 swimming carnival, not in Townsville but in Rockhampton, and they wanted a relay team for the class, well I wasn't much of a swimmer but I was one of the four people who could dive in. Such is my swimming career.

I was just thinking it must have been an English thing, because my Mother's English and she made it imperative that everybody could swim by the age of five,

16:30 **and I think it was this fear that being in Australia we would all drown because of all the …**

Well I mean, my Mother came from a country town, which was Bowen, and maybe she might have some kind of an incident in her childhood where somebody drowned in the local pool or local pond, or lagoon or something or other so she made sure that we both learnt to swim.

What about sport in

17:00 **general Helen, were you good at anything in particular?**

I played basketball for the Hall school in Rockhampton and we did play like a little league, we went to Rockhampton, no sorry not - went to Mount Morgan near Yapeen and played the various teams there, that's all. I did like running,

17:30 I s'pose if I persisted I might have been a long distance runner, but I did like hurdling, there'll the things that are not exactly, a bit tomboyish I s'pose and high jumping.

What about as an academic, did you enjoy school?

I s'pose as much as anybody enjoyed school in those days. It was there and you had to turn up and do the right thing, yes.

18:00 **Were you particularly good at English or maths?**

No, I really liked geography and history. English and maths, well for junior you had, and scholarship, you really had to pass English and maths, regardless; if you didn't pass in those core subjects you could be failed, so you more or less had to work on your English and maths to get a scholarship to further education.

18:30 **When you were little did you have an idea what you wanted to be when you grew up?**

No, no. In those days, I mean, especially now, when I left high school, this in Rockhampton then, when we were living in Rockhampton, that was the tail end of the - the war was on then, but

19:00 you either, if you had your junior pass then you may get the opportunity to go into the public service, you could take teacher's training, or you could become a nurse if you wanted to take nursing training, you could work in a an office if there were opportunities available for office work and if you didn't have that, you either went into service or you worked in

19:30 something like Coles. It wasn't Coles then, I think it was Penny's, and when you became 18 or 20 something, you'd be a senior and they would give you the sack. So they were more or less the opportunities that were available then. If you were what we called 'a brain', people had to have the sufficient pennies to put you through further education and there are

20:00 a lot of girls in those days who, if the family pocket were large enough, they would go to university but there was just no hope they could go to university so we did office jobs and various other things like that.

These are the days when you had to pay for your education? I mean you have to pay now too but we did have a period in Australian history when education was free, so was it expensive in those days?

Oh it would have been, yes,

20:30 and another thing, if it was university education, it would be the same as today, they would have to leave home and come down to Brisbane and that, and another thing if I remember rightly, there weren't too many high schools in Queensland, I think there were four. Townsville, Rockhampton, Brisbane, I think Toowoomba, I could be wrong on that, but there weren't that many high schools either so regardless of what kind of education whether it was

21:00 public or private schools or the state education you have to, you would have had to of left home if you lived in a country area other than these four main centres.

It's just so hard to fathom when today everybody goes to high school?

High school, yes, in Queensland in those days - I think it's probably the same now,

21:30 I'm not sure - at the end of year 7 you sat for your scholarship. If you passed your scholarship you got two free years at high school to do the next exam which was your junior certificate. I only did my junior certificate, and then I suppose with your junior certificate you could get two more years, three years to do your senior certificate and all that leading in other states

22:00 and then if you passed that you would eligible for tertiary education.

So what happened with you then, you decided that?

Well I did a commercial junior.

What does that mean?

Shorthand, typing, book keeping, English. I think we had geography there, I'm not sure. I can't recall the core subjects there, but it was shorthand, book keeping and typing.

Could you have done that at school?

22:30 Yes, from the age of 11 to 13, 14. I did another little course after junior in the commercial field and then, of course in those days you could go to work, I think it was age 15. You couldn't be employed under that age, but I think 15 was the magic age that you could sally forth into the workforce.

I guess what I'm trying to

23:00 **find out is, you could do your regular junior and, correct me if I'm wrong, you could also do your commercial junior; you could choose?**

No well with regard to doing the junior certificate there were a few streams. You could do an academic junior, you could do a commercial junior, also you could do a domestic science junior. And with regards to boys, they could do a manual arts one, though I

23:30 don't know that it had that name then but that's what they did, all those kind of manual art things. So there were four streams there. And, but they'd have hard core subjects like English and arithmetic and oh yes, arithmetic was up, maths, you call them maths 1 and 2 now with algebra and geometry, in those days they were the mathematics, algebra and geometry, the three definite

24:00 things like that. Now come to mind that's what it was.

So when you passed your junior you would pass that course with a percentage?

Well I would have to do my English, the three maths, then there would be shorthand, typing and book keeping.

It's extraordinary to me that an 11 or 12 year old would know that that's the junior certificate they wanted to do, that

24:30 **was the subjects that they wanted to do. Did you just chose them because you were interested in typing and shorthand?**

Well in those days, early days, when I was at state school, in grade 6 we went to the high school to do a domestic science course. I'm not sure whether it was one day a week or one day a month but we learnt how to

25:00 [do] dressmaking, cooking, laundry and also with regard to vitamins and dietetics and things like that, they were the four core things. I wasn't very good as a dressmaker, we made terrible clothes; the cooking, my Mother thought that left a lot to be desired because our scones

25:30 were a bit like rock cakes and things like that. But I didn't - and the teacher dearly wanted me to go to a domestic science junior because I really understood the vitamins and dietary. I think left to my own

devices I probably would have been interested in that but all I could see was a long line of dirty dishes to be washed up and that wasn't for me thank you very much so I opted for the commercial junior.

And so when you finished, how did you go? Did you do well?

Oh

26:00 I was say an average student. I got there but I wouldn't say I was at the top of the tree at all.

And so you would have been 14?

I was, I went to high school the first year the war was on, that was 1939, that was first year high school and then that was 1939

26:30 1941, I did another course, the commercial thing, then after that I applied for and was successful in a job as office boy.

Can you tell us what was going on in Australia at that time when you were in high school?

Well in high school as you know Rockhampton is in central Queensland and

27:00 also it's on the main north-south railroad. In those days the Japanese were very active out in the sea and to bring troops up to the north they had to come by rail and the trains went non-stop day and night, moving troops and equipment up to Townsville, maybe further

27:30 north and also at that time Rockhampton was a garrison city; we had 40,000 American soldiers.

Geez, well how was that as a young woman seeing all these blokes around?

There was a some kind of a canteen there, we were kind of like volunteers to go and be like waitresses in the canteen if I remember rightly.

28:00 And they, of course Rockhampton in those days, there weren't very many cars so the way you got around was you owned and rode a bicycle everywhere to work.

What did your father do in Rockhampton, was he still working…?

He was a logistic inspector of public works.

And your younger brother was obviously too young to sign up?

Yes, he dearly would have liked to of been older but

28:30 he took out an apprenticeship to be an electrician.

So what were the Americans like in Rockhampton? You said you worked in the canteen; were they friendly towards the locals?

Oh yes, I don't remember too many incidents that happened up there because the Americans were such a different race of people to the average Australian;

29:00 the Aussie fellow didn't like them very much at all but that still was par of the course.

In Rockie - I mean I'd heard about what was going on in Brisbane?

It went on in Brisbane here, but I don't remember too much in the way of that, I can't, I really don't.

Up in Rockhampton you don't remember the dances or the balls or anything?

Oh I did have dances. I can't remember any balls.

29:30 **So where were you Helen, when war was declared?**

Living in Rockhampton.

Did you hear it on the radio?

We didn't have a radio, my Mother wouldn't have one in the house, but we'd have got the news from somewhere either by word of mouth or by somebody's radio or something like that.

What was the feeling, was there fear?

Now this

30:00 war, when we're talking about the war, this is the European war.

Yes.

This is 1939.

Yes that's right, the Japanese hadn't entered.

No, but that was '41. Well I don't know what it was because well it was so far away I suppose but it was the fellows who joined up the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. I suppose I was a bit remote from that because I had no relatives that were in the services.

30:30 I did have one but I didn't know about it and he was a cousin I never met until the last 10 years ago; he's since died. But I didn't have any relatives in the forces so I couldn't tell you on that. But there was the, oh, we used - I was from the Girl Guides and we used to have aluminium drives and tyre, when they wanted to collect

31:00 all scrap metal of some sort and tyres. Have it connecting or all those things. There was a Patriotic Fund; I was a collector for the Patriotic Fund in our street, I think that's about all I think that, I wasn't very hard on that.

Who ran the Patriotic Fund?

It was a local lot of ladies, I

31:30 think it could have been a offshoot from the Red Cross, they might have had Red Cross kind of background but they were all local ladies, and they worked, held little functions like ladies do now to raise money with cakes and things like that. Now another thing, there was rationing but I can't tell you when it came in. It was meat, sugar, tea,

32:00 I think butter might have been rationed too, I just can't remember. We did have coupons, I know when I was ultimately in the forces, when I went home on leave I'd have to take some coupons to more or less hand over to the family, to the household, well my ration of butter and sugar etcetera, like that.

Because you didn't use all your coupons?

Well when I was in the services down there

32:30 we didn't handle coupons. We were kind of catered for but when you went home for a couple of weeks leave you had to more or less take your rations coupons with you and you would be issued with sufficient number of coupons to cover the period you were away for those items which were rationed.

Did your family have a particular religious faith?

Yeah,

33:00 we were Anglican. My Father was a Presbyterian. We were Anglican.

And were they strict on going to Sunday school and church?

Oh yes we had to go to Sunday school. We had to learn – well, that was the done thing, you went to Sunday school every Sunday and probably went to church either before or afterwards depending on what was the fashion in that particular

33:30 church.

Did you get lollies, biscuits or cookies for going to Sunday school from the teachers?

I don't remember that they gave out anything like that. I don't know that we were bribed in any way. No, no I don't recall that.

I remember my sister and I going for the bikkies.

So much for religion. Yeah.

So

34:00 **tell us when you decided that you wanted to enlist?**

Oh well.

I mean when war broke out, did you think, "I should do my bit", or…?

Oh when war broke out I was still at school you see and in the early days the only women in the forces would be nurses and they would be graduate nurses for the nursing services.

34:30 There was the VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachment], they were like an offshoot of the Red Cross, I don't know, they had another name. I think they were VADs and then I don't whether they went to war, but then again they would have been people well over 21. They would be mature people I would think. But then when the Japanese came into the war, then all the women services

35:00 came into being. Before then they, it was mainly the nursing staff I would think but then again bearing in mind living in Rockhampton in far North Queensland well if anything happened it would be down in the southern states, not up there. And we, and we may or may not know about it till months later I suppose, when news filtered up there I would think.

35:30 **Is that why you didn't return to Rockhampton; you felt a little bit out of touch with the rest of**

Australia?

What when, when I left?

After the war you didn't return?

Well as I say I 'listed in Rockhampton and came down to Brisbane here. I hadn't been down here 12 months and my Father was transferred back to Brisbane again, so we never went back to Brisbane, never went back to Rockhampton after they moved down and then they'd only be down a couple of months and I was shifted to Sydney.

36:00 So that was it and after I was demobilised I came back to Rockhampton, came back to Brisbane again, and then more or less the family were, housing was very hard to come by in those days and my Father, my parents were living in a kind of like a boarding house kind of arrangement. And there was, I went more or less flatting

36:30 with another friend and then more or less lived separately, although my parents were in Brisbane.

Was becoming the office boy something you enjoyed?

Well.

Sorry, what company was it

37:00 **for Helen?**

New Zealand Insurance. Well being office boy you had to collect the mail from the post box, open the mail. Now did I open the mail? No the boss opened the mail, but we'd have to write out any receipts or renew any policies as they came in. Then the company had three bank accounts

37:30 with different banks and I'd also have to go to the bank. Well Rockhampton is a very hot place, well I visibly lost weight on that job and also I had to deliver letters around town like say to a solicitor or somebody or other like that. So I'm more or less, along with going to the bank, I'd have a little route of people I'd have to deliver letters

38:00 to en route you see and then ultimately I bought a bicycle so it was a better going by bike around town but another lass, she was a little bit older than I and she was co-opted in[to] being office boy for delivering things on the alternate days. I really did lose weight because it was rather humid.

38:30 What else did we do? Another thing in those days, I don't know what's it's like now, there used to be called Western mail days, they were the days when the mail trains came in from Longreach on Tuesdays and Fridays. The mail train would come in very early in the morning, around about 8 or 9 o'clock, the post office would sort the mail, we'd get the mail and they

39:00 were the really very hectic days as I recall because the mail train went out again at four in the afternoon and any work that was needed to be done had to be done, letters typed and everything done, in and out on the one day. And so it was kind of scamper, scamper, scamper on those days especially the girls who were the stenographers, they were always working against time, you see.

39:30 And another thing I had to know all the little towns that lived on the Western line, also the Dawson Valley line so you knew exactly when you were going to send a letter, what day of the week you'd have to, the mail you'd have to catch. So being office boy I suppose had a few responsibilities.

Were you treated well by the boss though?

Oh yes, it was only a small office: the boss, two other men, I suppose there could have been 8 to 10 people in the office I think, if I can remember rightly.

Tape 2

00:36 **Helen you mentioned to Heather [interviewer] before that with all the Americans in Rockhampton they were regarded as a bit of a strange race?**

Well they were so different, they always seemed to have lots of money by comparison with the Australian Forces because

01:00 I think the men only got six bob a day, or shillings I should say, six shillings a day, which, seven days a week, that would only be £2; six sevens are 42. £2, 2 shillings, well I think the Americans were much more well paid than that and also they had

01:30 their PX [Post Exchange Store – American Canteen Unit], which was their canteen, they had wonderful things there like ice-cream and nylon stockings and chocolate, I don't know what else they had in there and also American-style food like chocolate bars and things like that, which would be, well a bit of a delicacy I suppose, so there was a bit of envy from the Australians who really couldn't compete with the

02:00 girls with those kind of, what's the word I want, those kind of inducements, that's the word. But still they were a really kind of open people, they seemed to be a happy kind of people - I suppose they weren't, they were far away from home, at least they were in a safe environment at that stage until they were

02:30 sent up into battle.

How did many of the locals regard them?

Well I have; most times when I lived in Queensland we didn't live anywhere where we had relatives. But when we went to Rockhampton my brother had a, her oldest brother was living there. Well I believe that they through her brother, although he was Anglican and his wife was Presbyterian, so

03:00 they were more or less part and parcel to the Presbyterian church and I know that they did have some American servicemen staying, visiting them. I think it was mainly through the church, they met them through the men going to church and they did quite a lot of entertaining of those Americans and they did keep in touch with them for many, many years after the war,

03:30 because they survived the war.

Did you ever hear of any U.S. soldiers being billeted by local families and things like that?

Well they had extensive camps that were put up, I think it was on the outskirts of North Rockhampton, that's right, and around there. All we saw were their

04:00 vehicles and I didn't really - in those days people weren't as mobile as they are now. I mean if I wanted to go anywhere in those days, you either walked, maybe went on an infrequent bus, or you rode a bicycle. I mean my Father had a car, but it was a government car, it wasn't a family car. So I mean you were, the billeting was restricted by comparison with today.

Was your father able to use

04:30 **his company car for personal use?**

Not really, I mean it was a government car and he was a bit of stickler of abiding by the rules.

So can you tell me how you came to sign up?

Oh well,

05:00 it was the advent of the Japanese in the war and probably a bit earlier than that, I don't where it actually, because there's the two other services, the army and the air force, they came into being well before the navy. But and well in those days good news and bad news travels very fast by word of mouth and sometimes you'd get a bad report about what's happening in the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] or the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force].

05:30 **What sort of things would you hear at the time?**

Oh there'd be naughty girls and naughty boys and various other things and you know what's it's like in country towns, good news and bad news goes like a wildfire. But evidently my Mother thought that the navy sounded a bit better than the - and so she thought, "Well…".

06:00 When I wanted to join the navy, there wasn't any opposition, so I applied, but then the navy, when you'll find out about the navy, the navy really did not [want] women in the services. In the days of Lord Nelson, women weren't in that, and in many ways the navy was still run more or less like the English navy and the bible

06:30 of the navy was 'K.R. and A.I.'; King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions. But the navy really didn't want the women in the services, they could get by without them but then again when they needed further men for active duty, that's when the women were more or less accepted.

07:00 **Because I find that very fascinating, just the introduction of women into the services and that sort of thing, but before I get you into the navy, I just wanted to ask, you were doing an office boy's job before you signed up because the boy there had gone off?**

His name was Albert, I don't know what his surname was, but he'd gone into the army because in those days, now I don't know about him, whether he joined the AIF

07:30 as a volunteer but everybody was in manpower and you had to, you had to be employed in and there are some industries that were called 'protected industries'. Now insurance was a protected industry so I really did not have to enlist, I did so of my own free will but it was some kind of

08:00 manpower arrangement. I do know of someone who was manpowered into a job where I ultimately worked for the last 30 years – this is hearsay I'm telling you now – and this lady, she didn't want to work in the soap factory but she was manpowered there and her sister-in-law said, "I'll go in your stead", and I think she thought she'd play merry hell and get in and

08:30 get out. I think that was her original idea but somehow or another she found that she liked it; that lady stayed there well over 30 years. But that was what manpowering was about.

Were there many girls in the town that were starting to take positions or jobs they wouldn't normally have had around the same time you were doing the office boy work?

Look jobs in any country town

09:00 were usually - there weren't that many around. The job I applied for was advertised in the local Rockhampton Bulletin I think it was called then, but there weren't that many office jobs going around because they would be branch office places and there were, as I said, I don't know how many people would have applied for the job, but then when

09:30 the people, the air force, the RAAF and the AWAS were, and the AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service], they were the army girls that had some kind of nursing training, I think the local offices had a problem staffing because all the girls joined the forces. They found that there was

10:00 much more, they'd be much more alive if they joined the forces than staying at home just working there, it was - no they all joined up. Most of them did anyway if the opportunity came their way, because not everyone could join up, they might have had family commitments, restrictions, something like that.

Was it a memorable time for you the day the Japanese entered the war?

That was in

10:30 December '41. I can't remember too much, the only thing is our next door neighbour when we lived in Rockhampton, he was a captain I think in the Australian Army in the intelligence and he was often away on raids of some description. I mean you didn't know what he was doing but often he was called out on things of a military nature. And when

11:00 you think of Rockhampton, which is fairly away with regard to the war because early in the days even with the Japanese, with the Germans and the Italians, they had quite a large population of Italians in the sugar industry up in farther north, so I think there would have been some kind of worry about them. I don't know if we had too many Germans around then, but I wouldn't have known that. And in any case, in

11:30 those days we didn't hear any foreign languages. I remember one day seeing a Dutch merchant navy officer walking up and down speaking some kind of strange language; well, such is the multiculturalism which did not exist in those days.

So what was it that most strongly promoted you to sign up?

Oh.

12:00 It was great, I was getting away from home and I would, I mean, I was getting away from home in one way, but then again you're going in to the arms of the forces where you have to do as you're told type of thing, but it seemed it [had] more to offer than just in Rockhampton. So I didn't know where I'd end up, but at least the navy had

12:30 depots in big cities; well, that was the big smoke in those days so it seemed inviting and exciting too.

So you were looking to get to a big city and do a bit of travel?

Not a bit of travel, I mean it was just, well I suppose it was travel. I didn't know where I'd

13:00 end up in the navy, it was a bit of a lark. Well most of them will say it was a bit of lark.

Was there much fear of invasion by the Japanese at that stage?

Oh yes. You've heard of the Brisbane line? Yes. We lived in Rockhampton as you know, well we were far north of the Brisbane line.

13:30 My aunt in Rockhampton, she came from a grazing property further in and if the worst had come to the worst we were going to go out towards the Claremont area somewhere. But I really, the Japanese, they really did, if the Americans weren't there, they would have had us. When you look where [the] Battle of the Coral Sea is you kind of shudder and when you find out later on in life all the shipping that went down on

14:00 the east coast of Australia, the people in the southern states, they really were in cocoons, they didn't know what was going on up north and of course in Rockhampton we did, those trains went non-stop going up past north where they could leap-frog up in to New Guinea.

So what was the talk around the town at the time, constantly seeing these trains go through?

Well my uncle, he was a guard on the

14:30 railway and he was almost due for retirement but he had to be kept on. Oh the trains went up, because

in Rockhampton the trains, they say, go through the main street; it's not the main street, it's a fairly substantial street but it goes through town. Also there was the railway bridge which was stronger than the normal bridge

15:00 linking the city side of Rockhampton to north Rockhampton and they had put planks and things on the railway bridge so the Americans could drive their heavy trucks and tanks like that when they were taking them. So the railway line and the railway bridge got double usage.

But

15:30 **you were saying that while you were in Rockhampton everyone was aware of the Brisbane line?**

Oh yes, and I think, I'm not sure whether we had an air raid shelter but in Brisbane I know they had air raid shelters.

What did people think of the pact, the rest of the country was prepared to sacrifice everything north of Brisbane?

16:00 Well if you allowed them to get that far, you would have had a very different job getting them back out again. And given what we know now that I mean we weren't really geared for war here. All our fighting men were over in the Middle East and over in the European theatre. So I mean if the Americans weren't here they would have had us for sure, but I don't think, and we were cocooned, we didn't know about

16:30 Darwin, we knew that they did do Darwin, but subsequently, we didn't know until what extent.

Your family obviously felt that Claremont was west enough?

Oh well a few hundred miles in. I never went there, but that's where aunt came, she was from that particular area. That was the plan that

17:00 never came to be.

So you mentioned before, your parents were quite supportive of you joining…

Yes.

…the service. Can you walk us through how you did, I mean just the process of enlisting, what happened?

I must have got the application form from somewhere, maybe I wrote for it, I'm not sure

17:30 and then I had to have Mother's permission to go because I was only 18 and a half. I must of had to have a medical examination before being accepted, because they'd have to find out whether you were acceptable medically before they'd take you in and then I think I must have applied when I was about 18

18:00 because I think it took about six months for me to finally be accepted. And then found that was to come down to Brisbane here. I don't know how I came up, I probably came up on an ordinary train, yes, like the Rockhampton Mail or something, that's what they were called or…

So there was a local recruiting office in Rockie at the time?

18:30 If there would have been I think there would only have been a recruiting office for the army and the air force and the navy maybe, for the men. I'm not sure, but I think the recruiting office was probably for the army I would think. I'm not sure on that. I've got to think back now.

And you mentioned before that I guess there was a perception that the AWAS girls were a little bit fast?

Well the whole

19:00 idea of women in the forces was a bit new, type of thing and there was people who find some kind of detraction of some sort and they were, whether it was true or false rumours spread like wildfire so just decided that okay if I wanted to join up, the navy it was, I mean

19:30 she didn't think too much whatever rumours she heard from the other two.

But what about the air force for you, was that not an option, did you think about that at all?

I can't think why, I decided I wanted the navy, maybe because there weren't so many of them I suppose. Well I thought there wouldn't be so many of them.

So once you signed up and they decided to take you

20:00 **what happened to you then?**

Oh the day had come so I was off, I just can't recall what happened. I think my Mother was got upset of the whole thing. My brother was rather envious. I don't think my Father said much in the whole thing

but I was away.

You were happy about that?

Well yes, as I said to someone later,

20:30 in a way that after the war the girls who had been the services, they had a experience that was not available to girls prior to then. I mean coming out of the Depression, that was a different way of life completely and then after they got out of the services life had changed again and they weren't going to be put back in the box that they were in before the war.

21:00 They had their own life to lead and they were going to lead it their way I think.

And cause no end of strife.

Well you, well, oh no they didn't get in any end of strife but they were far more reliant and I mean they weren't, well they had much more initiative and they were going to use, that type of thing.

21:30 You see and you look at them after the war, they had money in their pockets in preferred pay and they went over [to] England and they hitchhike here and they'd do that and they were very resourceful ladies and of course they were the role models - and the men too, the ex-servicemen - for the current day backpackers.

22:00 **So tell us about your initial induction into the navy, what that was like.**

Well that was quite interesting. Came down to Brisbane here and there was a recruiting office and we went down there to a clothing store and got an assortment of

22:30 clothes, so many winter uniforms, I think summer uniforms, I think must of had a couple of those because they were more or less on and washed and ironed and on and washed and ironed. And then we'd have our winter uniform and so many shirts, and I forgot, the shirts were men's shirts, they had detachable collars, you know, studs. I wasn't very good at

23:00 ironing collars and I scorched so many collars I more or less washed and ironed more collars than I ever wore because I was a disaster in ironing with starched collars. And we had a greatcoat and in the navy you get so much

23:30 pay and you get a clothing allowance, 3cents a day or something. And when you wanted to replace a shirt or collars or shoes along the line you had to pay for it because you had been given that much allowance a day,

24:00 a clothing allowance. And ultimately we'd have to do our basic training which you walk up the playground, not the playground, the parade ground and learn to salute the correct navy way and pay attention to the - in the army it would be the sergeant, and this was the petty officer. He was a grumpy old character; wasn't that old

24:30 but he was a grumpy character and after about a week we more or less, evidently we were proficient in marching without losing step and saluting the correct way and so that was it, and then we would be allotted to wherever they needed the staff. Well somehow or other, the two others, there were two other girls in the same

25:00 intake as I was and we were sent out to ATIS at Indooroopilly. That's how I got out there. I don't know who I got out there but, I don't know, in the intake I don't know if there were other girls that were brighter that could have been clothing staff or cooks or something like that, I don't know what there, I can't tell you what the other girls were doing, but we three set out to ATIS.

So basic training was

25:30 **a week?**

About a week, yeah, I think so, about a week or 10 days. And we lived in at Morton. Now Morton in those days was down where QUT [Queensland University of Technology] is now, on the river down there next to the gardens.

Yes.

And there was the Naval Depot and they had the seaman's quarters and they had WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Navy Service] quarters too. And we had our own mess

26:00 and the officers' mess, it used to be an old caretaker's cottage, where the café is in the gardens.

So was there much interaction between the men and the woman?

Well the navy, they were very, very strict. No, there were,

26:30 I mean they probably would in their various work roles when they had to interact with one another but seamen's quarters and the WRANS' quarters were over there and there was no sort of fraternising.

That's the word I want, yeah unless they had a social or some sort and then, wait on, there was, the one place where you could probably meet up was the canteen, the 'wet and dry' canteen.

27:00 It was called the 'wet canteen' because that's where they sell beer and things like that. It's the same place but when it's not selling beer it's known as the 'dry canteen' and you can buy whatever limited amount of things you could buy there, because bear in mind in those days there weren't that much in the way of sweets and things because of rationing.

And

27:30 **how often did it switch between wet and dry?**

Well, the wet canteen was usually late in the afternoon I think. Now I should mention along with getting all my clothes and things like that I did get a beer allowance, I think it was two bottles of beer, I don't know whether it was day or a week, or something and also I got

28:00 a, have I got an authority there, no that's another one, for cigarettes. Now I have smoked about one packet of cigarettes but then again I had to send them to people, have my cigarettes, I didn't want them, and the beer, I don't know whether I collected the beer and gave it to someone or what but when the wet canteen was on you could still buy your

28:30 other goods that were not alcohol at the same particular time, but you only could buy alcohol at just certain time, it was regulated.

Do you remember what kind of things they sold in the dry canteen considering the rationing and all that sort of stuff?

No I can't. I mean in the navy you got pretty good food, we had our own cooks, and I know when

29:00 talking to girls in the other services they were rather envious of our Sunday dinner because evidently in the days of Nelson, the Royal Navy had roast pork and apple sauce on Sundays for lunch. That's what we had on Sundays for lunch; very nice. When you heard what the air force and army girls were eating, they were rather envious.

29:30 **Was there, I mean how do you hear those kind of stories?**

Well I worked with them and when I went out to Indooroopilly I was an allied unit and there were AWAS and the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] girls there and as I mentioned earlier, we did get dinner, army girls

30:00 came over too. But we did know the other, I, well we six that were ultimately there, we did know our army and air force counterparts and that's where we found out, comparing how we lived and how they lived. They were rather envious.

And what about when you first sort of arrived at Morton to do your initial induction, what did they

30:30 **tell you to expect as a WRANS?**

Well probably it was more 'don't's' than 'do's' I suppose because with regard to leave, how they explained that, well in Morton they have you called on watches. Everything in a shore establishment has the same

31:00 terminology as it is onboard ship at sea and to a person who strikes us for the first time you think how quaint because, now when you go onboard ship and you probably see them go over the gang plank they salute the ship, well they're saluting the quarter deck. Well in a shore establishment there is a part

31:30 in the playground decimated as the quarter deck, so if you're walking down and crossing that you have to salute the quarter deck every time you cross it, type thing. Next thing, I mean I didn't know too much about motor vehicles in those days, they were cars or trucks, that type of thing but we did have such a thing as a tender: T E N D E R. Well on board when you're going out in

32:00 a ship they have a little tender; it brings things to a large ship and is moored out in the sea. Well the naval trucks were called tenders. There are a few other things that I can probably think of that kind of seem a bit quaint. I [can't] think [of] any more at the moment. So, and with regard to

32:30 watchers, one was called port and the other one was starboard, so if you were designated to be on a port watch you would this week, you could go out at night time, go out at night, go ashore, you could go out Monday, Wednesday and maybe Friday and the other nights you'd have to stay in: Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday and you'd have alternate weekends off too. So that was rather rigid, you

33:00 if you were on one particular watch and even though you were doing nothing you had to 'stay aboard', you were 'aboard'. Now if you wanted to go ashore bear aboard, a naval terminology as such, if you were stuck out at sea, to go ashore you'd be at liberty, so you'd have to catch a liberty boat, which would be

33:30 little yacht or something, a motored thing that would take you from the sea to the shore. Well on a naval

establishment, in a shore establishment, to go ashore you would have to catch a liberty boat and they would only go at specified times, on the hour, or every couple of hours, or in the afternoon or whenever it was. So you'd have to go to the quarter deck, line up,

34:00 be inspected that you had your tie and hat right. With the sailors they had to make sure they were, you know. Then you'd be piped and you'd walk out the gate. You'd have to have the correct leave pass to say that you could go at liberty and that's how you caught a liberty boat.

So basically you got an inspection or parade?

Yes, you were inspected before you went to make sure you were

34:30 properly correct. Now another thing, we used to have rounds at night time and the officer would come around and you've have to make sure that your hut, your bed was neat and tidy, there was nothing out of place, but you had to be fully dressed. Whatever the rig of the day was - the rig of day was whatever kind of dress you had to be in. In summer it was a summer, in winter it would be whatever the blues were, they all had numbers or something like that, but

35:00 at rounds time, you could not be around there in overalls. So if you were in overalls we would all go and sit down by the, on the banks of the river so we wouldn't be seen.

You didn't have to be present during your inspection?

If you were to be present for the inspection of the huts, you had to be properly dressed in your uniform. You couldn't be walking around there in your

35:30 overalls. If you were, you might have been washing or something like that and you wouldn't be having your work uniform on, you'd be in your overalls, but if you were in overalls it was a no-no to be around at rounds time, which was usually about half past seven, or seven o'clock at night.

So you'd just nip off down to the bank?

We used to sit down there until the officer went and then we'd all come back again.

36:00 **So your overalls were used for obviously cleaning…**

Yes, our relaxing kind of gear I suppose. I don't know that we could wear what we called civvies down there, I don't know, we had civvies, which are civilian clothes. I can't remember whether we wore them down there, I don't think we would of, I think it was uniform or overalls, I

36:30 just can't remember that.

So the overalls are like, in camp - on the ship civvies?

Onboard, we were onboard. And another thing that happened there, they used to have at night time, 10 o'clock was lights out. At, I think it was, whether it was nine o'clock or half past nine, I'm not sure. Now there was nine o'clock there was first post,

37:00 or maybe, and then there'd be last post, there'd be half and then the last thing would be lights out. And at that particular time we had an excellent bugler down there. Down by the water there can get rather misty and when he used to play the last post, it was the most eerie experience I've ever had, you know what I mean. That was every night

37:30 down in Morton.

And what about your navy salute, you must have become very good at it?

My what?

Your navy salute.

Oh yes, oh I remember this, he was a bit of nark and he thought women were stupid.

Who was this sorry?

This was the petty officer who was at our base. "You do the right salute; you do this. For the left salute you don't do that,"

38:00 - he thought he was being funny or facetious or something and we weren't too amused but that was him.

Tape 3

00:00 Oh and another strange terminology which crops up in the navy is 'rabbits'. If you, bear in mind though that when on board ship, you would think that you were trying to rabbit, but if someone had something on their person or and you asked what was it that they had and they gave the reply, "rabbits", you knew you did

01:00 not ask any further questions because there was something suspect about the object in question.

What about anything else, can you remember if there's a secret?

There would be many more. If you got some of the girls that really in time in depot, they would be able to tell you that. I was just more or less on the fringe of that because

01:30 I lived in there but I went out eight to five, eight to six days a week, out at Indooroopilly so I didn't get too far into all the naval terminology like that, except that I had to 'catch my liberty boat' to go out and I can't think of any other things.

Hang on a sec. Helen.

What next?

Well you were just telling us about catching liberty boats and that's how you knew these terminologies but really the girls at

02:00 **the depot the whole time would have had a better idea?**

And the other person in the navy, they would be able to remember, know all those kind of terminologies, which a lot of it is still a hang over from Nelson's day.

I find that phenomenal …

Well remember the navy is very, very rigid in pre-war and probably still is now too,

02:30 but I haven't been in the navy for ages. But they did things by the book, and the book was the K.R. & A.I.

Did you get wrapped up in the whole mythology of the navy? Was there a sense of pride, "I'm in the navy" as part of the British

03:00 **fleet or as part of the Australian navy?**

Oh we were the Australian Navy, yes, definitely the Australian Navy. Well that's what we would have been involved with because we our own navy but then with the war we had a lot of ships that came from the British fleet too. They were in Sydney and then of course the Americans as well.

I guess what I'm saying

03:30 **is that a lot of navy people, even though they were in the Australian Navy, felt this affiliation with the Royal British Navy.**

Oh they probably did because in those days there would be the Australian citizens, they would have been predominantly English, Scottish background. I mean it was only up to the war that we had such an influx

04:00 of people from various parts of Europe. Of course before the war you would have had Italians and Greeks, the Greeks used to be in fish and chip shops, Italians they used to have greengrocers, those kind of businesses. They are the only two predominant ethnic groups that I can remember in those days. There might have been others.

04:30 Probably if there were any German people they might have had some very nice delectable sausages. In small goods or butchers but apart from that we didn't have the vast number of different races of people that we have today so I would think that there would be quite an affiliation with the Royal Navy.

Do you think that most people that you met during the war time, particularly servicemen, joined up for

05:00 **King and country or for Australia?**

Well of course the first part, when there was the war in Europe, there'd be more or less, well Britain had a back to the wall type of thing, that would have been that part, but then at the time that I was in force, came into the forces we were there for our own survival we thought.

05:30 Could be because let's face it, they nearly had us I would think.

So in December '41 when Japan entered the war, where were you at that particular time?

At school - oh wait on, '41; I'd be in Rockhampton at school, either at school or just started work because I was at that particular time in two and half, yes I would have been at school.

And that's when you talking to Chris [interviewer] about

06:00 **the trains constantly up and down 24 hours a day. Can you tell me what was on the trains, do you know?**

Oh troops. The thing was they came up from further south and of course in those days, I mean nowadays you can go from New South Wales to Brisbane here on one, you don't have to change trains, but in those days

06:30 they had to change at Wallangarra. There was even quite an army staging post at Wallangarra. And they had to change trains there, then they had to come up to Brisbane, then they'd come all the way up and go on the, and of course they weren't the luxurious types of trains as the Met box type of the thing and of course there'd be soldiers in there and they'd be having a wonderful time, going through the town and yahooing,

07:00 and things. And they weren't the quietest of trains, the fellas'd be enjoying themselves as they'd be going along.

Do you thing they were drinking and smoking on the train and mucking around?

Probably; they were having a laugh. Getting a whole lot of fellows together in a carriage for a fair amount of time, because it would be quite some days they'd be on that train. It wasn't just the case of

07:30 12 hours, oh no it'd be quite some days if they've come from further south. They'd been on the road quite a few days.

Incidentally how did the servicemen, no matter what kind of service they were in, treat you and your friends when you were in your WRANS outfits, in your uniforms?

Oh fine. We had no problem at all. You were just another service person, that's all.

Do you think that they missed seeing you as women and they started seeing

08:00 **you as service soldiers instead of these women that would have been more normal if you like?**

Oh I don't think so, I mean everybody realised that there was a war on, and as I said, you were either manpowered in a particular job or you joined a protected industry or you joined up. So I mean everybody was doing something for the war effort so that was it I would

08:30 think.

And what about the ordinary things that the women would wear like lipstick and nail polish, and do your hair in certain styles, could you do any of that stuff?

Oh you had to have short hair, you couldn't have, you had to have your hair regulation an inch or half an inch above your collar. You couldn't have your hair

09:00 dangling on your collar, you had to have it suitably restrained. If you had long hair, you'd have to have it up, or short hair, you'd have to have suitably cut.

What did you have?

I've always had short hair. Not as short as it is now but I've always had short hair.

And what about jewellery, could you wear jewellery?

Oh I don't think so. In those days if we did have any jewellery, it would have been screw-on earrings but I don't recall

09:30 wearing them in those days, whether other people did or not, I don't think so. I don't think jewellery being tolerated. I can't recall but I don't think so.

When did you start meeting your friends? Was it at Morton when you started training in that week or went out to the Allied unit? When did you start having your good friends?

Well the thing is that the three of us were sent out and there were three other navy

10:00 girls out there and they'd been there quite some time, then of course we met up with all the army girls, and the air force girls. Now a lot of them were corporals and sergeants and there were section officers. The security of the whole environment there was with the Australian Army and they had a resident

10:30 sergeants' mess there and because we all came from various establishments around town, so we - all the ladies - ate in the sergeants' mess, so that's where we more or less congregated for lunch and then go back to our various jobs and go home to the various establishments.

And how did you get used to the regiment, the discipline of going to work

11:00 **every day? I know you'd been going to the office job.**

I'd been going to work every day at home, yes.

But I mean these were obviously longer hours and probably more intense hours?

Well I had to come out, I remember, first on a tender, you climbed in and out of those army trucks with gay abandon. Imagine it today - I can't imagine it today - but in those days we did or I used to catch the

train out

11:30 and get out at Indooroopilly station and I had to have a pass to go into there and go through the gate and then go to work and then go home again, the same way, just like an ordinary job I suppose. Only it was classified and we were told that you didn't mention anything what you did there and that was it.

Did you think when you joined the navy that you'd end up going to sea? Did that occur to you at all?

Oh you also hoped that you might, you'd do something, but

12:00 then again it was a bit remote. But then again you just never knew. I think some girls did have some kind of little sea-going services but they'd be in a little kind of motor boat or something or other like that. Nowadays it's different, but in those days women didn't go to sea as such unless it was in like a little motor boat ferrying people from shore to a ship out there, that type of thing I would think. But then again

12:30 that would have happened I would think, down more or less in Sydney and Melbourne, not Brisbane, I don't think so.

So you would have been there in Indooroopilly when the Americans were in town?

Oh yes, it was already established, it was an Allied unit. The CO [Commanding Officer] was Colonel Mashbier, he was an American colonel.

13:00 There was the navy section, was lieutenant commander, I think his name was Hopkinson, he was RN and then the second commander was Lieutenant Commander Crawford, RAN, and he was a Brisbane man here and then were we six and maybe others in the field that came and went, I mean as they were up in the islands they would come,

13:30 they would go on a stint up there and then come back for a wee while but there were only really navy ones that I remember there. There were a lot of army and air force ones, I showed you that photo there and one of the air force interrogators. We had what I call 'likely lads' in the compound there. They would be sent down from up north and the various interrogators would go down and interrogate them and

14:00 write up their report and we'd type it up and that was it. I don't know how they were selected for interrogation, I mean they might have been looking for a particular type of thing, that's why they sent them down for further interest.

You're talking about when the Americans were up in Rockhampton and having money and that kind of thing; in Brisbane were you aware of the Battle of Brisbane going

14:30 **on?**

It was but I don't remember too much about that, I know that it - because there was a American club here down in Queen Street somewhere or other and because with the Americans they were rather cruel in a way. They had a lot of black soldiers and they were only allowed on the south side of the river. They weren't allowed on the north side and no more than that.

15:00 Subsequently we were more or less out on the second, there's a lot of vacant - they're out at Holland Park out there, there's some, not Americans but military housing there and the same at Gregory Terrace, there was military housing there. I just can't remember any more than that because things change so quickly.

Had you heard,

15:30 **I don't know, I'm just sort of putting this out there, I don't know if you're aware of it, in fact I'm not, about the Germans living in Australia and the Japanese then when they came into the war living in Australia being put into camps?**

Well I think they would have rounded up any foreign nationals who we were at war with. I wouldn't think any, I think the Italians were kind of rounded up.

That's right, the

16:00 **Italians too, weren't they?**

Yeah there were Italians, now I don't know about, there must have been some Germans around. So they would have all been interned, anybody that was a foreign and any Japanese or, I should imagine a few Chinese might of got rounded up because anyone with an oriental feature would probably be rather suspect. They wouldn't know whether they were Chinese or Australian or something else, but bear in mind

16:30 when you go back into the early part of our history, there was the pearling industry up on Torres Strait and over in Western Australia, well there were a lot of Japanese in there and I believe that as a result of the pearling industry, the Japanese got very good maps thank you very much of our coastline.

And of course that was something our government complied with prior to war?

Yes, they said it was okay.

17:00 **Was that a big business?**

For pearling? Yes it was. I think it still is but it was then, yes.

So that's how they got hold of the northern parts of Australia?

And they would have very good maps of the north part of Australia, yes.

I knew that they had maps but I didn't know it was because of the pearling industry.

Well I should imagine [it] to be, because they had a lot of Japanese

17:30 divers, I should imagine if you were just another Japanese on a pearling lugger you probably were a diver but then again you probably were a navy intelligence man as well, I would think. Making sure that he kind of put things in the right perspective in case something might be needed in the future. Never know, I think we would do the same thing in a similar situation.

18:00 **But they obviously didn't pearl during the war? That would have all stopped, that industry?**

I think they would have then. I think since then, but I think, they used to have pearl buttons and all sorts of things, mother of pearl and I don't think we used that kind of technology now, probably old hat, we have another way of getting the same kind of results. Synthetically I would think. I do know there's that Paspaley [Paspaley Pearls Pty Ltd] people over in Western Australia, I think they've

18:30 got a rather expanding business there, that's artificial pearls as well.

Paspalli, it sounds Italian doesn't it?

Paspaley, out at Broome. If you ever go to Broome you'll find it very interesting. Go to the cemetery and you'll see so many different races of persons who are buried.

I had no idea, I've never been over to Western Australia.

It's very interesting over there, especially Broome. They have a very interesting festival I believe.

When did you find out

19:00 **Helen, that what you were going to be doing was top secret?**

Oh we were told that right from the first step on the boat. I stepped in the establishment or we could have been when we were interviewed and told where we were going to go, and our lips were sealed forever more as I understood it.

19:30 Whatever we saw, it was secret and we weren't to divulge it to anybody because the people we lived with down in the depot, they knew we worked uptown, had no idea what we were doing. No one ever said. If they asked, we said couldn't give them an answer, there were other girls in various other parts of AIB [Allied Intelligence Bureau] and

20:00 it's only come out after the war in fact that what they were doing, who they were involved with, just more or less kept your mouth shut. Maybe there was a - we could have been chosen for those jobs. As I mentioned, I was in insurance. Now I got a little lecture before I joined the insurance company that our client's business was their own and confidentiality was paramount. And it would be more or less an extension of the same kind of conditions as far as we were concerned.

20:30 It was no one else's business, we kept our mouths shut and that was it.

Do you think that's why you got chosen for the AIB?

I don't know whether it was or not, I had no idea. I was quite amazed, it could be but as I said, in the insurance company you were - I would think in banks they would have the same kind of, whether other offices were so strict on security,

21:00 on confidentiality I do not know because I've only worked in a couple of insurance offices, but then again when you work in a company you don't go and blather about all the company's customers; it's the company's business, no one else's. But then again some people seem to think that tilly tells all.

But did they have some form of contract for you to sign like

21:30 **'this can't be spoken about for 10 years' or something like that?**

I can't remember if there was any. There must have been something there to put the fear of God into us I'd think. There may have been, I just can't recall that one.

Was it frustrating that you couldn't tell your mum, you couldn't talk to your friends outside of the war effort? Or were you all right with it?

Well

22:00 I would think as far as I could see it was common sense. I mean you didn't tell anybody a thing like that when you were involved with prisoners of war and you're getting information out of them. That was common sense, you didn't tell anybody.

I suppose you would have thought that it could also jeopardise Australia's safety?

Yes, you never know who's listening, I mean at that time

22:30 they were always posters and you've probably seen posters, a similar kind of thing of movies in England, where 'who's listening?' type of thing. So it was a similar kind of thing if you didn't know who was there and I would think that bearing in mind that my next door neighbour was out and all sorts of things, so I don't know who he was rounding up but you just didn't know who was your friend I suppose. They might seem like friends but you just never knew. I never got quizzed on

23:00 that. People in the depot, they were accepting of the part, "Oh she works uptown" and that was it. No questions asked.

So you'd catch a tram from what is now Garden's Point I suppose over to Indooroopilly, into the city and then over to Indooroopilly? Is that how you'd get to work?

No, I'd walk up to the railway station at Central Station and go out on the train.

23:30 There was no tram down, walking from Queen Street down George Street.

So can you tell for the purpose of the archive what the AIB unit actually looked like?

AIB was the Allied Intelligence Bureau and ATIS was Allied Translator

24:00 and Interpreter Section. It was out in Indooroopilly.

I'm sorry, you were out at ATIS. But you had something to do with the AIB?

Well AIB was the whole box, the whole Australian, Allied Intelligence Bureau.

So that was a kit…

And it had various facets; we were just one part.

At ATIS you were just one part,

24:30 **what were all the other parts?**

Well I've found out since the war. There was one lot of girls, they were involved with coast watches. Another one of my friends, unfortunately never even asked her, even in peace time and she's died and I don't know what they did but they were in another area uptown somewhere and no one ever said anything.

25:00 We believe in keeping our mouths shut.

Did she ever ask you?

No I don't think they did, they realised we were both in kind of restricted areas and that was it.

So can you tell us was ATIS looked like? If you opened the door, how would it be inside?

Well do you live near Indooroopilly?

No but I know it. I live in The Gap.

Well

25:30 when you come in a motor vehicle and you go past, there's the Indooroopilly railway station, and you're going to go over the Indooroopilly Bridge, there's a big old house on quite an area of land, it's at least two storeys, it might be three storeys, and it's called Tighnabruaich. And it's a big old mansion and that was the main building

26:00 at ATIS. They had, there were army buildings there for the security personnel and they had compounds there to hold the prisoners of war and as I said, there was the sergeants' mess and that's all I remember of that and I think it still has the same amount of ground as it did then, that big place, it's still there.

26:30 It was used by the military police after the war and I don't know who has it now, it might be still in the hands of the military, I do not know. But it was an allied unit then.

You said the army were guarding it?

Yep, they provided the guards, you had to have a pass to go in and they more or less provided the

27:00 security for that particular area, the Australian Army.

And what floor did you work on?

I think it was the ground floor.

Were there many desks against walls and all that kind of thing? How many people were down there in that room on the first floor?

Oh rooms, bear in mind it was a residence, not a purpose-built place, so there'd be desks here, there and everywhere else. They would have

27:30 fitted in. I remember lots of desks everywhere.

What about your room, who else was in your room besides you?

A lot of people.

Like 10?

Could be, could be, maybe more. Bear in mind that while I'm beavering away in my little navy pursuits the air force are doing the same and the army are doing the same getting information out of various kind of documents. So

28:00 we'd be - and I should imagine the American girls were doing the same kind of thing from an American point of view. So there were a number of people of different services all in various areas of expertise.

How did you find the American girls working there?

Oh they'd be fun, they'd be a good deal older. I was one of the young ones. A lot of people were 21 plus, they'd be a

28:30 good deal plus, I was only 18 and a half.

So if you said, "ATIS", would people know in those days where you worked? Or you wouldn't say "ATIS"?

I don't know that we said anything to anybody, we just said we worked uptown in Indooroopilly. I don't think they knew where in Indooroopilly we went. If we told them Indooroopilly, I'm not sure.

29:00 **So who called ATIS do you know, was it the government, the military?**

Oh well it would be the military because it's - I should imagine the MacArthur's department would have called it, they would have had a name ATIS. At one stage they, we had such variety of people there, they decided they would put all the hats together of the various services and they used, I had the newest of the navy hats, they used

29:30 my hat as the - I often wonder where, if that photo ever got off the ground, where it's languishing. In what military establishment now, because it's my hat.

Did you get it back though?

Oh yes, they just took a photo of it, yes, my hat.

So the prisoners of war that were there, they were obviously captured by the Australians or the Americans?

Yes up in the islands.

30:00 **And brought back into Queensland and housed there at that residence?**

I never saw one.

I was going to ask you, even though you were in the same domain, were they guarded from…?

That would be where I think probably the military police and the Australian army there that provided the guarding.

30:30 It not only would be guarding the gate, it would be security for the prisoners they had in the compounds.

So we'll go into more detail later about transcribing and giving those details on the actual processes of your job and details of your job,

31:00 **But can you tell us how this work effected you, did it get worse for you as the war went on?**

Because the war, everybody would be, there'd be news on the radio, in the newspaper and in Brisbane at that time, up near where Myers are now, there used to be the Carlton Newsreel

31:30 theatrette and that's all it did, was just newsreel so we were more or less kept abreast of what was happening in the world due to the war correspondents and things like that. But when they interrogated

the ‘likely lads’, it brought it a bit closer to home because here are these people, they were on some kind of ship and they were sailing from A to B

32:00 and they were - it more or less brought it a little closer and with regard to the Battle of the Coral Sea I didn’t realise it was so close as it was.

And you were working at that time?

That was before then I think. It was very, when you go and look where the Battle of the Coral Sea is and where, you’ll find that things were

32:30 rather grim.

When you talk about the Battle of the Coral Sea, how much did you know about it before you started work?

Didn’t know; I knew it was the Battle of the Coral Sea and that was it. And it just seemed a fair way away, it didn’t - but it wasn’t a fair way away.

So then during that process of working and finding out more about the Coral Sea?

33:00 The Coral Sea was earlier than ’44, I think it was.

’42?

I think it was. That’s the time we lived in Rockhampton so I suppose that’s why they had to have a plan of action of some sort but it wasn’t a very reliable one, or it wouldn’t have been a very reliable one.

But what I'm trying to figure out is, you found out a lot more about the Coral Sea, was it after the war, or just recently?

Just recently. After

33:30 the war I found out and said, “Oh my golly”.

I was going to say if you found out during the war how would you have found that out, but if you found out after the war, what, through personal curiosity?

Oh I’ve read a fair few things since then.

So tell us about turning up for your first day of work?

You more or less have to go through, you’d probably have to report to

34:00 the navy personnel and they just, I can’t remember any more. It probably, some people have first impressions, and with me it doesn’t work like that, I just more or less take it all in and, this is it, it’s another job and that was it and this is the way it’s going to go and that’s it. I wasn’t kind of, I suppose I was a bit wide-eyed wondering what on earth I was going to be involved with, not realising then that

34:30 I’ve been, [that] there were prisoners on the premises. As with regard to Japanese you always suspected that they’re well in the islands, not in your backyard in Brisbane.

No certainly, I haven’t interviewed anybody like you in my short experience doing this job. So it’s fascinating

35:00 **how you actually did it. Were you excited though in a very young way about doing secret work?**

I suppose we were. I wasn’t, excited, isn’t exactly excited. I suppose at least you were, you knew something somebody else didn’t know. It was, we more or less knew a fair bit about what was going on, or

35:30 what had gone on, because when you get to war reports via the correspondents you don’t know that a certain ship has gone here to there to there, whereas that’s more general, whereas we’ve got more of a detailed plot of the various voyages of what we were kind of keeping an eye on.

36:00 Because when they would interrogate the various likely lads, I remember one, they brought down a doctor and they were interrogating, and so I don’t know what criteria they used to bring various people down for,

36:30 and this one was a doctor. Well they more or less, the reports I typed up were with regard to treatments for various kinds of tropical medicine, because I mean tropical medicine has gone great distances now but in those days it was a new field and they would see what the Japanese would be using for this, this, this and also they did mention the comfort women and that came out in the report.

37:00 And also I remember the interrogator quizzing what medications they used for various kinds of venereal diseases. That was rather illuminating but it was interesting that they had specific reasons for bringing these particular people down, whoever on earth they were. I remember that particular one about the doctor and anyway.

When you say comfort women, the Japanese had comfort women, are you talking about

37:30 **prostitutes?**

Yes, yes.

They just called them comfort women?

Comfort women. Well I mentioned comfort women just then, as I mentioned going to lunch down on the sergeant's mess we went past the compound. There was one cheeky prisoner of war, I don't know who he was, he could hear our voices outside laughing, going down to lunch; he wanted to see what we looked like. So all the girls said, "Probably thinks we're comfort

38:00 women."

Mustn't have been too comforting for the women?

Well the comfort women, they were captured I would think and forced into that way of life. Whether any of them were volunteers, but a lot of them were not. I think they were Korean. There's been a human cry in recent times about the comfort women, how they were forced into

38:30 this way of life by the Japanese army.

The Korean women were?

I think it was, there was a lot of Koreans, I'm not sure, don't take me on that but I think they were Korean women.

I wonder if it was also helpful to the universities to gain this knowledge of tropical diseases and tropical medicines?

It could have been because I mean

39:00 our soldiers were up there fighting the same kind of battle as they were, one against the other, but they're always fighting a common enemy which would be malaria and there would be other kind of bugs and things up there that you get up in the tropics which can cause havoc to one's system when you're living up there, for both sides of the army. That fellow

39:30 was interrogated mainly on a medical background.

To get a better understanding of how to treat our men?

Possibly. They found, well the Japanese are using X for this, we're using something else, which - oh well and it gave them some other food for thought. I had a friend at the time, he had been in the Australian Army and he was in the mosquito control, so I knew about the encephali mosquito, so it's just interesting.

All right, we'll switch tapes Helen so we can continue.

Tape 4

00:32 Oh whatever you like, I can repeat it. The Carlton Theatrette which had war news and etcetera, from various fronts, I saw when the Americans and the Brits got into the concentration camps and the people that came out of those concentration camps they were for real. Nobody,

01:00 no actor could have [been] emaciated as those people and when people say that it did not, could not have occurred, they are telling lies because the people were walking skeletons and probably the same with the prisoners of wars with the Japanese. But in regard to the Germans they did take pictures of those people as they came out and that's for the truth. I saw that then and I'll argue with anybody if they say it's a lie. No one could

01:30 have done that, they were terrible.

Kind of falls into one of my questions that I have for you actually, during the time when you were doing this work at ATIS, but having a limited social life in Brisbane and seeing movies and newsreels and things like that -

Oh there was the newsreels, yes.

Did you see things in the newsreels that kind of conflicted with what you knew,

02:00 **because of the work that you were doing in ATIS? Or that you knew ahead of time?**

Well if I remember rightly of the newsreels that for the public, more of the European theatre, because that was full blown at that time, any thing that would be in regard to the Japanese

02:30 sector, that would be more like, forest areas, like there was forests and New Guinea and beaches and so on but I seem to remember most of it being geared towards the European theatre. There would be others there but it wouldn't seem to be as dramatic I would think because of

03:00 the background. I mean New Guinea, which is forest and beach and not too many scenes of too many buildings and things - the buildings over there were only low grade buildings I would think. I can't remember too much about that but I meant we did see a lot of - I mean the newsreel it went, the same program over and over all day. It wasn't a case, you could go in anytime, stay an hour or two and come back out again,

03:30 and four hours later if someone's winning you'd probably see the same thing or if it had been updated anyway. But he was a good source of information.

Can you give me a picture, Helen, of how your job worked at the office at ATIS, just in terms of who you would report to; where your information, your reports would come from; just basically the personnel that you were working with?

04:00 Well I suppose you'd be a bit like in a typing pool and I mean you'd have so many interrogators, some girls did take shorthand; I didn't. I mean I did, but I didn't do it there. I did it later on in life but I didn't do it there. The interrogator would come back and he'd kind of give you, if you were free you'd

04:30 type up X and sometimes in some of those reports, in Japanese there's different ways of saying things with the same kind of word, so you would have, when they were being interrogated they would give the English text and then in Japanese, they would put in parentheses Japanese characters, so anybody reading it would knowing how

05:00 the text was meant to be, so we'd brush up our Japanese and write it in beside it. Didn't know what it meant, but it looked good.

And once you finished typing up a report, where would it go?

You'd give it back to the originator. What he'd do after that, I had no idea.

So as a typing pool how many of you were actually transcribing for the interpreters?

05:30 Oh can't tell you that, because that place, when you mentioned rooms, it wasn't like an office as such, it was a rabbit warren of a place, so they'd fit desks in here, there and everywhere, so it was a lot of people in everywhere, type of thing.

06:00 You know what I mean? If you can imagine an old fashioned house being turned into offices of sorts and getting the maximum out of it, desks and typewriters and things. I just can't remember; as I say of all those people we knew them fairly well because we worked in fairly close harmony with them all, regardless of their rank.

06:30 **So can you give us a bit of a, I guess an impression, a window into some of the people and personalities you were working with?**

Well I mentioned that anybody and everybody who could read, write, or transcribe Japanese. When Japan entered the war I believe that a lot of people left

07:00 and one of them happened to be an Australian, he was a major in the Australian Army and I think he was English and he'd been a professor of English at the Tokyo University. Now he used to give us little talks on the lifestyle of the Japanese and they way they think, like the Samurai thing and the (UNCLEAR) system that the Japanese had; they called it the 'Hoko system', that the man at the top would probably use his power

07:30 on the person below him, who he could have been a bit of a brute I suppose, so if he kind of beat you, well you have people in a strata below you, so you kind of gave the person below you a hard time. So it seemed to be a general that the person at the bottom, the underdog, he got the wrong end of the stick, but that seemed to be the system, how the Japanese system worked. They seemed to (demonstrates),

08:00 so he was quite good on mentioning that. We had another lass there. She evidently could use a Japanese typewriter. There were some Chinese people, when they came into the Australian Army and they'd evidently been turfed out of Japan. And I think there were a few others, that came into, there were some Greek people, Papadopoulos, they

08:30 could speak Japanese, so they had some kind of NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] kind of rank in the Australian Army, and then there was the Japanese, then there was the American Army and nothing air force down there and the army girls, the American Army girls and I mentioned the Nisei, the second generation Japanese. They were bought out and they were mainly

09:00 used for translating captured documents and things of that ilk. Because there were quite a number of them there at ATIS then. I think there were some people there from Indonesia. I think I did see some Indonesian uniforms, 'cause like officer uniforms because they could speak Japanese as well, so anybody that had expertise in Japanese, they were there.

An amazing place.

09:30 **And how about the Nisei, the second generation Japanese interpreters, I guess were they well integrated into the systems?**

Well I don't know, we knew they were there, I don't know what they did. I mean they worked;

10:00 the American Army, they had their own messing arrangements so I don't know where they kind of ate, but I don't know if the American girls ate with us. I think they must have eaten with the American menfolk somewhere, can't remember that. But we all ate in the officers' mess, which was kind of a bit upmarket for us because with navy you would be in the seamen's mess, and the next mess

10:30 was the petty officers' mess, then the army equivalent would be the sergeants', so we were eating quite well, thank you very much.

Doing very well.

I would think, yes.

Do you recall what was on the menu, what you would eat?

Oh no, I can't recall, it was all good food.

And what about, I mean mates, did you have particular mates or friends that you worked kind of more closely with,

11:00 **or that you socialised a lot with at ATIS?**

Well there was, due to the nature of our work I didn't have too many friends in the navy. I just slept down there. We did go on some picnics, the whole lot of us, and the army laid on a truck to take us out on a picnic. I don't know who supplied the food, whether the army supplied the food or - I have no idea, but

11:30 the food was supplied from someone. And there were some sports days, this was inter-service. I remember participating in some kinds of sports things. Then the air force, they were down at Victoria Park Golf Club

12:00 and they used to have a pipe band and they had very nice for dancing. We used to dance to the bagpipes, that was where the air force were. I can't remember too much about the navy putting anything on or the army but we did go out on a few things like that. And then one of the lasses in the army, she was Chinese, she'd been turfed out from somewhere and there was a Chinese

12:30 restaurant next to where Trittent's [?] used to be and she would go down and more or less organise a banquet for anybody who wanted to go out on that particular night. So we would go out and - I forget now what her name was - she would organise these very exotic kind of dishes, which would have been exotic in those days, because we weren't au fait with Chinese food, that was very interesting and

13:00 to eat it with chopsticks, wow-ee. It was on the learning curve, all the way around, very, very interesting. She was quite good at organising the right kind of food.

Wonderful. Can you tell me Helen, I guess, I mean you mentioned the report you were writing up about

13:30 **Doctor X, but what kind of information were the interrogators getting out of the Japanese that you were actually writing reports up about, what would they?**

I remember the doctor one, that's about the sum total. I mean there would be a lot of captured documents and then they would translate those and then

14:00 with regard to the - it depends on who they were interrogating, it could be that it was a military man and he might have got from Rabual to somewhere on such and such maru [Japanese for ship] and they would ask him, "Where did you go? When were you on that particular ship? Give a date. Where did you stop? How long were you there? What did they do there?

14:30 Where did they go next?" And there would be cards, in the information centre, on that particular ship and you would plot that on such and such a date it went on a voyage from here to here to here to here. Well then you'd get some more information and you'd find that, "Oh it seems strange that it didn't go the same way that the first fellow said", so you'd more or less put all the information down, then the

15:00 powers that be would gleam what vital information there was from that voyage of that particular thing or what they did or what information that was on there, navy-wise. There'd be the same, I should imagine as the girls would do in the air force and the same from the military, but I'm just speaking on the navy point of view.

15:30 **And what about captured documents, what sort of things would come through that you end up typing reports on?**

I wouldn't be typing. They'd already be typed up there, that was a separate area, but I should imagine there would be photographs and things like that, that would be in the documents and probably diaries

and things of that ilk. You never know

16:00 what these people keep, keepsakes or probably things on their person they probably would have been forbidden to them by the Japanese Army anyway, but it could be a great source of information, from our point of view. There was one particular photo, I mean the Japanese, as we know today, take photos willy-nilly whenever they go anywhere as a tourist, well in those days they were still taking photographs

16:30 and I did see one photograph of a fellow about to be be-headed and that caused a great deal of concern. Ultimately that particular person was awarded an award posthumously but it was kind of very sobering when we got that, when we saw that particular photo. 'Cause that would be hard on everybody else being imprisoned

17:00 after the fall of Singapore, this particular one happened in New Guinea somewhere.

So it was a worrying time for everybody?

Yes, yes, oh it was extremely worrying because you had news of Japanese brutality and this seemed to confirm that

17:30 that was so.

So what other news of atrocities would you have come across?

Oh.

Or did you come across?

The perpetrators of any kind of, I would use the word atrocities for another name, seemed to be Koreans. They seemed to have a vast criminal element in it,

18:00 whether they were criminals that were released to go to the war, I'm not sure. The Koreans seemed to be the more brutal of them, whether they were all like that, I do not know but they just seemed to be that, there seemed to be a brutal element amongst the Koreans.

How do you mean? In terms specifically, you mentioned criminal?

Oh well what I meant

18:30 was they might have been wanting to have more men in the services, so they released criminals and put them in the services, that's what I meant by criminal. And as I said there seemed to be a criminal element that seemed to be in and whether there was a criminal element and a Korean element or a violent criminal Korean element, I don't know.

19:00 **But how - I guess, in your experience, what the Koreans were doing in the islands, how was that worse than what the Japanese were doing? What sort of things?**

Oh it was just in general, because everybody just thought, well in the Japanese Army they were Japanese. You didn't realise whether

19:30 they conscripted the Koreans in or not, I'm not sure, but under the pseudonym they were all just Japanese. The thing is I think the, there was a degree of cannibalism, so and I think that had been raised by someone along the line, I read that then, so

20:00 that was rather unfortunate to read things like that, but still, that's what really happened.

Absolutely, so Helen, how would you deal with it personally, given that you couldn't talk about what you were doing, but you were coming across this information everyday that was revealing some quite horrendous things?

20:30 It was only until 1990, that was when I bought my first Japanese car. There'd be no way, I have been to Japan since but, no I would have nothing

21:00 to do with Japan, nothing.

So what changed your mind in 1990?

Let's say I mellowed a bit. But I've had two Japanese cars since then, on my second

21:30 Japanese car now but until then, no. I wasn't going to have anything to do with them.

I'll just check my notes for a second. Can you give us an impression Helen of the kind of hours that you were working at that

22:00 **stage at ATIS?**

Well I don't know that they were nine to five, probably eight to five, or maybe something, we would have to be home for evening meal and that would be about six o'clock, I would think. So they would have to make sure that we could get back to our various living establishments in time for a meal, so it

would probably be about, I suppose maybe about eight till about five, I would think;

22:30 have to make our way home on the train. Once I lost my pass and I finally got it back again but I was in big hot water because until my pass was restored I had to report to the sentry office every time that I was coming and going, so they knew who I was.

So coming from Rockhampton as you did into Brisbane, and to do this work, can you give us a bit of a picture of what Brisbane was

23:00 **like that at that time, as a big city, next to Rockhampton? And getting to know it?**

Well we lived down at the depot, down there and when we went at liberty out of the barrack we'd walk up George Street. Well along George Street up there, there were quite a lot of red light establishments

23:30 in those days. There was the American canteen, I don't know what it called itself. I remember hearing Glen Miller there and some particular, when he came. There was the newsreel theatrette in Queen Street, the Post Office,

24:00 Lennon's. There was a submarine depot, or something like that, down at Hamilton. See unless you had transport, you had to walk everywhere, and the down town area would be not as it is today but then Brisbane has only more or less changed dramatically since about 1982. But

24:30 before then it was more or less the same – no, not really. It was the big smoke, by comparison with Rockhampton, so I would have been over-awed anyway.

Did you have favourite things that you liked to do with your time off?

Used to go to the Regent Theatre, for whatever the movie was, because there was a

25:00 man in there that used to play the Wurlitzer organ, and that was rather interesting, and they used to do a lot of - because there'd be a lot of service people in there, and they seemed to love singing. They seemed to do an awful lot of singing because TV wasn't in, radios were around, so the piano and the voice got a good rendition on all those things like that. Can't think of anything else.

25:30 There would have been trams and trains, no. South Brisbane station was the end of the line from the Sydney and the other gauge and if you wanted to go, you'd have to physically change their things and change your station and go over to Roma Street station to continue your way north.

26:00 Nowadays you can come straight in on one rail line and then just go on the platform and change your train, much easier these days. I can't think of anything more in those days, I really can't. The Brisbane River was the same, but there wouldn't have been too many in the way of activities, I would not think, apart from - well they had so many troops in town. And I can't

26:30 think of anything else.

What about dances Helen?

I mentioned the dances out at Victoria Park with the air force. I was only here about twelve months before I went south. Then I remember the American camp, probably when we were able to go there, I think you must have been able to go there.

27:00 And there were various functions put on, and I did go to some symphony concerts in there.

What were they like back then?

They were rather good then.

Whereabouts did they play?

In the City Hall; I'm thinking we must have had concerts and things in the City Hall, but I just can't remember any more than that. I did go to sea one day.

27:30 They had a Fairmile, they gave us a trip down the river on the Fairmile. I remember I was sitting on a depth charge thrower.

What were you doing sitting on a depth charge thrower?

Hanging on, holding a girl who was being violently seasick. They call them Fairmiles. It must have been going down for some kind of sea trials, so they said, "The

28:00 Fairmile's going down for sea trials, we can ask them whether so many WRANS who are off duty, to go down for a trip down the river on a Fairmile", so I did that.

So how far did you get?

Probably just to the mouth of the river, I suppose. It depends on what kind of trials they were doing. It might have [been] some kind of engineering trials or something like that, but as far as I was concerned it was day out at sea.

28:30 It was a bit rough. This girl was mighty ill.

She was ill going down the river?

Sorry?

She was ill going down the river too?

Evidently, yes. She must have been a poor sailor. I can't think of any - that was more or less Brisbane. I went home on leave a couple of times and of course to go home on leave you had to get a

29:00 leave pass and then you have to go and present that to the military rail transport officers and I had to [go] home by train and I was to go home by troop train and that's what I said, you were packed to the gunnels in there and I know one particular time, it's an overnight trip to Rockhampton, and I slept on the floor. Some of the fellas used to sleep in the luggage racks and there wasn't much room on those places.

29:30 It was sort of taken up by everybody and anybody, that's how you used to go home by troop train and come back the same way.

Did you travel by yourself?

Yeah.

On the troop trains and stuff?

Mmh.

How did the fellows treat you?

Fine, just another one. I'd have a seat somewhere, I would think

30:00 in a carriage. I don't know whether it was really reserved. I had a seat in a carriage but that was about it. I went home a couple of times by train.

And what did your parents ask you about your time in the navy and what you were up too?

Couldn't say much, probably told them a lot about in the depot and probably

30:30 various things I did up town, at leisure, but as far as what we actually did, didn't say anything about that. Probably wondered why, but…

So you couldn't actually tell them that you were working on things that you couldn't tell them about?

No one did.

You couldn't actually say to them that you were working on things you couldn't tell them about?

Probably did, but they didn't ask any more questions. Maybe

31:00 Mum might have been a bit reticent given the nature of my next door neighbour's profession, being in army intelligence probably. I probably said I was in intelligence or something, so you say no more. It's a long time ago.

What was it like to get home, back to Rocky?

Oh course it was great 'cause everybody wants you to wear your uniform. We were just happy to get into something, some old clothes or something or rather

31:30 like that but you'd have to kind of, but if you did have a uniform you'd have to have it on properly because you never knew who you might meet and if you saw any officers - army, navy or air force - you'd have to salute them.

That would be hard going on a troop train?

The troop train was different, we were all other ranks I suppose.

And what about just general discipline back at Morton, because you were living there

32:00 **when you were working at ATIS, so?**

Oh that was very strict. They were really extremely strict down there but you couldn't get away with much. Maybe some people did but I certainly didn't. The only thing I suppose I could have got away with is I had a pass to get out of the depot to go to work and I could have told them I was doing anything, I suppose. They wouldn't have known whether I'd been called back for extra

32:30 duties or whether I was enjoying myself. No, but see the thing was to get out of the place, on leave, you had to catch a liberty boat and you had to have a leave pass, which would permit you to go and if you were on port watch it was your night in and you couldn't go out anyway regardless. It seemed strange,

but that's how it worked.

33:00 And probably the army and the air force had similar kinds of restrictions but I don't know anything about those.

Did you ever get up to any mischief?

I don't think so. I wasn't exactly a goody two-shoes but I don't know that I got up to much mischief.

Or try and sort of avoid the discipline? In the navy were there ways that you could sort of, I don't know,

33:30 **avoid doing certain things or you were pretty much under?**

Well see I really had limited time there, it was more or less my sleeping hours and my eating hours, that would be about all, except on, and I worked a six day week, not Monday to Friday, it was a six day week, so I just more or less had a particular day off. I'm not sure whether my day off was Sunday or not, I can't tell you that, I don't remember.

But what about your living quarters, I mean

34:00 **what were they like at Morton?**

I'm not sure whether it would be twenty girls to a hut or not. It would be like a dormitory arrangement, great beds like that and there would be a bed and locker between two of the beds, that's right. Bed, locker, bed, locker and I think and you had to make sure you folded up your bedding up a certain way so it all looked

34:30 like they had in hospitals, all very, very set and there would be no fruit in the room. I remember one girl, she came up from down south and she had never seen a monstera deliciousa [split leaf philodendron].

A -?

You know what a monstera is? Well she had left it on her locker and the officer came in and said, "What is that?"

35:00 And the girl told her what it was and the officer didn't kind of get it straight, and this is what I'm told, and she said, "Get that monsterious derlercious out of here!" But as I say they were very, very strict. You got into trouble if you kind of left things around that you shouldn't leave around. There'd be a black mark; what they actually do, I don't rightly know but I wasn't privy to what people got onto charges because I

35:30 was only there for eating and sleeping, but if there any other things that happened during the day, which I knew nothing about.

But how did you go with the aspect of naval life which is much more community, much more out in the open, much more out in the public, just in terms of sleeping in dormitories, and showers and I mean just things like that? I mean it's very different to being at home.

I wouldn't say that I

36:00 bonded too well with any of them down there, because I didn't work with them, apart from the other two girls that were out at ATIS. One of them, she had a fiancé, two of them had their fiancés down here, so they were more or less out and about. Oh I did get around a fair bit but not in the same buddy-buddy arrangement, like when people work in the, say all in the clothing store together or in some captain's office together or

36:30 something like that, it wasn't like that at all unfortunately, but still. You can't have everything in this life.

So was the navy living up to your expectations at this point?

Oh yes, well anything, I had no preconceived ideas about what it was all about, but well, I joined the organisation, I'd

37:00 have to live the way that they set the rules. They were the rules of living and they were very strict there at the navy on things like that. I suppose on board on ship they would have to be. If they were too lax people would take liberties, type of thing, and it would lead to a lack of discipline later on, so they really had to be fairly strict, I would think,

37:30 viz à viz the shipboard life. Depot life would have been different but as I say, depot establishments are the same as on board ship, they run them the same way, terminology and all.

I think it's wonderful. During your time at ATIS, I guess, and more towards the end, was there the same sense

38:00 **or fear of invasion by the Japanese that you were experiencing in Rocky?**

No, 'cause everybody was aware that MacArthur was going to make his push. When that happened I

had my parents' permission to go overseas, my Mother's permission to go, we all did and the unit was going further north.

38:30 The Australian Government wouldn't allow us to go. We were not allowed to go. I believe the American girls landed with all the ferocity of a first wave landing at Manilla. Whether the army girls got to Lae or not, I do not know but the air force girls and us we did not get out of Australia and that was when I and one of these other lasses, we were sent to Sydney and that was different again.

39:00 We were replaced by men and that was end of story. I was rather peeved over that, but still.

Off to a new adventure. Okay we'll break there for lunch Helen.

Oh good.

Tape 5

00:31 **Helen as far as you can remember do you know if the prisoners that were held at the compound were tortured for interrogation purposes?**

I have no knowledge of what they did in interrogation, I really don't.

Have you learned since the war anything about that?

No,

01:00 the only person that may something about it, is that picture that I showed you there, that air force fellow. I said, "He's still alive." He was in 1995 and he was one of the interrogators in the field. He could have been an interrogator while he was in Brisbane, they all used to come and go, but whether he was actually interrogating there in Brisbane, I

01:30 don't think they would be. They might have been, just conjecture, they might have been deprived of something like not having a meal or something; I don't think there'd been any torture, I couldn't imagine it, but then you never know, you just never know. I don't know.

I might get his name later on from you, after today's interview's over.

Right, I had another photo and I was going to take it to the Darwin

02:00 reunion and I wrote to the last address I had for him and that was about fifty years ago, and I got an answer. He'd done all sorts of things since then. He'd been in the diplomatic service and he had his own private business. He'd been widowed and then he has remarried a Japanese lady and now he's back down in Canberra again. Now that was in 1995. I'd say he was a few years older than me, so you're looking at someone

02:30 on the wrong side of eighty. He may be alive, may not, could be, I don't know.

Did you, were you aware by doing the transcripts that some interrogators were perhaps more grilling or more cruel than others?

Oh no, I wouldn't know what they did down there. All I had to type up was what they produced.

03:00 If they did any, they'd have to be someone who actually was doing that kind of, they would say what kind of deprivation method they used, if any. I think they would have to be extremely subtle if ever they did because they're dealing with very wily characters. I mean although they're a prisoner, they're probably an officer over there and they're probably used to all sorts of wily things.

03:30 I wouldn't know, I really wouldn't know. You'd have to get someone who actually did that.

So did the documents actually look like, the one's you had to type out?

Oh they would be reports of, I've forgotten now. They weren't that interesting. They'd be shipping movements, or movements of troops or where they were

04:00 and it would be more or less of that nature. As I say, with regards, with the exception of that photo, that would have been someone's private photo and it could be diaries too, personal diaries. And, of course, in personal diaries they might say they sailed from so and so at such and such a date on such and such a time. The

04:30 persons might be alive that had the diaries or they could be things that had been found in huts or ships, debris from ships, I don't know where they got the captured documents from.

So you weren't told how they got the documents?

I was only a lowly cog.

But a cog in the wheel, nevertheless.

Oh yes.

In the big wheel.

I've got a book, a couple of books there. You must take the names and read them yourself and you'll see what I mean, interesting…

05:00 **What about - sorry to interrupt you.**

I said, they are interesting.

What about the pay, what was that like?

I think we got about three and sixpence a day.

What is that? What does that mean?

Three and sixpence a day. Well I'll tell you, I worked from age sixteen, two and a half years

05:30 as a civilian in an insurance company and in an insurance company in those days you had years of service. Each year you got a pay rise until you were twenty one and then you were classified as a senior. I was in the navy two and a half years, pay sixpence a week. Income tax you had to earn two pounds a week; two pounds a week was four dollars. I was well paid in the

06:00 insurance company and then the navy was (UNCLEAR). I worked five years before I ever paid income tax, big deal.

Was the navy renowned for being tight? Was it the services in general?

That was the rate of pay in all the services. Oh the men got I think six bob a day in all the services. That was the

06:30 basic rate, then if you were promoted you would get, I mean I went in evidently as an assistant writer. After a certain amount of time I was promoted to a plain writer, then the navy did not give out rank with the same spontaneity as it did in the other services. They were a bit parsimonious as they gave out rank, so you don't more or less see too

07:00 many of those 'Leading Hands' (they're the ones that have the anchors on their sleeve). You don't see too many of those around, in proportion to the other ratings, which would be the other lower morsels like that. But in where we worked there were corporals and sergeants and all sorts of things. And ultimately in our little area, there were only six of us there, six girls. The other three girls I have not mentioned before, they were Brisbane residents,

07:30 although they were in the navy, and they were a good deal older than us, now they were all Leading Hands. And we three, 'cause we came in a lot later but I don't think the navy would have given out three Leading Hands out of a group of six, that wasn't like them at all. I think it was because there was a whole lot of brass and the other thing, they felt honour bound to promote the first three girls.

Well what about if men did the

08:00 **jobs, hypothetically, that you did, would they be given more pay even though they?**

Well I should image that the men who replaced us, they would be writers the same as us, but as a male they would have got six bob a day.

So that was discrimination?

Way back then, it's still going on now.

Oh I know.

In the workforce with

08:30 male and female.

I saw the most wonderful cartoon the other day of a little boy and a little girl and them each opening their underpants and looking down each other's underpants and it's says, "Oh that explains the difference in our pays".

Well the basic wage as I understood it was for a married couple, I think with one child, and that was way back and they fixed that

09:00 and that was the pay rate and of course with the single person, if you were a single man you got say, let's say ten pound a week. If you were a married man with two children or something, you still got your ten pound a week. The single man was well up. If you were a female doing the same job as said men you got seventy five percent of the male wage.

I'm just trying

09:30 **to work out how they could have even got away with it on a logistics level, because you're doing the same job. Wouldn't matter what race or sex or colour or anything you were?**

Well if there wasn't too many jobs going around, you'd take what was going and what was offered. You wouldn't kind of rock the boat, would you? Because if you did you'd be out on your todd.

And I suppose women wanted to do their bit for the services as well?

Well that was the going rate. I could be wrong when I say three and six, I mean

10:00 it wasn't, I believe with the men it was six shillings a day, but that's all found. I mean initially all clothed and food and lodgings, so when you put it up a bit further, put a value to all those things it would really be much more than that, but actual, and of that three and sixpence whatever it was, I think probably a shilling or something was taken out for deferred pay, which

10:30 came back to you when you left the service. I think I got ultimately about, when I finished two and a half years, something like fifty pounds or something, which seemed to me to be a lot of money. It was the most I'd ever had.

What did you do, incidentally, with the money?

Put it in my bank account. I don't know what I did with it. It got put there for some reason or another. I think my brother got married and I loaned him twenty pound out of

11:00 it.

Did he pay it back?

I think so.

Sorry Helen, I'm just checking my notes here making sure that I'm…

Why don't you put it up higher and bring that over and bring that higher.

There you go.

Closer and higher.

Oh something that occurred to me on a personal level, did you court anybody during this time?

Oh a few folk.

Were they navy people or army people?

11:30 Oh no, just another service, that's all.

Is this the bloke that studied mosquitoes?

No, it wasn't anything kind of, just friends type of thing, that was about all. Because after all I didn't know what my lifestyle was going to be after - my family had more or less pulled up stakes from Rockhampton, so I was kind

12:00 of a bit apprehensive where I was going to next, so I just enjoyed myself, thank you very much.

So you went out; what would you do on a date in those days? Would you go dancing?

Oh probably go to the movies or something or other like that. With regard to dancing, we would, especially as I mentioned at the air force and that, we'd all go from the depot in some mode of transport, probably in a truck,

12:30 or a tender was the right word, and we'd go to the dance and then all more or less come home, 'cause we needed to get home from that because it was a fair way away. You couldn't walk home by yourself at night, that would be a bit dangerous I think.

Were you much of a dancer?

Oh I don't have two left feet. Not that kind of dance. I could I suppose; I used to like waltzing and a few other things like that. I like different type of dancing

13:00 now, thank you.

Were you, I don't know if you were, I suppose the generation was slightly different to me growing up, but I used to be frustrated that boys wouldn't have the courage to come and ask me to dance?

Oh gosh no, they were all, they were still as funny then as they are now, by the sound of it, yeah. They would look rather and seem to survey the field, type of thing,

13:30 and then, and you were obliged to dance with them, regardless. That was the etiquette of the day, you didn't kind of refuse, even though you didn't, they probably might not wanted to dance with X, but you

had to dance with him and that was it, type of thing. It could be that he trod all over your toes or maybe he might have been a bit drunk or something or other, but that's what etiquette was like, you more or less, you had to be polite,

14:00 regardless. I don't know what they'd do today. They'd probably say, "buzz off", wouldn't they? A girl would probably say, she'd probably give him short shift.

I don't know. I mean I was bought up to never refuse somebody asking me to dance.

That's it, that's the same thing.

But that would have been in the eighties, early eighties, late seventies.

That's probably with you, it's probably a hangover from earlier times.

Maybe today, I don't know.

I don't know what happens today.

"You smell, go away".

Oh my God, you'd never say that.

14:30 Although you'd like to. That would be, gosh!

So the other young women in the office that you worked with, that knew what you were doing and you knew what they were doing, were you able to kind of, I suppose this is a modern word, but debrief about the work that you were doing, so you did have somebody to talk to after work? Did you go to the pub after work and talk about what you did during the day?

Oh no,

15:00 we all more or less went our separate ways home. We didn't debrief anything. It was just you went home, you came back the next day, and you didn't talk to anybody. If you talked to anybody about anything it would be something entirely divorced from work because you couldn't say anything. Later on if you were with someone who'd been working in the clothing store, they might have some funny kind of a story about someone about size fifteen wanting to get into

15:30 something size ten and have a funny little antidote like that. Apart from, they would have funny little instances I would say, but with regard to us we couldn't say anything about what we did.

I guess I'm thinking about just somebody you could talk to, that was of your rank, of your lowly...

The only other one were the other two girls; course they lived in.

16:00 You'd be able to talk to either one of those. You might be able to say, whether we did or whether we didn't, I don't know what we did, but we more or less weren't encouraged to talk, ever. I thought it was to be forever more, but then again the bar has been lifted in recent years, so after fifty years or something.

How did you hear about the bar being lifted; through the Department of Veteran Affairs?

I don't know where I heard about it. I couldn't tell you where I

16:30 heard about it. I listen to all sorts of things. Whether I read it in the paper or whether - I do belong to the WRANS Association, so whether it was something said there or not, I couldn't tell you but the bar has been lifted, as I understand it.

Now you mentioned something before that's probably unpleasant to remember or to recall, and that is that photograph that you saw of the young gentleman being beheaded.

About to be beheaded, yeah.

About to be beheaded. Now he was an Australian?

17:00 Yes.

How did you come by this picture?

It was in some of the captured documents. It was in somebody's effects and I don't know how it came down to the area I was in, I really don't but it was there. 'Cause knowing what the Japanese and the Chinese folk do the same thing now, they take pictures of everything,

17:30 well whoever took this, took pictures. I think it was only a picture, whether there were other pictures, I do not know, but I only saw that one.

Did you ever happen to find out who that young man was?

Well I did know who it was. Ultimately I read that he was given a posthumous award.

Was he the pilot, the Australian pilot?

Mmh.

18:00 **I think we may have heard of him before actually.**

His name was something, I don't know, it was Black something, I mean his surname, like Blackburn, Black, Black something or other. I think it was Black something, I'm not sure.

You mentioned diaries before, diaries or journals if you like, being taken from the captured. Yes, one person we did speak with said he had got a copy

18:30 **of a Japanese person's diary after witnessing a beheading. I don't know if this was the same thing, but…**

This was up in New Guinea or somewhere - I won't say it was New Guinea because it could have been in the islands somewhere because they were not only in New Guinea, there were other islands up there that there was action. I couldn't tell you where it was but it was up there.

What were you hearing during this time of the kind of action that was

19:00 **taking place by the Japanese of cruelty? Were you aware of what was happening to the Australians, the nuns and - ?**

The thing was I mean, going up with the Kokoda Trail and various other things, we did hear incidences of the brutality of the Japanese when they caught people. Sometimes, whether it's hearsay or not, how they would more or less tie them to a tree, with the hands and arms behind

19:30 it of the tree and just leave them there. Well I mean, it's a ghastly way to die if they died that way, but then again by the time someone found them they'd be in the most excruciating pain, so whether that's true or false I'm not sure but stories like that did abound. And there would be probably others, because the beheading, we knew about the beheading, I mean even in the civilian instances like that it filtered back.

20:00 **Is that probably why you said you didn't - sorry, I think I've got hay fever.**

Can you eat Fisherman's Friends?

Ah, yes, but no thanks. No, they'll blow my tonsils out. Thanks anyway. I've heard about people not wanting to buy anything Japanese and you said, well it took you until about 1990, well in the nineties until you bought a car, was that part of the reason, hearing these things during the war?

20:30 Yes it was, it was. I didn't want to have part and parcel because they were too cruel.

And what about your superiors at Indooroopilly, were they, how were they hearing all this coming back from overseas?

Well when you think of my superiors, they were people a good deal older than myself, and I don't know that they would have broached that kind of subject with me,

21:00 and I certainly wouldn't have broached it with them, so how they would have reacted to that, I would not know. Amongst themselves I don't know what they privately thought. Probably thought it was another ghastly thing they heard about but I would not know. The range between officer and lowly person was, it was such. Nowadays in the business world, you can initiate any kind of conversation really,

21:30 but not then so much. That would be more or less like on a personal level and personal things like that I wouldn't think would have been discussed in a military kind of a background. Bear in mind that the people I worked with, in the other services, apart from Hopkinson and Crawford, I would be working under the jurisdiction of either an army person or

22:00 an air force person as well. I mean they were, the head of the section would be probably be an air force section officer in the WAAAF, or could be a lieutenant in the army. So it was an allied unit, you all worked together regardless. I didn't have to report to some navy person, it was who was in charge of the section, regardless of what service, that was how it worked.

22:30 **So you were left alone for most of the time? You just worked on your own?**

Oh we all worked at our own, I mean I would not be the only person taking information for the navy. I would, I think another lass did and in that general area there would be people doing a similar job for army and air force.

Could you get up and have a cup of tea or go to the loo if you needed to at anytime?

Oh you could probably go to the loo and there would probably be a set time, like in an office, that you would have a morning tea or an afternoon

23:00 tea but it was just the same as a civilian job really. I mean the way it worked, it was like office routine, as I know it, except it was in a military situation.

So can you tell us about being transferred down to HMAS Rushcutter? How long had you been in Indooroopilly until that happened?

23:30 Well I think it was until the war in Europe had ended or nearly ended and the push north by MacArthur was imminent and so we all, as I said, asked our parents' permission to go and then we were replaced. Now I don't know what happened to four of the girls or any of what happened to the rest of the air force girls or army girls, but Nola Armstrong and myself, we were sent

24:00 down to Sydney. Now we were attached to HMAS Rushcutter and we lived in the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] in Bayswater Road. I don't know whether they had accommodation at HMAS Rushcutter for navy girls. I read somewhere or after that they didn't but if they did there wasn't enough for us and we were living in the YWCA. And we were to go to Leichhardt.

24:30 Bear in mind we're writers, and pretty handy with the pen and pencil, but they wanted us to test radar valves, so they had to give us a brief briefing on the rudiments of electricity, so we wouldn't kill ourselves or damage equipment. So the navy, with another one of it's terminologies, they're not lecturers or anything like that, they have 'schoolmasters',

25:00 right, 'schoolmasters'. So Nola and I turned up in a class with young sailors to learn the rudiments of electricity. I mean, more so than the facts that you just turned it on at the wall. Well his method of teaching the sailors and us was to illustrate how the two stroke engine worked on a motorcycle, and also how you operated a Sydney

25:30 tram. Well the trams were electric see and the thing is, when they go through the points and if they want to go that way, say, they might have to have the power on, so you either open the rear stack and if you wanted to go this way, and that would put you on the right way, and if you wanted to go this way, you shut it off, so that you went that way. So that was the basic principle of

26:00 running a Sydney tram, but the motorcycles they were a different kettle of fish, because I didn't even know how a car operated, let alone a motorcycle, so we learnt sufficient that we went out to Leichhardt. Leichhardt was where the radar repair depot was and we had to test the radar valves. Have you ever seen the valves of an old wireless set?

26:30 **No.**

The wirelesses that used to run on valves years ago. They were about that high and then they'd have a series of prongs where they fitted into a socket and various prongs would have various duties, that would be the word I wanted to use, you see. And so for the radar sets we had to more or less test that all the valves we had were not faulty. Now there were a variety of valves.

27:00 You would have to read the specification to see that you were using one type of valve and you'd have to set your little keyboard to the various - so you'd have to power on various legs of these valves and test them to make sure they gave you the right reaction, then turn it off. Of course you're dealing with, you weren't dealing with 240 power, you were dealing with much greater, stronger electricity; industrial equipment.

27:30 And of course, we'd do another batch of other valves, so we'd have to reset the co-ordinates on the valves. We tested them all before they were used in the radar sets. Now also in the place, as I said, it was a repair depot, and radar sets were bought in and they were repaired by petty officer radar mechanics and they were English 'Wrens' [name commonly used for the WRNS, Women's Royal Naval Service].

28:00 They were English, all English girls.

How did you get on with them?

Good, fine. There was another lass that was with us, out there, and there were quite a number, I can't remember how many but they came and went. They worked different kind of shifts and we had to go out to Leichhardt by tram and it just looked like an industrial area, you see.

28:30 That's why I say I know precious little about the navy up until this particular time because I was more or less out in the field, I would think.

Were you concerned that you hadn't done any kind of physics or science before?

When I went to school they didn't do too much in the way of science and all I really knew about science was you got steam from boiling water.

29:00 **Did you tell your schoolmaster that?**

No, no, he was too intent on telling us how motorbikes went.

Did you get to drive a Sydney tram though?

I was just thinking lately, they ought to let me at the wheel. I'm sure I wouldn't go off the tracks.

Did you really try that?

No, no, he more or less explained the rational behind opening and closing this particular on a tram. What it did one way was take you to one line if you wished and the

29:30 other one it would. It would be the same on electric trains here, I would say.

Do you know why you were chosen specifically to go from Brisbane to Sydney?

No, no, unless, the only thing I could think was that when the push went forward, in another area in Brisbane there were two other girls, I don't know what they did. Now when this all happened they were sent to Sydney too in another area, and we ultimately

30:00 all met up in Watson, but whether they wanted, seeing as we had done this particular work they wanted to make sure that we were dispersed as far as possible back I suppose. Whether that true or false I have no idea, but I have no idea why we were chosen and that was that. 'Cause radar was in it's infancy then so it would be kind of a bit hush-hush really, I would think. And then along with testing the valves they were using confidential books

30:30 for specifications and there'd be modifications written up when probably the manufacturer's realised that a certain part had been superseded and that you should use different kinds of tactics when putting these machines together.

Did you enjoy that?

I found it interesting, yes.

Was it better than doing?

For that I got another pair of overalls, see as a writer I only had one pair. We were only allowed

31:00 one pair of overalls. Certain other kinds of areas, I do not know, probably if you were a cook or somewhere like that you may be allowed two, but because we were working like in an industrial situation, we were allowed another pair of overalls.

Well that's handy. But was it more interesting for you working down in Sydney and doing the electricity, rather than sitting in the office and doing the transcribing?

31:30 I had no option. I mean ATIS in Brisbane had gone. It had gone up to the islands, so you did whatever the navy sent you off to do and well that was the next thing I had to do, so I found it interesting. I was in Sydney; going to Sydney was quite a interesting exercise, because I'd never been, well before I joined up I'd never been

32:00 further than Brisbane. I'd been to Brisbane as a small child, but that was it. I was [in] foreign territory when I went into New South Wales, wasn't I?

Yes and you said you lived on Bayswater Road, which is fairly infamous for night girls, let's say?

Yes, the YWCA was I think pretty okay but it was rather a lively area down round there at King's Cross - King's Cross was just around the corner.

32:30 **It still is.**

Yes, yes.

Can you tell us what you saw? Was that a hub-bub of activity during the war days?

Yes, yes, of course it probably was a hub-bub of activity but to my eyes it would be, I'd probably have eyes as big as saucers, "oh this is going on", but I really enjoyed it while I was in Sydney then, yes.

But what do you mean you 'had eyes as big as saucers'? I know that you were coming from the country and moving to the city?

Oh country

33:00 mouse and then you come to Brisbane and of course Brisbane was regarded as a big country town in those days, whereas Sydney was the place to be and King's Cross was supposed to be the place for where everything happened, so well there [was] plenty of activity. Quite often there was some English warships in town, in the harbour as well. I have some photos there of some of the, KG5, and

33:30 might be a few other names there but there was quite a great cross-section of troops: army, navy, air force and as I say, ships in there. And in Sydney there was HMAS Rushcutter, Balmoral, Kuttabul, and then ultimately Watson, where I finally ended up at Watson [these are all shore establishments (although famously, the original Kuttabul was a ferry for housing troops)].

What kind of colourful characters did you meet down in the Cross?

34:00 **Oh that's -**

Colourful characters?

That came out the wrong way.

I didn't meet any, I looked at them all.

Also, I mean did you see a lot of obviously servicemen, prostitutes?

Oh there would have be a lot of servicemen there because I mean, probably especially with the ships they would come in for R&R [rest and recuperation] and they would have a wonderful time when they

34:30 had shore leave. And they had Garden Island. That was another naval area where they did a lot of repairing ships and that's not too far from King's Cross.

So how did you live there in the YWCA? Was it a small little unit, did you have kitchen facilities?

I think we must have had meals supplied. We must have had to have meals supplied,

35:00 'cause it was all paid for by the navy, not me. I mean I didn't come out of - we were billeted there. I don't know where I got my lunch from, whether I had to pay for it when I got to Leichhardt or whether out there they provided meals or not. I can't tell you what I did, I don't know that I starved but I don't know what I did at lunchtime. Can't remember that one.

35:30 **Did you have your own room or your own unit?**

It wouldn't be a unit, nothing as smart as that. It would be a room probably. I don't know if I shared with anyone. Sometimes accommodation was such that you'd probably have twin share or something, I don't know if I did that. I think I had a room to myself, such as it was. It would probably be minute.

And what about this man that worked in the mosquito unit, can I ask about him?

Oh that's

36:00 later in life, later.

After the war?

Yeah.

Oh okay. During this time then, this sounds wrong, did you meet any men in the Cross? What I mean is did you go out in King's Cross with any of the navy people on nights out and go for a drink, or anything like that?

I think I more or less went out like in groups of folk. 'Cause I mean I don't think it was recommended you go out to

36:30 some of these places by yourself or anything like that. If I went out it would be to the movies or something like that. I don't remember any dances or things down there. I can't remember those.

Excuse me, excuse me. Something I meant to ask you also before when you were in Brisbane, it's the time of the year,

37:00 **how trustworthy were the second generation Japanese that came over from the United States? Did the Australians feel like they could trust them?**

I don't know that we had much to do with them. Well I didn't, I don't whether anybody did. They more or less - I don't know what happened with them. They were there, we knew they were there but how they operated in their off duty

37:30 hours I do not know because let's face it, if anybody saw a Japanese face in this country I think they would be very suspect. I don't know how they were looked after and probably for their own good because they could be in trouble, I suppose, due to their facial structure. But they were in the United States Army uniform, so they should be okay, I would have thought. I've never thought of that aspect at all.

38:00 I knew they were there and they were working on captured documents and that was about it.

Were you aware of spies around where you were working?

No, but as I say we were in a secure area. I don't know what the spies would have seen, apart from unless they noticed some of the fellows who had been operators who were here and came and went. Maybe if they had

38:30 gone back and forth on a regular basis they might glean something from I don't know. I wouldn't know how they would have operated. But I guarantee there would have been spies around. "The walls have ears," they said - probably did.

I suppose, this is a silly question to say, "Oh well did you know of any spies?" because...

Oh well I wouldn't know that.

What about Australian military people working as spies,

39:00 **were you aware of people who actually did it out of ATIS?**

No, nothing, apart from typing up anything I wasn't aware, apart from the people I knew were there, I didn't know too much about the infrastructure. That's the garbage bin.

The other thing you mentioned before was the Glen Miller Band?

I think it was the Glen Miller Band, yes, came over.

39:30 **Is that the jazz? Were you into jazz during this time?**

Oh it was very nice music, yes. Catchy music.

So what would be a dance that you would do to jazz?

Oh golly, haven't done that kind of stuff for years. It was very, very, catchy, they're very, very catchy, because the jitter-bug

40:00 was in too and nearly got my nose broken in that. One of those things. No, and it was very nice listening music as well as dancing to it.

So obviously American music, the jazz scene, was filtering into Australia during the war years?

Well it came in with the troops, I would think; when you think back because they bought their music with them.

40:30 **Is that something new though, that you'd never heard before up until these days?**

Well anything would have been new to me. We weren't allowed to have a radio in the house.

You did mention that.

Yeah.

All right, we'll switch tapes Helen.

Tape 6

00:32 **Helen you mentioned to Heather before that one of your favourite dances in the early days was the waltz, but your tastes have kind of changed since then. Can you give us a bit of a theory of what replaced the waltz?**

Why? Well since, you're coming into the end of my life now. Since I've retired I've taken up Scottish country dancing.

That is a change.

01:00 I was a fairly good square dancer except that I have a hearing problem and with square dancing the calls are very similar, they might say "alaman bar" or "alaman star" and when you've got a hearing problem, I'm all set to do this and I should be doing that, so I gave that away and I thought, "I'll take up Scottish country dancing. I'll learn the dances and I'll be fine". But apart from learning the steps they have got so many formations, there's

01:30 well over six thousand dances, maybe more, they're still devising them. But it's great fun, great exercise and it exercises the mind too and I'm not arthritic, so so far, so good.

And what did you reckon of the jitterbug when you'd go dancing?

Oh gosh, as I said, I nearly broke my nose on somebody's elbow when it connected with my nose. You know how they seem to go all ways at once.

02:00 Yeah, I decided that was too dangerous. When you see them now when they dance, it's amazing that they're so nimble, but still that's the way they went on. Still gave great relief to expression I suppose.

Well I mean in order to get your nose almost broken there must have been, was it a packed hall or was it?

Oh it was, it was very packed type of thing and everybody's doing their own thing because with jitterbug

02:30 it wasn't a case of like with dances of that time you more or less waltzed round like this, or whatever

the dance was, you more or less went round clockwise or anti-clockwise, whatever you were going to do, whereas with a jitterbug you're like a lot of worms, going this way and that way, aren't you?

What was your first reaction or sense of Sydney when you first got there? I mean compared to Brisbane it's a much larger town?

03:00 Oh well in our limited time off we had to explore what it was like and there were quite a lot of girls who were local girls and they, well a couple of the girls that lived out at Watson, ultimately, they were all Sydney girls and they more or less took we country girls under and more or less adopted us to a certain degree.

03:30 So we were able to get involved in a family situation in some of those instances.

So did you discover favourite spots? Did you have favourite places that you liked to go?

Oh, mainly for eating. I don't know that we had coffee so much in those days but it was more or less afternoon teas I would think. Some of the places more or less down in - is King Street the main street of Sydney?

04:00 I think it is, isn't it? Somewhere down there we used to all gravitate to eat because I'm not sure, I think rationing would still be on there. I think it would be, aren't sure, can't tell you, so I mean it was limited what you could eat anywhere. What you ate would be, not be rationed and I can't tell you anymore. I hadn't thought on the subject eating down in Sydney. Well away from one's abode,

04:30 mainly because of the cost. The cost wouldn't be that great, I wouldn't think, but then again it would probably seem great with the amount of money that we were receiving in our pay packets.

And what did you think of Sydney overall as a city?

Well initially I more or less, I went forward and back to Leichhardt in

05:00 I think it was a tram, now that's an industrial area. That wasn't a very marvellous looking area but ultimately when I went to, transferred to Watson into captain's secretary's office, that was out at Watson's Bay, that was a different part of Sydney, a much more upmarket part of Sydney than I was used to, ultimately we lived at Watson. It used to be a signals station and the WRANS' quarters

05:30 were where the signal station was and that was more or less how we came up there, so after we finished work there we'd come down the precipitous steps, if you could call them steps, to catch the bus, 'cause we could see the bus coming and we'd be up at the top and I'm sure we made the hundred metres in less than ten seconds time trying to catch the bus.

06:00 Because it wasn't, have you ever been on that route out to Watson's Bay? You know how it's a very nice kind of a route there. We didn't mind that. It was very interesting.

Can you give a bit of a, walk us through Watson's Bay itself, your barracks and what the layout was?

Well it was another hut. I've got some pictures

06:30 there if you'd like to look at them.

Oh yeah, we will later, but just from a visual experience.

Oh it was just huts up there. The living quarters were more on the lee of the hill, because as you know you get the full blast of the ocean on the ocean side. We had our mess hall and the galley, that was another hut entirely and HMAS Watson was another series of -

07:00 I think they'd be fibro and wooden huts. What it is now is vastly different but that's what it was like during the war at that particular time and that was a radar station. I think they trained sailors there and also they used to go on trials. I did go to sea again. It was another one of these trials; radar trials. We went out through the heads

07:30 and was more or less like the, they must have been calibrating sets or teaching somebody, some class of sailors and we were out in the ocean, just stooging around. For what reason I don't know, it was radar trials of some sort so we just went along for the ride, it was very nice.

How many of you went along?

There'd be about eight or ten of us.

08:00 I think I've got a picture there of us being very wind blown on this said ship. They were the only two times I ever went to sea.

How long were you at Rushcutter's before you got posted to Watson?

I've looked up my records but I can't tell you that, I really don't - I would think after

08:30 war in Japan was over, there would be no more further need for radar sets and I think that particular

workshop would have been closed and that's when I would have gone to Watson. I mean it was a permanent station, Watson, then.

Oh sorry, sorry, excuse me, just to clarify, you went to Watson after the war was declared over?

Well

09:00 see my terms were "two years, or the duration of the war and six months thereafter", and with people it was first in, first out. Well there was probably, there was a lot of people in before me, so I had to wait my turn, but I can't, I would think, I mean there would really be no need to upgrade us if the war was over, would it? 'Cause there should be no more action.

You would think theoretically but…

Whether that was so or

09:30 not. There's no time on that, to differentiate between both, I can't tell you that. Somehow someone had been a bit remiss of what they did with me. I got my pay all right but keeping my records updated, there's something missing there.

So it was at Rushcutter's you were doing all your work with electricity? Training on trams and?

That was down in Rushcutter's Bay, that was HMAS Rushcutter, down there, yes.

What other duties

10:00 **were you actually doing while you were at Rushcutter's?**

Just testing valves and maybe keeping the maintenance books in order, making sure they were up to date. That was what our duties were, nothing else. We had boxes and boxes of these things. I mean you didn't just put them in, like testing eggs, making sure you've got good eggs;

10:30 you had [to] make sure they were put in correctly and you had to switch the power on each one when you did it. It wasn't a case that you had the power set and you just put them in. Course now days they probably have a better way of doing things, but that's how they did it then.

No, I mean that's fascinating to realise what you had to do.

Well you were dealing with, as I said, industrial power. I think it could have been in excess of four hundred,

11:00 is it watts? It could be more than that, I don't know but it wasn't the two forty, it was more than that, it was industrial. Even so, two forty is kind of, can be lethal.

You get on the wrong end of it. So how many would you be able to test across your average day?

Couldn't tell you. It would be boxes, how many boxes they wanted done. It could be, I

11:30 would think they were different types of sets so they have different types, they have different specifications and different types of valves. One set of valves here would not possibly suit the valves on this particular one so that was probably how it would be. And bear in mind, as I said, not only the Australian Navy, there was the English Navy but probably the Americans, so I would

12:00 think that we had a good cross-section that came in for repair, so that's why we had this kind of diversity of equipment.

So would the process to test these valves actually vary, given the variety of valves you had to test, at all?

Well some of the valves would have, well I mean they'd all have like prongs or feet and then,

12:30 some of them would have a thing on the top where you'd have to put a connection to the top. There was some particular reason why some, so you had to make sure you had the power onto the correct connection. Some of the connections, the feet, may not have any power on them at all. That's why on one set of valves you may have power on one, two and five. If you put another one the power

13:00 might be on two, three and something else. You had to be mighty careful you hooked up the right one because you could wreck the valve or do all sorts of things. We didn't come into any disaster but you had to be very careful. Have a healthy respect for electricity, thank you very much.

Were there any valves that got broke or busted along the way?

I don't know, there must have been some that didn't perform and they'd have to find why

13:30 they - we'd probably take it to our supervisor and say these particular valves wouldn't work, for some particular reason. Could be that they'd been broken internally and we couldn't see it, but I don't recall any duds, but there must have been. I can't recall any but it just seemed a strange job for girls.

Did you

14:00 **know much of the, hear anything of the Japanese sub's that came into Sydney Harbour and the sinking of the Kuttabul?**

Probably did, 'cause it would have been in the newspapers, so I would have known about it from that way.

14:30 But I did hear later on, from another person, she was on the teleprinters in the WAAF, and she knew about the other submarine that was not reported.

Which one was that?

There was another one that evidently kind of escaped or got away somewhere and she knew about that one, but that has only come out in recent years, but at the time it was just, I think I knew about the Kuttabul, probably what I heard or read in the papers.

15:00 'Cause it wouldn't have been bandied around a thing like that if there was more than what was in the paper. They'd have to keep it, because after all the Japanese would be very interested to see what happened to their submarine, whether it had the desired kind of effect that they had hoped. Don't know anymore than that.

Now how about Helen, I guess observation, because of the different forces,

15:30 **I mean it was a very service-heavy town at that stage with a lot of people. Did, for instance, the navy fellows get on with the AIF, or were there sort of conflicts or scraps between any of the…?**

There always seemed to be scraps between a body of men when they have too much leisure and alcohol. Any little things sets them off, but I wouldn't know. Not far from where we were up at

16:00 South Head, there's an artillery school up on South Head, I don't know we had anything to do with them while they were there but I don't know too much of any other kind of scrap that went on.

Did a scrap like that happen at South Head though?

Pardon?

Did you hear something?

No, no. I was mainly mentioning that because the artillery school was more or less close by and we had nothing to do with them and they with us, type of thing, I wouldn't think.

16:30 No, apart from there, there must have been kinds of differences of opinion I should imagine in King's Cross. A whole number of our servicemen bent on leave and having a good time, no I wouldn't know too much about that but they must have been, given the nature of the male of the species. Giving you a hard time, aren't I?

Trust me, we deserve it.

17:00 **You mentioned to Heather before, you got to learn much more about the navy once you got to Sydney, really than what you had experienced in Brisbane. Now I was just wondering in what way?**

Well I was put into captain's secretary's office and that was more or less; you're into the secretarial department of running a

17:30 depot. It's more or less a bit like an accounting office if you were in private business. The captain's secretary was, well that's what he was, he was the captain's secretary and he just more or less would be the main general office for the depot. The other offices there would be the clothing store and things like that, but this would be the general office and the depot.

18:00 So this was more or less how I learnt how the navy operated, albeit late in the piece.

And what, I mean you were working in the secretary's office, what principally were you doing?

Oh just clerical work. As I mentioned when we

18:30 were being demobbed, it was first in, first out. Well I was one of the last ones there, but as the girls got demobbed in the office, I mean the senior one in the office, the girl in the office, she did know the combination of the safe. Whether the WRANS should have known the

19:00 combination or not, but the captain's secretary, that was how he operated. What was in the safe I have no idea, there'd probably be some kind of confidential things in there but I don't know; evidently what we got out in the morning, I can't tell you that. I've forgotten. In the light of my subsequent business career I wouldn't have thought it was too confidential or too much money or anything like that,

19:30 I wouldn't know what was in there, but as people got demobilised, the role of senior office staff passed down to the next senior person. So as Mary was demobilised, she told Betty what the combination of the safe was before she left and that's the way it operated. Well it got down that I was the senior WRAN in the office and I was given the combination of the safe.

20:00 And so first thing in the morning like you do, you open up, I opened the safe and a very pucker permanent navy lieutenant came in, and he spied me opening the safe. Well he read the riot act; a WRAN opening the safe, that was dreadful. I don't know what happened to the captain's secretary. He must have got his ears pinned back I would think but they

20:30 subsequently removed the safe completely - it was one about this high - and brought in a brand new one. So that was it.

That's one way of changing the combination?

Yeah. That was rather funny I thought, because I had no idea what was in there apart from, there must have been something in there, but I can't think, but I think it must have been

21:00 normal kind of business books of some sort, I can't recall.

As the war was coming to, I guess, a close, were you and others around you aware that it was happening, that it was perhaps going to end soon?

Oh I think we were kept up to date with the progress of the war as MacArthur was making a stronger foothold in the Philippines and then they

21:30 more or less got up into the various other places. Course the atom bomb really sealed the end of the war, but apart from that we were hoping it would end fairly soon. And of course, once the war in Europe finished we were able, all the energy from Europe

22:00 was amassed to help us to get out of our dilemma in the Pacific. As I mentioned we had a whole lot of English navy ships, they were all in Sydney. After they'd finished their stint in Europe, they were out here.

As things were sort of getting towards a close, did the

22:30 **discipline I guess in the office and daily duties amongst you or other staff members kind of relax a little bit?**

I suppose they did up to a point because we were all, most of them were all, in the navy I don't know if you know but if you, the permanent navy they're the ones that have straight bars. Volunteer Reserve was like that and I believe the fellows that came

23:00 from the merchant marine they were, so you could tell by the bands on their sleeve whether they were permanent or hostilities only people. And the hostilities only people they were quite happy to get out and go back to whatever pursuit they were doing before they enlisted. And in any case all the people in there, they came from far and wide.

23:30 There was one girl from (UNCLEAR) North Queensland, another one from Tasmania and even in our small, little group up there we came from more or less the four corners of eastern Australia. So we were all happy, more or less, to shake off the military yoke and go home. We'd had enough after two and a half years or so.

What about CO's during the service, did you

24:00 **get on with senior officers or were there some that stood out as being particularly good or nasty?**

Well I don't know. I didn't rub against anybody unfavourably I don't think. Just did my work and that was about it. I didn't find any abrasive fellows apart from this fellow who didn't think much of the safe. And he wasn't my boss, or anything like that.

24:30 I don't know what exactly his duties were there, I can't tell you. But he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, as far as I was concerned, in regard to the safe, but that was it.

And so did you make any sort of good friends in Sydney that once you sort of got there and settled down, compared to I guess Brisbane where you were sort of working a bit more in isolation?

25:00 Yes, especially with the girls who lived in Sydney, we did go out with them and also we were invited out their families. I don't recall any kind of service invitations, like as I mentioned in Brisbane we

25:30 were invited to go to the air force dances and we had a tender supplied to go and attend. I don't know of any of those functions. I think we were a bit too far out of town because other places like Balmoral and Rushcutter, they were all closer into town. We were more or less up on the hill, a fair way to get into there. I don't know, I don't recall any kind of social activities. Oh yes, one I remember.

26:00 They had a hockey team and they went to play the WRANS in Canberra. Somehow we got to Canberra. I didn't play hockey; I went as a spectator. First time I'd ever been to Canberra which was about '43, '44. No, it would be '45 sometime.

God, how did Canberra shape up back then?

Well I remember the Civic Centre, was it Civic Centre? I seem to remember that.

26:30 Didn't seem to be much more than that, whether there was or not I don't know because we only saw where we were taken and it was in relation to where they were playing hockey and where we ate. That was the main thing and I don't know how we got there. Must have been taken there, we wouldn't have gone by train so we must have gone there under somehow or other, don't know how we got there but I went with the hockey team.

How did the team go?

I can't remember if they won or lost. I didn't

27:00 know too much about hockey. I was just a spectator. I was interested in going to Canberra and having a look.

What about Sydney, I mean you've touched on it briefly but what did you do for fun? To let your short hair down and...?

I don't know what I did

27:30 apart from having coffees. 'Cause the thing is whenever you went out with anyone, it had to be with someone that was off duty and it could be that you might want to go somewhere and there wasn't anybody around because they're all working or something or other like that. I can't remember too much about Sydney apart from the various other girls and any kind of activity that you went out with them. Can't think of anybody else.

28:00 **Now what about, Helen you mentioned to us this morning that the navy initially or at least some part of the navy really didn't want women in the service?**

Ah. Well you probably heard that there was a lady down in Sydney known as Mrs Mac. She taught

28:30 wireless stenography, she had classes and she taught men for the forces and also she taught women and she had quite evidently a band of good female telegraphers as well as men too and she had them placed within the army and the air force and so she went to the navy and asked them could they would be interested in female telegraphers,

29:00 and as I said, "No, women in the navy? Never, never, no." So they resisted her offer so she offered the girls to the army and the air force. Well ultimately it came to be, not only as the war progressed in Europe and then there was the Pacific campaign, the navy needed more telegraphists, so they

29:30 reluctantly had to accept. They couldn't get sufficient men and these girls were all trained so they took the girls in, albeit they didn't want to but that was more or less the nucleus of how the girls came to be in the navy. They were more or less, I suppose the navy was kind of blackmailed and there weren't very many of us, only about three thousand odd, may be.

30:00 **And did you or anyone you knew or heard of experience that kind of disfavour of not really wanting women in the service?**

There was another lady, you might have already interviewed her, Alison Armstrong. Did you see Alison Armstrong?

We haven't done Alison, no.

Well she was a wireless telegraphist and as I understand it, she was a student of Mrs Mac.

30:30 She kind of I think mentioned that. She would be more or less a full book on that one, I think. It's outlined in one of the books here that I have, that the navy didn't really want women in but they found that they needed them and then they found afterwards they were as good as men anyway, probably better, but that was more or less, they didn't really want women in the service.

31:00 **Did you experience at any time anything that kind of felt like the men not really respecting or wanting the women in the service?**

No, I don't think so. I think it was more or less the way the navy operated and the only thing is when you go back in history, women onboard ship are deemed to be unlucky. I mean when you I suppose go back in the sailing ship days

31:30 and things. So maybe it was that kind of bad luck kind of syndrome that prevailed even to this day, that they didn't want women in the navy for that, whether there was more to it I do not know but it probably goes back to some fable of earlier days.

So with the, did you feel, I guess, well,

32:00 **respected for the work that you were doing during your time?**

Oh I suppose so, I think so. Bear in mind I was not a, I seem very gregarious now but I was not like that when I was extremely young, I was more retiring and sat back and watched, didn't say anything, just sat back and watched, you see. But didn't suffer any discrimination from anywhere or anybody or anything, so no, I would say we all got on fairly well.

32:30 **And did you hear much of, I guess, any strife between the Americans and the Australians in Sydney?**

Oh golly, unless it was documented in the press, I don't think I would have seen it, unless someone knew about it with any kind of row or fight when maybe we were in the YWCA, talking over breakfast or tea or something, it might have been hot news or something, I can't recall

33:00 anything yet. One fight is the same as another one, it depends on what they're fighting over, probably alcohol or something like that.

Well it's quite often talked about that the main problem was that the Americans were picking up all the girls?

Oh yes, because they had more money and they had what, they were more or less dazzling all the ladies and the fellas

33:30 couldn't compete. They really didn't have, as they say, the social skills of the Americans and of course the girls were kind of overawed, I would think, and the Aussie fellow was kind of found, he was relegated to back and he didn't like it and didn't realise he should up his game to compete with them on their own terms, but then again he didn't have the money

34:00 to compete with these charmers.

And were they charming?

Oh yeah, oh yes, they were kind of and they had all sorts of and of course they had a very efficient PX system, that's their canteen thing from which they could get all sorts of goods that were not available in department stores around town, like nylon stockings, you couldn't buy them

34:30 for love nor money. We were wearing wonderful lyle stockings, ghastly things, but nylon stockings they were very much appreciated by those that received them.

As a young woman didn't you think it was perhaps a little odd that the US male soldiers had their hands on an incredible supply of nylon and silk stockings?

35:00 **Didn't you ever wonder what that was, what they were doing with handfuls of nylon and silk stockings?**

Oh there are two ways of looking at that. The PX store was not only for male soldiers, it was female soldiers too, so that's where the nylon stockings came from probably, but the average GI [American soldier] he could fetch whatever he liked I suppose in there

35:30 and that's where he was able to get a supply of nylon stockings, 'cause there would be American women would be in Sydney too. I don't recall them in Rockhampton, but they were in Brisbane where we were and I would say they would have been in Sydney too.

So what was your impression of I guess the American women, I mean we so often hear about the American men being charmers, having all the money and the good uniforms, what about the American women?

36:00 Well they seemed to be very efficient kind of ladies and well they came over just as you see them now. They always seem to be very efficient, kind of well groomed, up to date kind of ladies. I would think, as I say, I think they would be a good deal older than I was because maybe they had some rule you had to be over twenty-one

36:30 or something to go overseas, I'm not sure. But I would say they would be well in their twenties, those particular ladies. Same with the Australian nurses, I think they had to be over twenty-one before they could go overseas, whether that's true or false, I do not know. But they seemed to be very nice. I didn't meet too many of them because but you just rubbed shoulders with them in the office and they just seemed to be just like any other kind of office personnel.

37:00 And they probably had rank on us anyway, can't recall too much about them.

Were they as talkative and overt as their male counterparts?

Oh look, it's a long time ago. They were there and I don't know what they actually did. They weren't in the same area as I was. Maybe they were in some other area. Maybe they

37:30 were translators too, I'm not sure. I really don't know. I haven't thought about that one before but they were there.

I'll just check my notes for a second. Helen Heather asked you about spies up in Brisbane

38:00 **but were you aware of any Japanese presence actually within Australia during your service, here or in Brisbane, spies of any sort?**

I don't know any spies of any sort but then again there were always posters, "watch out with regard to" - what was it? - "loose lips sink ships" or something or other like that.

38:30 But as I mentioned in Rockhampton our next door neighbour was in intelligence and he was often called out on raids of some sort, so who he was raiding, whether it was Italian, German or whether it was others, I'm not sure. But he was a very busy man, he used to get called out quite often in some kind of a activity of some sort.

39:00 We have a long coastline as you realise, so I mean they'd have to more or less have their eyes and ears well open with the Japanese that were coming down. They probably figured the worst. That was what Mr Jolly used to do. His surname was Jolly.

Okay Helen, we'll pause there because we have to change tapes again.

Tape 7

00:32 **Helen being in the navy were you given any privileges as to go on any ships that came into harbour in Sydney?**

Might have, might have but then again bear in mind we were out at Watson. I should imagine the girls down at Garden Island or Balmoral they would be more closer to the action if any invitations were going around, I should imagine they would be allotted to them because they would be closer to the scene of the action, I

01:00 would think. As I say, I don't recall, the only thing I can remember now, not us, but in Sydney the social ladies of the city they would have like balls like the Red Cross, the 'Red and White Ball' and there'd be various other things. I remember one of the girls in the office, she was teasing a very young lieutenant

01:30 or sub-lieutenant or something or other about going to the Lesbian Ball, and he was getting very hot under the collar and he was trying to shunt her off but she was teasing him with it, but it appeared it wasn't a lesbian ball, it was the Lebanese Ladies' Ball. She deliberately provoked him with this and he was kind of squirming trying to get out

02:00 of under her probing.

To confirm whether or not he was going to that ball?

Yes, oh she was just teasing.

What about day trips on the harbour being at Watson? Did you get to go on any day trips?

Apart from that, oh I don't know whether the Sydney Harbour ferries were still operating. They probably would have been wouldn't they? I would think. Even

02:30 amongst the naval ships there because there was a boom gate across the heads, but I think the Captain Cook, the ferries would be operating but the only one I ever went on was, as I mentioned before, on radar trials that particular day. That was the only one I ever went on.

How did you go, I mean I know that was for work, but how did you go with being on the sea, did you have any problems with the waves or anything?

I get quite seasick if I'm

03:00 down below and I can smell the diesel and maybe paint and if it's kind of airless I can be very quickly sick, so if I go onto anything like that I like to be a bit like a bird dog and sit with my nose to the wind and I'm quite happy if I'm at the centre of gravity, type of thing, but down below it's a different kettle of fish. I used to get train-sick, car-sick, you name it-sick

03:30 but I've overcome those things these days.

So where were you when war was declared over and it was time to go home?

Still in Sydney, yeah.

Was there a big celebration that night?

Oh we had, I think that particular photo I have of the march through Sydney and I remember everyone was going around kissing people. One awful looking fellow, he looked like an awful wharf labourer and I got the biggest hug of all and kiss of all of my

04:00 life from this great, grimy looking character. I didn't fancy that but still. It was relief all around, everybody so relieved that we weren't going to fight anymore and that was it, we had to wait till everyone came home.

Did you call your mum and dad?

Call?

On the telephone?

Didn't do things like that in those days,

04:30 no, I wouldn't have done that, they would have written home, no, wouldn't have done that. I was safe in Sydney. It wasn't the case I was in some kind of outpost somewhere that was hazardous and I'd say, "It's all over, I'm coming home", but it was fine, probably wrote a letter. 'Cause I wouldn't have known when I was coming home because as I said, first in, first out. So I had to wait my turn and I didn't

05:00 get out until September '46, so I had to wait my turn, that was it. Just because the war was over they couldn't kind of everybody just walk out of the place and drop tools because the army they had to have some kind of continuity admin.-wise, so there would be certain kinds of classifications where they'd be all out. I should imagine soldiers who were just

05:30 soldiers, not having some other kind of specialist training, they would probably be able to be released quite quickly but others that had some other kind of specialist thing that they needed to hand down slowly I should imagine that they would be taken first in, first out like that to enable some kind of continuity in the defence forces.

06:00 I would think so, anyway.

So how did you know you were being demobbed? Did you receive a letter or your superior come to talk to you?

I'm not sure whether I knew that, "Oh yes you were likely to be demobbed in September". I mean earlier in the year and when September came around, "Oh yes

06:30 you're to go on draft back to Brisbane to wait for demobilisation". There would be that. There would be some kind of loose continuity initially and then subsequently you'd know more definite plans as the demobilisation plan speeded up. When we got up here I mean in the first place when we came in we had to have a medical.

07:00 I forgot to mention all the injections you had, well when you were demobilised you had to have a medical again to make sure you were in good health, so that you couldn't claim on them later on through DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] I would think.

By the way, did you have a reaction to the inoculations, to being immunised?

I was okay with regard to tetanus and typhoid but my first two vaccinations

07:30 of smallpox did not take, so they gave me a third injection and I landed in an overnight in sick-bay out of it. That was the only one.

How do you mean "it didn't take"? What does that mean?

You've never had a smallpox injection? Well the thing is they give you the injection and it comes up like a boil, horrible looking thing, well

08:00 it just didn't come up, didn't take, so after the third time it came up and of course along with manifesting itself as a horrible looking boil looking thing, it makes you quite sick as well. I'm quite immune to smallpox, thank you very much.

You don't have to worry about that then?

No, no.

So where did you go when you left Sydney, Watson's Bay?

08:30 Oh I came back up to Brisbane to be demobilised. I said I wanted to be demobilised from Brisbane, then I was demobilised here and subsequently I went to work for the Royal Insurance, in Brisbane here, in the Accident Department. And I was there for nine years and in the mean time, at that time, after the war, girls and some of the fellas

09:00 they'd used their deferred pay or some other means, they decided they'd go to England, New Zealand and any other places and the ships were leaving for England and those places with all the ex-servicemen and women going to see what Europe looked like. And as I mentioned before they were used to hopping on and off trucks here so they were quite masters at hitchhiking and going through Europe and that type [of] thing. Now I

09:30 didn't want to go to Europe, England or to New Zealand. I would have like to have gone to the United

States but to get a visa to work there I had to wait five years and I wasn't going to wait five years, so I decided I'd like to go to Canada. But to work in Canada you have to go as an immigrant, you have to emigrate to Canada, so I decided I'd emigrate and it just so happened that Royal Insurance had an

10:00 office in Vancouver and I got a job at the office of the Royal Insurance in Vancouver so I went off, I emigrated to Canada. I was only going for two years, but I stayed away nearly eight.

Hang on Helen, you went straight after the war?

No, nine years after.

Nine years after?

I was nine years in the Royal Insurance and then I went over to Canada.

But you went overseas during those nine years, is that correct?

No, they put, I saved every penny I

10:30 could lay my hands on because to go over there it would cost about five hundred pounds, this was pounds, not dollars and I had my fare home which was five hundred pounds before I went. So I had to have a thousand pounds before I went because I knew I'd have to maintain myself while I was away. 'Cause you're not sure whether you're going to get a job or not and when you're travelling around

11:00 you're forever saving, for to get to the next destination 'cause you've got to live and work at the thing, so I went to Vancouver and worked for the Royal Insurance for, must have been about a year or so, and then with a New Zealand friend, we decided, I left that job and I worked for Canadian Westinghouse Supply and that was different kind of work again

11:30 and then with a New Zealand friend we decided we would hitchhike up to Whitehorse. Now that was kind of interesting. We got up there faster than we bargained on. We got two wonderful rides. One for three hundred miles and one for six hundred miles and we got up there faster than we bargained on but when we got to Whitehorse there were plenty of office jobs going but no accommodation. It was too expensive. We couldn't live in a hotel but

12:00 there [were] two other Australian girls up there. They were waitresses in a cocktail bar at the Whitehorse Inn, so my New Zealand friend became a waitress in the cocktail bar and there was a position in the café next door as a cashier in the café. Now I'd never seen a cash register in my life, apart from seeing it I'd never worked one in my life, but I became quite proficient at that and worked quite well and we had accommodation which went with the job, which was what we wanted.

12:30 I ultimately asked to become a waitress because you never know when you're travelling around what you're going to do and if you say you're a waitress and you haven't had experience, it could be disastrous, so I became a waitress for a few months. Didn't throw any soup over anyone, I think I was a pretty efficient waitress. And then of course we decided we'd go on the grand tour to Dawson City and around Alaska with the girls

13:00 and came back just before September, before too much snow-fall. The Alaskan Highway gets very, very snowy. We nearly had an accident and I didn't get in that car again and then we came back down to Vancouver, collected our gear and went to Calgary. Was in Calgary for four years working for Minneapolis Honeywell, which is the name now of

13:30 Honeywell Controls, and I was in the brown instruments division there. They sold most of their instruments to the oil industry where they could put the instrument in the oil well and they could tell the viscosity, the temperature and whatever information they wanted about that oil at the oil head back in the office, back wherever it was, where they'd read off all these things. It was a very interesting job.

14:00 Honeywell Controls made all sorts of things. They made automatic pilots, they had a lot of interesting equipment. I found that rather intriguing. And after a while I decided I'd like to see the north and I applied to become a public servant. That was the way you could see the north up there. The jobs that were going up there were more or less under the auspice of the Federal Government of Canada

14:30 and I received a job as secretary to the Administrative Manager of the new Inuvik Hospital. Inuvik is - the capital of the North West Territories was Aklavik and it was on one arm of the McKenzie delta and it was sinking into the perma-frost. The Canadian Government, in their wisdom, established a new capital

15:00 of Inuvik on another arm of the McKenzie delta which, not two far away was rocky foundation to put an airport. See with the perma-frost it's just ice and if it gets too warm it melts and of course a lot of the houses, you've probably seen pictures in the far north of crazy looking buildings where they sagged one way? It's because

15:30 of the cooling and warming that has gone on in previous times, you see. So I accepted this position to the new hospital, the new city. It was a hundred bed hospital and initially the office staff we were to be staying in the nurses' residence until they got a full compliment of nurses and they asked us to leave and we went and lived in

16:00 government housing. The government housing up there, the nucleus of the whole town was the power station, which was run on oil, which came up in the summer months from Norman Wells. It was ballasted in barges and the hospital, all the government buildings, the houses, proper looking houses and

16:30 rack of four blocks apartments, they were all attached to the power house by the utilidoor. Now imagine all the services that come to our houses here under the ground. There's the cold water, the sewerage, well over there they have another one, a

17:00 hot water system, that's right. Now they had that and they had that in a casing about that wide and that more or less snaked through the town, more or less at an even level like railway have to be, you see and by having the steam heat and the hot water in that casing it stopped the sewerage return from heating but unfortunately we never got a glass of cold water the whole

17:30 time we were there because it all came out of this thing and it came out warm. That's and all these services were in the sub-floor of the house and there was quite a, and if you were an engineering student, you'd know what I mean. They were all sorts of kind of planking things under there to make these things work but it was very, very efficient. I don't know how costly it was, I wasn't into the cost of things but if the power house had failed, unfortunately they'd

18:00 have to evacuate the town because when the cold gets in it actually wrecks things.

I've actually seen a documentary I think that was made on the plumbing and the way that heat that got into the houses. You're talking right up the north of Canada?

Oh about a miles north into the Arctic Circle.

What made you decide to go there after living in Australia?

I wanted to, well my Father used to subscribe to some kind of magazine,

18:30 whether it came out monthly or not, it was called World's News I think and at one stage, this must have been when I lived in Rockhampton, there was something in it about the Mad Trapper of somewhere. I mean up there was the fur trade and there was somebody who went amuck and the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] were after him to get their man and it was all up in the Arctic

19:00 near Fort McPherson, Aklavik and that's where I actually ended up, in that general area, and I was kind of fascinated with that part of Canada, so I was quite happy to go there, thank you very much. I stayed there two winters and a summer.

Did you go anywhere south? Did you go to Montreal or to Toronto?

Well the thing was while we were up there, to go up there you had to go for twelve months,

19:30 'cause the Government paid your fare up and fare back. If you left within the twelve months, you would be obliged to pay your fares both ways. It was only Hudson Bay Store there and another store, which was a very general store. It had everything in; you could buy very nice clothes, you could buy provisions and if you were into furs and things like that, at the door in winter you'd find bloody

20:00 carcasses and things like that, waiting for you to buy them if you wanted, as the fur traders brought their wares in. So I stayed up there and then I went on transfer to - while I was up, I'll digress. We couldn't go anywhere there because it was too expensive but I was there when they had 'Win Alaska Air'; sufficient people in the town all off at the time. We

20:30 chartered a plane and went to Fairbanks for a weekend and then another time we went and chartered a Pacific Western, it was about a twenty-four seater plane. No, no, it would be less than that. It would be about twenty seater, I would think and we were going to Arctic Red, Fort McPherson, Aklavik and then we over to Herschel Island and then over to Tultoyaktuk and came back. We were a float plane so all

21:00 we needed was three feet of water to just land anywhere and everywhere where we could go. There weren't enough - because we were going on a day trip we didn't have luggage, therefore weight-wise we could take more people, but there weren't enough. I was seated on a box of some sort in the aisle hanging on when we were taking off. The Department of Aviation would have had a fit at that kind, but that's

21:30 what we did. It was a great trip, it really was. Herschel Island is a magnificent place. It's a reserve these days. Whether you can get there I do not know but it was truly a garden. It's way up; if you have a look on a map of Canada, just before it gets to Alaska you'll see this little island, Herschel Island. Iceland poppies and for a limited period of time it's an absolute garden.

22:00 **Well I've always wanted to go to Alaska because that sounds so exotic.**

It is.

Did you?

Yes, I have been there.

Did you go there?

I went to Alaska when I was on our round trip with the girls from Whitehorse, but then I came on, after leaving Inuvik I went on transfer to Ottawa and I worked for the secretary of the Director of Public Health

22:30 and while I was there my friend who was in personnel, she said to me they needed office staff on the CD Howell and I had no idea what the CD Howell was. Well in the summer months the CD Howell was a ship. It's more or less, I think it's quite a substantial icebreaker, has a distinctive crane on

23:00 it to lift heavy cargo and along with taking people in on twelve month tours of duty, together with all their supplies, it also brought people who were already there out. And to take advantage of that, the Department of Health sent a TB [tuberculosis] survey team in and we were away for three months, first of July until the first of September, and we went into all the little hamlets, fishing villages, all around

23:30 the Hudson Bay, all around the upper side of Baffin Island, up to Resolute Bay and then all the way back, then the mainland part of - on the Labrador coast. I was paid to go, it was magnificent. What they would do, they would bring all the people in;

24:00 Eskimo, Indian and white. They would all have a chest x-ray. Evidently TB had been quite a scourge earlier and that but they'd caught things in the nick of time and it wasn't such a scourge as it was before, but they still did all that. And we had an eye specialist on board, a general physician, dentist and so when you came in you had your chest x-rayed, you had [your] eyes looked at, you had your chest looked at, you went to the dentist and they hauled out everything.

24:30 There was a canteen on board where the little children could go and get something after having their teeth taken out. If a person was ill and needed hospitalisation, we had a little sick bay in the bow of the ship. I shared a cabin. We had two nurses on there, graduate nurses. I shared a cabin with the practical nurse. She was a red Indian girl and they were put in there.

25:00 They had a welfare lady on board. She would arrange welfare for the whole family while father was away. The people had to eat didn't they? If mother was sick they had to arrange for somebody to look after various babies and things and it was quite efficient the way they did that. And people - that was from the Department of Health expedition, our three

25:30 months. There would be school teachers going in on a twelve month stint, RCMP personnel going in, Hudson Bay personnel coming in and bringing them out. One school teacher and his wife were going up on that, they were going to Grise Fiord on Ellesmere Island, right up at the very top. And we were well on our way and of course the wives had never ordered things by twelve months before.

26:00 Fortunately the lady realised when we were onboard the ship that she hadn't brought any toilet paper with her.

Helen can I ask you, after this time in Canada, did Australia seem boring when you came back?

No, it was a different kind of - 'cause I came back and I got back into bushwalking and hiking and camping and all sorts of things like that.

And did you continue on in your business career working in insurance, in the corporate world?

26:30 No not in insurance, when I came back I worked for Campbell Brothers. You know Campbell Brothers here? I worked there since 1964 until I retired.

How were they to work for?

Good. It was interesting. They were soap and special chemicals and I'd never worked in a manufacturer's before, I really hadn't, but it was different and I suppose it would be an extension of working

27:00 in the radar workshop down in Sydney, I suppose. Campbell Brothers were down at Bowen Hills there and it was a rather interesting job and I'd never been in that type of environment before, it was different.

What did you do there, at Campbell's?

I was the boss' secretary.

So that would have been quite a bit of responsibility I would imagine?

Yes, it was a very interesting job.

Did you get free toothpaste?

Oh no, we didn't make toothpaste.

27:30 **Oh I've got the wrong one, I'm thinking Colgate. Oh Campbells.**

No, no, he made soap, detergents.

They still make soap?

No, not now. When they went and put the freeway or the (UNCLEAR) or whatever on earth it is, on the north side they resumed Campbell Brothers and they did not, they sold the soap business to Faulding's, I believe. I'd retired quite a while by then.

28:00 **So do you think the service maybe gave you a sense of the travel bug, or you already had it?**

Well I think it more or less started me off on the travel bug, I would think. I mean I had to more or less make up my mind, "Okay, yes I will go". Hopefully I wouldn't fall flat on my face 'cause I mean to leave one's country to go to another one is quite an upheaval. I always marvel at these people that come from other countries

28:30 with wife, quite a few children and no job to come to. I think they are very brave those people who do that.

What was the feeling in Australia after the war when we started gathering more multicultural people into Australia, the 'ten pound Poms' for instance, do you remember that intake?

I remember that. When I came back - see I went to England after Canada and I stayed there about twelve months working at the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] Television news and then I went on the grand tour of Europe and came back. I came

29:00 back on a migrant ship; the lass in my cabin she was one of these 'ten pound Poms'.

My Mother was, by the way.

Did your mother, was her intention to come out here and stay or just come out here and have a look and a laugh? Because some of them, they thought, "We'll come out and then we can go back home," and it backfired on them

29:30 and they never went back home.

Well my Mother was from way up north in England and they were very poor and it was a way to escape the poverty and the lack of employment opportunities.

Probably would be too.

So I don't know if she came out for a holiday but she actually met my Father and the rest is history, but she came out for the adventure.

Yes, this is what this lass did. A lot of them did and then they found that they,

30:00 if they did go back, they realised that our way of life they missed when they went back.

Well we are I think, I'm speaking generally here, but we do tend to be a lot more relaxed in our social behaviours than the British.

Yeah, I've said before we didn't want to be put back in the pre-war box, which wasn't relevant anymore and it would be the same

30:30 there with regard to the Brits. They probably didn't realise 'cause I suppose we've got a more sunny outlook due to our better climate.

In saying that do you think Australia will move towards a republic in the future or move towards the monarchy?

I don't know about the monarchy but it depends on who we get for a republic. We need a friendly dictator.

31:00 It depends, it really depends on how we go. The present Queen I think she's a - I guarantee if things were different she would not have wanted to be Queen. She was more or less pitchforked into it really but I think she has done an excellent job of it. But whether her successors, whether they will do as excellent [a] job or push even England

31:30 into being a republic…?

If it's not too personal a question, where do your politics lie in regard to that concerning Australia?

I don't know. It depends, I mean I wouldn't want to throw the Queen out with the bathwater, but it depends on, we don't want the American style of dictator, of president,

32:00 thank you very much. It depends, it would really have to be given sincere thought as to just how we do it, if we do it at all. But then again I think maybe the Brits will disentangle us anyway. They might decide - there's a lot of difference of opinion as to - I mean they love the Queen and etcetera but

32:30 what will happen after she goes? They might decide to do something and ditch the monarchy themselves. If they ditch the monarchy we're up the creek without a paddle aren't we?

You're using all these great Australian metaphors, are they? Analogies?

Yeah, it is true, it could be both ways. I mean I would not like to hazard a guess of how anything would go politically.

33:00 **What advice would you give a young woman today regarding the services, regarding the navy for instance?**

Well fairly recently I was at something at King George Square. It was the navy equivalent of 'Beating the Retreat'. Have you ever been to an army ceremonial affair? 'Beating the Retreat', it's something to do with they change the guard on sunset. Well it was a similar

33:30 type of thing. They had the flagpole set up with the flag flying, it was supposed to be that the sun had gone down, but the sun had gone down about five o'clock and this [was] half past six, a quarter to seven. And this was a similar kind of thing where they had the band parading up and down doing various kinds of formations and whatever this sunset was. And afterwards we were invited to a cocktail party,

34:00 more or less in the City Hall. I saw a couple of lasses there and I spoke to a sailor. There were three ships in town then, a couple of weeks ago. And I said to one sailor, "Excuse me, that lass over there, what does she do?" Because you have your rank which is the hook and on the other arm you have what your classification and it was some kind of weird thing I'd

34:30 never seen before. I know quite a lot of them but this one I'd never seen before. And he said, "Oh she's in communications and she has another language as well." And later I spoke to another lass and she was from Perth too and she was in communications and I don't know what her skills were but you've got some very cluey girls there. Probably cluey fellows too but I would say and

35:00 they're serving onboard ship and onboard ship especially in the navy, the one this particular lass was on, I think there was about a hundred and seventy on and I think there were about twenty-something girls. They're regarded as seamen, not regarded as male and female, just regarded as a person and they're the person there to do the job and that's it. But there seems to be opportunity, especially in communications,

35:30 and probably in other fields too that I do not know anything about. But this one lady I do know in the navy and she happens to be the daughter of someone I know, she's a medical doctor and I believe she's more or less the person in charge of the Defence Force Medical Services. And the thing she does, she's a diver as well,

36:00 so what do women do these days, it looks like the sky's the limit I would think.

When you look back now on your service in the navy, are you thankful, or happy or pleased about it?

Well I feel that inadvertently it opened the door for me, that I would have not gone through. If the war had not been on, I don't know where I would have been,

36:30 I really don't because I mean the opportunity was so - it was there, I took it and I'm happy. Well it gave me the confidence to go a little further afield. Probably I wouldn't have gone overseas, I don't suppose, maybe not, I don't think so, but I did and that's it.

Well for what it's worth, as a woman in my thirties, the women in your generation certainly

37:00 **opened the doors for many of us.**

Oh I think so too.

And then we hopefully open doors for future Australian women but it's unfortunate that war had to be part of that door-opening circumstance.

Because I mean, let's face it, my Mother she was born in 1895. Now she was brought up in a little country town which was very, very conservative within

37:30 the reins of I suppose Victorian-style living. It was a narrow kind of atmosphere I would think, socially. You more or less were in a social structure. One thing that my Mother used to say, it used to annoy me no end, now I might come home from work today and say, "I met Heather today, she's a new girl.

38:00 Oh she's a very nice lass." "What does her father do?" And I might have no more idea what your father did than, why did my Mother want to know. But that was the way that people operated in that day. They quizzed you right back to what your father did regardless, which I thought was intruding on people. I didn't fancy that at all but as I say you can't

38:30 with regard to older folk, they don't realise that they're offending or anything like that, or could do.

I think you'd be surprised. A lot of people still ask those kinds of questions.

In some ways yes, but not a person they don't even know. If it was someone, a very close friend who'd newly come into the household or just a new person, I could see that. But someone at work, that had just come into the place,

39:00 I could, I used to get rather upset when that question was asked.

But it is a bit crazy judging somebody on what their father does, isn't it?

Yes, I might have liked to have known, but I would never have asked. It might come to me sometime but I would not have asked that kind of question. I would like to know though.

Do you think, having gone around Europe and then going to Canada, that Australia

39:30 **was fairly progressive in it's attitude towards Western women? Do you think they were behind or too conservative compared to Europe and Canada?**

In what way?

Oh the whole social ways of men and women and what have you? Did you notice any difference, I should add?

Well of course I was working in English-speaking countries and I

40:00 thought the office set up in Canada was a bit more relaxed than it was over here. At the insurance company over here, the manager of the place knew who everyone was on his staff and amongst ourselves, I mean the girls and the young fellows. Not the bosses, the bosses were always 'Mister'.

40:30 We referred to one another by our Christian names but to say to the manager, "Oh yes, Mr So and So, Mr Prince, Bill told me that." "Who's that? I don't know any Bill?" You'd have to say, "Mr Brown told me such and such". He was a stickler for correctness, but amongst ourselves… When I went to Canada everybody called the boss by his Christian name, it was very relaxed over there.

41:00 And of course it ended up everybody was known by their Christian name, even the boss and the lowly person in the workshop, the fellow in the warehouse, all on Christian names; very, very democratic. Even when I came to Campbell Brothers it was back to Miss Fraser, Mrs This and Mrs That and my boss unfortunately died about three months ago, we were always Mr So and So and Miss So and So. And it was all because

41:30 of that. He wasn't the boss at that stage, he was 2IC [second in command, or in the commercial context, deputy] and he didn't take over the reins for about a year, but that was the structure. Everybody was Mr, Miss and Mrs and that was really a step back in a way but, so I can't say one country was more democratic than the other.

INTERVIEW ENDS