Australians at War Film Archive

Elizabeth Bradwell (Betty Pyman) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **So Betty, would you mind giving me, if you can, a summary of all the major aspects through your life?**

From when, beginning, from the beginning? Right. My parents lived in Hawker but because my mother's eldest sister had died in childbirth she would never have any children there, so she always used to come to Adelaide and

01:00 so I was born in Adelaide on the 3rd of March 1914, so one of the disasters of 1914. I lived in Hawker, I had three brothers and I went to Hawker School and eventually I came down to the Adelaide Girls High School, which is still going strong. I always wanted to be a nurse but because I did a commercial course at school I

01:30 worked in the office of one of the local stores until I was eighteen, because you couldn't start nursing until you were eighteen and so I started at the Hawker Hospital where you had to do two years and then you could transfer to a major hospital. You had to do physio - physiology, you had to pass the physiology exam and I decided I'd come to the Adelaide Hospital and I transferred there on the same, when I was twenty one,

02:00 the same day as a city girl called Nell Keats and we shared the room together. We finished our training and then I went to Western Australia and did my midwifery and infant welfare and while I was there the war started. But in the meantime when the English Prime Minister came back waving his flag and saying "Peace in our time," they asked if any trained nurses would join the Australian Army

02:30 Nursing Service and we signed up and sent our application in the same envelope and when we were called up our regimental numbers were one behind the other. I was FX, used to be an X and later they put an F in it, 11646 and she was 116467. When I finished my training at the Adelaide RMA [Repatriation Medical Authority] I remained on the staff and until the war came and went off to

03:00 Singapore and Malaya and I got back from there. I was the first theatre sister at the Daws Road Military Hospital, which had just opened and then I was sent to New Guinea and I worked in Port Moresby and joined the 8th Australian Field Hospital in Buna and then onto Lae and then back home, back to South Australia again. And then out to an orthopaedic hospital just out from Sydney and I was in Sydney when peace was declared.

03:30 And so I came back to the Adelaide and I got so fed up when I got back there because not any of the sisters of my era had returned and I became one of the seniors with all these old dears that were trained, or they were training us when we were there and I had to sit at the matron's table. And the first morning I went down, there used to be eight of us sitting there and one looked down the table and she said. "Oh Pieman, all those men in the army

04:00 and you couldn't catch one?" I said, "Like you, Sister, I was very fussy." However I got so fed up with there, I couldn't stand it and so the hospital matron said "Try the Port Adelaide Casualty". Now that was just a little hospital that was a casualty. There were two sisters and you would be on or off duty. We used to live in. We had a cook and a housemaid and next door was this

04:30 charming assistant town clerk that I'd met during the war, selling war bonds and so eventually we married and that's the story of me.

Thank you for that. I'm sure there's a lot more in there, but we'll find out. So going back to the Wilpena area where you grew up, what are your earliest memories of growing up in that district because it's an unusual area, isn't it?

05:00 Well, the first thing I remember was that my father had a property. It was about ten miles out from Hawker and my first memory of how I spent my life was trying to catch the hens. I used to sit outside

the barn with a little trailer of wheat and when one would get near me, I used to pick it up to nurse it. Goodness knows why. I had three brothers.

05:30 One was older and two younger than I was, and then of course when we had to go to school, my eldest brother and I. My father used to drive us in on a Sunday and we used to go with a buggy and two horses. One was called Vincent and the other was called Verus and we had to cross a gum creek on the way in. It was about nine miles and we always used to stop for the horses to have their drink. And we used to stay with our grandparents from Sunday afternoon

06:00 until Friday and then he'd come and collect us again, so that's how we could go to school.

It would have been quite a handful for your grandparents?

Well it was, although there were two unmarried aunts and they always had a woman working in the kitchen, so we were well looked after and well fed, and although very strict. But in those days you wouldn't act as the children do now.

06:30 You sat at the table and you didn't say anything. The food was good but you had to behave yourself.

And what did you do on your weekends back on the farm?

Well we used to, a big creek used to run around, went right around the place. It didn't have any water in it and we used to play down there a lot and then our next-door neighbours, who were about five miles away and there were four children and one girl in that family.

07:00 And we used to go down on a Sunday with them and we used to play football and they had a big overhead tank down at the well and we used to crawl up the steps they had there and it wasn't big enough to swim in but we used to get into the water there. And oh well, play with horses and they used to milk the cows. I could never milk a cow but all these Webbs

07:30 children had to before they went to school, `cause they went to the local school but we always went into the town. Yeah, I don't know, we just used to, we had a tennis court which was just dirt and we used to use whitewash and put lines on the dirt and the net was always a piece of fence netting and we just used to have a good time.

What was the difference between the local school and the school at Hawker?

08:00 Well the thing was that to get to the local school we would have to go about six miles, which meant that you would have to leave home in those days, it was only a horse and cart or whatever and I never could ride. I was always too frightened to get on a horse and it was the getting there and the coming back. So that when we were in the town, you see, we were just with our grandparents and I think that the teachers were better qualified.

08:30 Those that went to those little country schools, the Hawker School always had a headmaster and an assistant teacher so I think they thought that perhaps the education we got there would be a bit better.

Were there any indigenous children at that school?

Oh yes, yes and when we were out on our farm the first Aboriginals I remember were Fanny and Wallace and they had a whirly down at the creek and

09:00 Wallace used to help with the sheep and Fanny used to come up to the house to us and my second brother, he was, he would be about two, he was in a pram and Fanny used to come and we'd go down and spend time in the whirly with them. And she used come up and do the washing and of course, in those days they used to be round tubs and she used to sit in the back veranda with this tub in between her legs washing and one day

09:30 she was washing and of course the Aboriginals have pink palms and my eldest brother said, "Oh Fanny, look you're turning white" and she took umbrage and went back and wouldn't finish the washing. Really. And we had them at school with us. There were quite a number that came to school but we got on with them.

Were you quite isolated out at the farm?

No, not really. There was a little school in the corner of

10:00 our farm, as we came in the main gate and it had been operating in the early days because there used to be large families, everyone had a lot of children. But when we, well, when my father bought the property and there were not many small children and eventually there were the Webbs and there were the Piemans [Elizabeth's family] living near, and we had enough children that the school was to be opened again, so

10:30 we wouldn't have to go in there. And then one of the families, the Harolds, they left and went to Western Australia so we didn't have the number of children, so the school was taken down and became our woolshed. And of course they had two lovely little deep-hole dunnies [toilets], as they used to have in those days, so had one come, we took both to our place. One to the shearing sheds for when the shearing was on and the blokes could use it and the shearing shed became our centre of entertainment actually

11:00 because any local engagement party would be in our shearing shed and my mother used to always play the piano and my father the cornet, so the piano would be dragged up and they'd play the music for the dancing.

So it sounds like when there was a social life, it was quite a good one?

Yes, and there was a Methodist church right out there and they used to have these sort of evenings where everyone used to, even if they

11:30 had no aptitude to entertain, they used to put on a concert which were good fun. I wouldn't say they were of a high standard but everybody enjoyed them.

So what was your Dad running on the farm? Was it primarily sheep?

No, it was mixed. We had sheep and wheat, but then of course that's outside [north of] Goyder's rainfall area [the northern limit of sustainable cultivation] and I mean you get a good year then it would be drought. If you go there now

12:00 there is no wheat at all, it's gone, by everybody. And when we left, originally those farms were a square mile when they first set up there. Anyone bought in they'd get a square mile of country. Well, my father had sort of three square miles because there were three farms, so when we sold it the man that bought that, I think he had our three and he had three of his own, so the properties became larger

12:30 and they no longer grew wheat. They just went in for sheep or cattle but mainly sheep.

And did your Dad do well from the farm?

No, I think we always kept it but then you see when we moved into the town and he put a manager out there and he became the town clerk of Hawker and he was the secretary of the hospital and he was the chairman of the school. He sort

13:00 of became a sort of, man about the town and then it was when I was in New Guinea he became very sick. He had a cardiac attack, so in the meantime they lived in the town. We bought a house in the town because we had to go to school, so they sold it. They sold up and came down to live in Adelaide and came to Largs Bay to live so that's how we sort of got mixed up with Largs Bay.

13:30 **What initiated the family's move off the farm into town, into Hawker?**

Well because of, well I mean, my mother eventually said she wasn't going to be without her children, so we bought the house in the town and we had a man managing the place but there were so many droughts it was, there was just nothing. I mean there was no wheat and there was no feed for the sheep and so the place just sort of, was just derelict

14:00 I suppose, or not used for anything but it wasn't used for anything for years till we left.

That must have meant quite hard times?

Well yes, I suppose it did but we never noticed it. First of all my eldest brother had to go away to, he had to go to Quorn, and he used to board and then I came to Adelaide and then my third brother, he wouldn't go to school.

14:30 Well I think he was dyslexic. I mean in those days they didn't know but however he always got on very well and ended up very well but he wouldn't go to school, apart from primary school but my youngest brother went to Riverton High School, so we all sort of went to different places for our secondary education, which was unusual because kids up there didn't go away to school. They just went to Grade 7 and from then on.

15:00 **Sounds like education was important in your family?**

Well yes. I think it was my mother because my father's parents they were very, sort of thought that the girls would live at home and the boys would go out and do something and of course when I said I wanted to be a nurse, that was really the last straw as far as I was concerned. And

15:30 my father's youngest sister apparently had been in the Oriel Hospital and when I said I wanted to be a nurse she said, "The only thing they teach you is how to waste water," `cause I think they used to wash their hands and feet so much.

So your Mum encouraged your education?

Yes, she was the one, yes, although she'd never been away to school herself. I mean she as a child was on Wilpena Station and then of course she married my father, so

16:00 she hated Hawker and because her eldest sister had died in childbirth she would never have any of her children in Hawker and so from the very beginning, when she was pregnant with my eldest brother, he was the first one, she would come to Adelaide and the three of us were born on Devonia, which was a private hospital on The Terrace, just out from Adelaide, and then the last one,

16:30 Dean, he was born at Largs Bay actually. But she used to come to town, a few months beforehand. She wouldn't have any children out there.

Sounds like a very determined woman?

Yes, well the only thing was Granny Ward had a laying- in place and I remember going over there and visiting an aunt and one of my cousins and the mother was in a double bed with the baby beside her but I think that it was that my mother was frightened because

17:00 her eldest sister had died. But she was the one, she really was full of spirit and vim and most entertaining. All the local concerts that they'd put on, she'd always take the part of the comedian. She really was something and my father was staid and quiet and two absolutely different people.

And they met up in Wilpena area did they?

Well they met in Hawker because I mean his father lived in Hawker. He was actually

17:30 born in Hawker and I mean she was there, so they met.

But they were opposites?

Absolute opposites, yes and on our birthdays we'd have a birthday and we'd have our friends there and we'd be all be sitting down having our tea and a knock would come at the front door and my father would open the door and in would come this old woman we'd never seen. And she'd go round asking if they'd all been good and

18:00 it would be my mother, dressed up. We never woke up to it, never, never, ever but my father was a very quiet man and if we misbehaved very badly and mother would report us. He'd come home and he used to look at us and say, "If you don't behave yourself I'll see your nose above your chin." And we didn't realise that it was already above our chin. No, we had a

18:30 very good, peaceful childhood.

When you were still out on the farm were you expected to help out with the work?

No. No, I never milked a cow. I suppose I used to like gathering the eggs because I had a yen for poultry, as I said I used to try and catch them and nurse them but no, I've never been, couldn't milk a cow and neither could my mother. I mean we always had a man about the place

19:00 to help and quite often a woman.

So was it a big change when Mum and Dad moved into Hawker?

Oh it wasn't, well, I don't, I'd been in there. We had to live with our grandparents you see all the week.

It must have been nice to be able to live with your Mum and Dad?

Oh it was marvellous, it was marvellous, yes, yes. Although there wasn't much choice in houses and we had to buy this house and some people had lived in it

19:30 who had been Irish and I remember the dining room floor was slate and they'd drawn circles with paint around it. That's how they decorated, so it had a lot to be done with it. No, it was a good life. We really had a good life as kids and our so called barbeques we have now, we used to call them "chop picnics". And we'd go out with a roll of netting and our chops and a bottle of tomato sauce

20:00 and a loaf of bread and the boys would light a fire and they'd stretch this wire out with a few sticks and we'd eat our chops and that was our chop picnics we used to call them. Now they call them 'barbecues'. Very modern.

A chop picnic doesn't have quite the same ring, does it?

No, no.

But it sounds like good fun?

It was, yes.

And you must have had good fun as well growing up with three brothers, or did they tease you?

20:30 No, I think my eldest brother and I got on very well and then the next, well Dean was so much afterwards. He was just a blessed nuisance and Jack the next one, he was, I suppose we were a bit selfish with him, but he was one of those very caring boys and the doctor lived opposite us in Hawker and he had these big pine trees. And I remember Max crawled up and fell down and as he

21:00 fell down he cut his leg and the doctor stitched it up and he came home and of course he was complaining most bitterly that he had to do homework and I remember my brother Jack sitting under the table so he could put his leg on his shoulder to rest it while he did his homework. That's the sort of boy Jack was. He was very caring. He was sort of different to the other three. He was more gentle and thoughtful

21:30 I think. In our way we used to gang up on him a bit as one does when you're kids.

Your mother and father obviously lived through the Great War?

Yeah.

Did that have any impact on the family? I mean obviously you were a baby or you were a very young child then?

I don't, no I don't remember. I was only born in 1914 so I don't think so. Well I don't know if it did or not, yeah.

So your Dad obviously didn't go?

No, no.

22:00 **And then you decided you wanted to be a nurse and what did that mean? For your training, where did you go from there? You obviously finished school?**

Well I finished school and I came down to the high school and then after intermediate I went home because I mean very few did leaving or anything like that and as I did a commercial course I worked as a typist in the office

22:30 of the local store until I was eighteen.

We're still talking about Hawker aren't we? The local store in Hawker?

Yes, one of the local ones in Hawker. My grandfather had a store but it wasn't his. I worked in the opposition. Edwards, I worked in Edward's Store but so then I had to wait for a call up because they only had three nurses at the Hawker Hospital and either you went to Port Pirie to finish or you went to the Adelaide and until one of them moved on.

23:00 So I was over, I was eighteen in March and I started the day after Christmas at the Hawker Hospital. And while you were there you had to, well it was a training no-one would get anywhere else because we only had a matron and there were only three nurses and two would be on day duty and one would be on night duty and you'd do a month night duty. And if

23:30 there was an operation the matron would give the anaesthetic, the doctor would, and you'd have to be assistant. So from the very beginning you learnt to do thing you would never learn in a general hospital for a long time. And of course we had midwifery. Babies would be born and if you were on night duty, cause we knew all the women because we were local girls, and they'd come in on labour and however was on night duty the woman would say, "Hop up

24:00 on the bed and if anyone rings the bell or if I need the doctor, I'll ring you up." And we used to get, we used to love it when we had midwives come in because you'd get a little sleep at night. But the dust storms, they had droughts up there and you'd see these red clouds just rolling in over the back of Hawker, like a hill, like a spine and you'd see this dust rolling in with luck occasionally

24:30 and we'd rush around and shut all the doors and windows and we used to drape wet sheets over the babies, the new-born babies, on their cribs and when it would finish, you couldn't do anything. You just had to wait and there'd be mud and then you'd almost have to bring in a wheelbarrow because the dust used to come in every nook and cranny. It used to be frightening. The droughts up there! Nobody realised how shocking they are. Sand drifts and no grass, it was just terrible.

25:00 **It must have taken forever to clean everything after they'd been through?**

Well that's right. And you'd only just finish and they'd start again and if you were out driving you'd pull off to the side of the road and just sit. You couldn't even drive, see where you were, because the roads were not in good repair.

And what had inspired you to become a nurse?

I have no idea. It was just something from when I was a small child and I've even got my old doll, baby doll, over there with scratches on her stomach where

25:30 my brother used to operate on her because he'd be the doctor. And it's lost a couple of fingers unfortunately but I don't know why because there hadn't been a nurse in the family ever and there's never been one since. I've got five granddaughters and you say, "Nursing" and they say, "Nursing, ooh."

Sounds like hard work does it?

I don't know, they just don't like it.

But perhaps in the days,

26:00 **when you were growing up, there weren't many career options for women?**

None.

Not like there are now?

No.

And nursing would have been one and perhaps teaching?

Teaching, they were the only two.

And so you?

Or get married very early. They used to get married very early and have large families.

So obviously you had decided that you didn't want to get married very early and have a large family?

I don't know. As I said my mother was always, I was always running around with a tea towel draped over my head. My mother used to put it on for me with a safety

26:30 pin and when I was very small, and I don't know why. I still don't know why but yes, I always loved it. And as I said I worked until I was sixty four as a nurse.

And when you did your training what was the normal training pattern in those days? How did you become a fully fledged nurse?

Well if you were transferred as I was you had to pass physiology and the local doctor used to give the

27:00 lectures and the examination papers would come up from the Hospitals Department. And then I came down to the Adelaide and what I liked was theatre. I was a theatre sister and I didn't like the medical training in the medical wards but the surgical ones I liked.

You found that a bit more interesting?

I always did. I think probably that started in Hawker because we only

27:30 had a doctor and any operation, you would have to assist him, or you'd take it turn about and I think that's when it started off, so that by the time I came to Adelaide I'd helped with appendicitis and with this, that and the other thing, just up there. And I didn't like the medical wards at all but I always enjoyed working in the theatre.

Because the work in the

28:00 **medical wards meant more routine I suppose?**

Well there was nothing interesting. There was nothing doing for it, it was just routine and of course in those days at the Adelaide Hospital you did three months of night duty and your night duty was from eight o'clock at night till seven o'clock in the morning. And when you first, the first night duty you did, you had to pass invalid cookery, which had to be done at the School of Mines

28:30 and so you'd be called at one o'clock to go down to the School of Mines to do that and then you'd end up at four, you'd have your one to whatever it was, and then at eight o'clock you'd just go back on duty again. We used to work from eight at night till seven in the morning, night duty. And you'd do it for three months and you'd get one night off a week but we used to like invalid cookery because the meals were pretty

29:00 pink and what you cooked sometimes you could eat and the thing was that some were better cooks than the others and you'd have to take it up to get it marked, and if yours was bad somebody who had good marks would say, "Give us yours," and you'd take the same thing up and the marks would be different but not as bad as your own cooking.

I can't imagine now that cooking is part of nursing training?

I don't know. They don't go to the School of

29:30 Mines. I don't think they do, no, it's not done anymore. I'm sure of that.

So what would you be doing on your night shift?

Well you'd have your dinner, well I don't know, we used to have our dinner at seven I think. You'd finish off your duty in the morning and you'd have your breakfast and you'd go to bed.

30:00 And at four o'clock in the afternoon they used to wake you up with a slice of bread and jam and a cup of tea and then you'd go and have your midday meal, which would be your dinner at night and they put something out for you to have overnight and it could be an egg or it could be a chop. And these you'd have to cook and all they had on those old wards at the Adelaide were little gas rings and

30:30 you'd go and switch on the light and all of these animals would be crawling up the wall. Just terrible and of course the patients, they were big wards, and the visitors would bring a patient an egg or a saveloy or something or other and the food would come up from the kitchen which would be porridge and you'd cut bread and butter for them and a cup of tea. We had this one big saucepan

31:00 and you'd go around and anyone with an egg, you'd write their name on the egg and we'd put everything, eggs and saveloys, everything in the same pot and heat it up for them.

You weren't wasting water, were you?

No. Certainly we weren't, no. And of course all the floors were jarrah and you had to polish them. We had to polish them.

With those big machines?

No, it was not a machine. It was a block of wood with

31:30 a block of lead on it and you'd have a bit of rag underneath it and you'd shove it up and down. No machines in those days. Broom and dustpan, that's the lot.

And also you'd also be checking the patients on the wards?

Yes, yes and there would always be one left on for breakfast and you either had to pan the ward or bottle the ward, whichever, male or female and that

32:00 was your job: to do that while the first breakfast was on and then you'd go to the second breakfast and then you'd be off until twelve o'clock. So you'd be on duty at six, you'd go off for your breakfast and then you'd come back and then you'd work till eight o'clock at night. You'd have the afternoon off and work till eight o'clock or you'd go to lunch and have the time off but there was no... The only people who were off in the afternoon were those

32:30 who worked in outpatients, the nurses, and we used to love to get there because you'd finish and you'd go to the pictures. Cause if you went to go to the pictures at eight o'clock I mean sometimes you were late and then you'd run like mad to Rundle Street to the pictures and you'd miss the first part.

What were the pictures you were watching?

Oh I've forgotten now. It's so long ago. But we used to love to go to the pictures, yeah.

And so part of your training was physiology, was an important part,

33:00 **was it part of your training?**

No, that was, when you were training at the Adelaide if you were a 'Black Pro', that was the girls that did an extra year, they would come in there. They would do their physiology in the first year. If you were a transfer, you would have to have your physiology. They wouldn't have you unless you had that. Well then you had to do medical and general and surgical and those were the three things you had to pass. You had, during the year, you had

33:30 your yearly test but then there was a general thing you sat for but then midwifery you had to go to another hospital to do that. There was no midwifery at the Adelaide. I went to Western Australia.

And that's why you went to Western Australia, to follow that?

Yes. And also because my eldest brother was there. He went there and he was with [stock and station agents] Elder Smith and he'd married and he had this little boy and so I decided I'd go to Western

34:00 Australia and I did my midwifery and my welfare, which was four months training, over thirteen months. And of course we joined up with the Australian Army Nursing Service before I went and then of course, while I was there war was declared.

And obviously you had seen war coming. Was that why you had joined up?

Well no. There was no mention of war but things were a bit uneasy

34:30 and then they decided that on the Australian Army Nursing Service and there no-one. See, there was only the 1914 girls and because the list was so depleted they asked people to put their name down. I think things were getting a bit edgy over in Europe and that's why they asked. So of course war started and the principal matron

35:00 in Western Australia, whilst the old girl who was in charge of the Infant Welfare, so I said to her, no, I wrote to the one in South Australia, when the war started and I said, "What will I do?" And she said, "Best you join up in Western Australia." Well I didn't want to do that and so I was in Perth when the first Australian troops left for overseas and so I came back, finished my training and came back to the Adelaide.

35:30 Then Nell and I were called up on exactly the same day.

So where had you met Nell?

When I transferred to the Adelaide.

So you did your training together at the Adelaide?

Yes, I came down to the Adelaide and Nell and I shared a room and it was over on Austral House and we were upstairs and these two elderly sisters were next door and apparently they'd opened the

36:00 outpatients and new casualty block at Adelaide, those on the corner of North Terrace. And so they had to take in all these extra nurses and of course there was no room for accommodation. They were sleeping on the balconies outside the nurses home, no shelter of any sort and Nell and I were sent over to Austral House, upstairs and this room had belonged to these two old sisters. They'd had their sitting room and they were living together and

36:30 of course they had to give it up. And if Nell and I so much as laughed there'd be this knock on this connecting door, "You're having such a room in the home, remember we have not one now. Would you please not make so much noise." And of course, being a country girl I used to go home with Nell to her home and so that's how we became sort of involved.

Was her home in Adelaide?

Yes, she lived in Dulwich and she had twin brothers and I hadn't been there long and Don, one of the twins

37:00 was invited to a twenty first birthday and he didn't have a girlfriend. I mean he was younger than I was and Nell said, "Well, you'd better go with him," so I went out with Don all those years till I joined up and then in the end I sort of changed my mind.

How did that go down? I expect he had expectations?

Well it was very

37:30 difficult because when I came back, I think Mrs Keats thought it was because of me that Nell went to the war and of course she was one of those shot on Bangka Island and I came back and I think she was sort of not very happy. And then as I said I sort of met Owen, but I didn't meet Owen until long after the

38:00 war, until I was matron of Port Casualty and he was next door but in the meantime you see, that was that.

You had a significant impact on that family?

Yes, yes, and the youngest daughter, Nancy, who's years younger and she sort of, oh she was a naughty girl. She sort of clung to me and when I was matron of Port Adelaide Casualty, she would turn up.

38:30 And from Nell she was absolutely different. She was a girl who went out with people she shouldn't and she used to drink and she used to call down to me on the Port and I used to get so irritated with her. She was so young, she was so frivolous and her mother rang me up on Monday and she said, "Have you seen Nancy lately?" And I said, "No." She said, "Well, that's strange, she said she spent the weekend with you."

39:00 However in the end I had poor Nancy round my neck and when she lived out at Northfield she'd ring me up and she'd say, "I've got no food in the house" and I'd go all the way out there and all she wanted was for me to go and buy a bottle of brandy. So her Don, the one I was friendly with, died and her, the other twin, we got her, eventually we got her in the Adelaide and got her in a Salvation Army home

39:30 and she died not so long ago, years younger. Lovely looking girl but foolish. Nothing you could do about it.

Didn't make wise choices?

No.

So Nell and you went to Western Australia together?

No she wouldn't leave home. She was very close to her mother and she wouldn't come with me. She just stayed on at the Adelaide and I went back. But then you see when we were called up she came and

40:00 we were called up and we were leaving on a troop train from the Adelaide Railway Station. It was night time and all the family came in and I'd spent the day at the Keats the day before we left and she was as good as gold. And when the train pulled out of the station she cried, she cried, and she cried and I didn't think she would stop and it was Murray Bridge before she

40:30 sort of pulled herself together, so in a way I sort of felt responsible. And then in the end, unhappy.

We'll leave it there.

Tape 2

00:37 **Betty, could you tell me a little bit more about your training in Western Australia?**

Well it was at King Edward and King Edward had been an old sort of a police place and of course

01:00 I came from the Adelaide and I went over there and I really wondered what I'd struck. It had been an old reformatory. However, the food was absolutely terrible and again they had not enough rooms. Some of them had to sleep out on balconies as well as in, and the wards were absolutely antiquated. And I was the only sort of outside one

01:30 there. All the others were Western Australian girls and I remember the steriliser was a great big brass, square box thing and you had to stand on a pedal to lift the lid and I was out there, when you were the junior it was your turn to sterilise the bowls and clean this thing and it was full of water.

02:00 And the sister was out there inspecting the bits and pieces you had to keep from each patient and I said to her, "How do you get the water out of here? There's no plug." She said, "You dish it out." And you had to take it all out with a jug and to clean the whole thing out before you could fill it up with fresh water. There was no outlet for the water. However, while I was there, I became very friendly with two of the Western Australian girls and

02:30 one of them was an only child and I used to go out with her with her parents and we've remained friendly ever since. However, one night I was on night duty and this woman came in to have this baby and it was a, the head presented, or the placenta presented before the head which meant that every time she had a labour pain she'd lose all this blood.

03:00 So they had a clamp on this baby's head and every time she got a pain I had to pull on this thing to bring the head down to stop the bleeding. Anyhow when this scrawny little baby was born, it was a little boy, and the father, the husband wasn't the father of it and so she didn't want it, and so I sort of looked after it. And then it went up, and besides having midwifery they had infant welfare and they had a block

03:30 with all these premature babies and babies for adoption and then when it came my time to do night duty I went up and this little baby was there. Well I was thoroughly attached to it, so I wrote to my mother and said it was up for adoption and would she adopt it? She said. "It would be fine: you've been away for thirteen months and you come back with a baby and everybody would be asking questions." So however I don't know what happened, but I came home and then, when the boat came in from Singapore to Fremantle and the

04:00 military matron happened to be the sister who'd been running this ward and I said to her, "Whatever happened to Gary?" And she said, "Oh he was adopted and had a lovely home." So that was that. But the only reason I went there was because my brother Max, he was in Elder Smith, he had gone there and he had married and had this little boy so I decided thirteen months in Western Australia would be good. I had been to Western Australia

04:30 at about eleven I think, after I'd been very sick with diphtheria, and I went over and spent three months over there with my aunt and uncle and I went over on the train, all by myself and it was really quite exciting. And I think that's what gave me the travel bug and I've never stopped since, but, however, as I said, war had started and I didn't want to join up with the Western Australian people. I wanted to be back in South Australia, so

05:00 that's why I wasn't called up until 1940.

Can you remember war being declared? Where you were?

Yes, I remember sitting and listening at my uncle's that night. I must have had the day off and I know we listened in that war was declared and then as I said I was there when the first troopships went out taking Australian boys to the Middle East.

05:30 **That must have made an impression on you. Can you describe the sight of them leaving?**

Well that wasn't so much as the night when it was declared. I mean that was sort of a terrible feeling that we had that night. We sat there and absolutely sort of thought about it and I thought about my brothers who eventually, of course, joined up and fortunately they both came back again,

06:00 but it was horrifying really. And we listened to Mr Chamberlain [Prime Minister of England] waving his, that everything was going to be better and it just got worse.

Did you have foreboding at that time?

No, not really, no. I was over there and I had to finish my training and go back and I suppose I'd been back about three months when we got our call up and we went into Wavell, it was a camp hospital

06:30 and we lived on North Terrace and we used to call it "Auntie Flo's home". And we used to have to walk and it was the house, was almost down to King William Street and we had to walk from there to Wavell, even if we were on night duty. And you would never walk across those parks at night now by yourself and Wavell was a sort of camp hospital. When they had the shows the wine exhibition building,

07:00 was our mess. We used to eat there and the wards were, the gas company's ward was Gas Co Ward and Elder Smith's display place was Elder's Ward and actually we had no wounded. It was just the boys who were joining up and those that were having injections and being quite sick, and we didn't have any surgery or anything like that.

07:30 **So you'd gone to Western Australia, you'd gained the qualification of midwifery?**

And infant welfare.

And infant welfare. Had you been able to see much of Max during that period of time?

Oh yes, I used to have all my days off. I'd get a day off from the hospital, he lived in South Perth, he worked at Elder Smith and I used to go and have my days off out there with he and his wife and John, this little lad, who eventually ended up in the air force.

08:00 But no, I used to have my days off with them.

And it was enjoyable?

Yes, and the thing I liked about Perth in those days, you never worked overtime. If you did you were paid. We were getting five shillings a week, so each four weeks you'd go into the matron and she'd give you a pound, but if you had worked overtime, well then they paid you for it. And one woman came in and

08:30 they had these odd rooms in this old building and she had an infection so I specialled her, which meant that I would work, like, my twelve hours and then the other girl coming on night duty would do the night duty twelve hours and so we got extra money for that, which they didn't have in South Australia. In South Australia you'd work and it just wouldn't mean anything but Western Australia were the first ones to have that,

09:00 that if you worked overtime you got paid for it.

So you were being looked after quite well?

Yes, looked after that way quite well but the meals were absolutely appalling. They were dreadful.

What were they trying to feed you?

Don't ask me now but all I know they were dreadful. They were worse than meals at the Adelaide Hospital and that was saying something, but we used to have a good time. We used to have our pound

09:30 a week and we'd go down to the pictures and you could have a beer with that and but then when you'd finished your nine months of midwifery we used to have a doctor who would lecture you then your exams and then you'd have your four months of doing your infant welfare. And when you finished, if you were finishing, you had to provide afternoon tea or morning tea for the rest of the staff and of course it was a bit difficult with the five shillings a week but my aunt was

10:00 a very good cook so when I was finishing and leaving she provided the special meal for the rest of the people.

So your aunt lived in Western Australia?

She lived there and an uncle and they had no family and actually I'd been to Western Australia when I was after, after I had diphtheria when I was nine, and I went over and I spent almost a year with them, so I knew them very well.

So you had two adoptive families there?

Yeah. Yes, two, so they were always there.

10:30 **You said it didn't make a huge impression on you at the time. But can you remember anything about the men leaving on those first ships? How close were you to them or did you never speak to any of them?**

No, no, not really. It was only just that the ship was in Fremantle and I didn't speak to anyone. It was just the point that they were there and you saw them going.

It must have bought home to you that the war was really happening?

11:00 Well, that's when it bought home to me and I wondered and that's when I got in a panic you see and got in touch with the matron in South Australia about what would happen if I was called up and I wasn't there to be called. That's what she said, "Well, join in Western Australia," which I didn't want to do.

It seems extraordinary now that I've heard of

11:30 **other service people wanting to make sure that they joined up in the state in which they were born or lived?**

Yes.

Would you say that the state divisions were more prominent then than they are now or it meant more what state you were from?

No. I don't know about that but what everyone felt was they wanted to be with their friends and I think

all during the war, it doesn't matter

12:00 where it was. It was those friends that sort of helped and sort of kept you going.

You sort of felt that you'd have a greater chance to end up with them overseas or where you went.

Yes, if you were called up interstate you'd probably, they used to, each unit or hospital that I was in had people from all over the state, but you wanted to be with your friends if at all possible.

12:30 **So then you worked in Adelaide at the hospital there?**

I came back to the Adelaide Hospital and it was then that we got our call up and the last ward I worked in was Flinders Ward ,which was a big medical ward and in the meantime the Adelaide Hospital was training orderlies. These men joined up to become orderlies

13:00 and they came to the Adelaide and I remember I had two boys there and they were bank, they'd been from the bank, they were bank tellers and whatever, and it was just before Christmas, that was in 1943, yes, and so I said to them I wanted a pine tree to put up for Christmas decorations. Oh they said they'd find one and these two boys went off and goodness knows where they got the pine tree but they came home with this huge thing, this huge tree.

13:30 And the friend, or at least she was a friend of my mother's, but I'd lived with them when I went to school so she came in and decorated it, and it was this most magnificent tree that filled this ward, these two lads. I don't know what happened to them. They probably went of to war but that was the last ward I was in.

So they were training as orderlies so that they might be orderlies in the field?

Yes, that's how those that had joined up that wanted to be. They used to come

14:00 to the Adelaide Hospital and do time there so that they had some hospital experience.

Must have been a change for you to have the men who were subservient to you?

I just remember these two boys and they were very lovely and great fun. I don't even remember names and goodness knows what happened to them but I should

14:30 think they would get on because they had the typical Australian Army. I meant the Australian Army boys, they could find anything you asked for. Goodness knows where it came from, but it would always be there.

Probably best not to ask?

That's right, that's the whole thing, yes.

So you had a tremendous Christmas tree and you were starting to look after the boys who'd had injections and so on to go overseas, was that right?

No, that was just

15:00 the ordinary medical unit at the Adelaide. They were all civilians. There were not any army boys in there. There was this young lad that was in there. He was in a home, I suppose a foster home, whatever you call it, and my family were coming down because I was going into the army. I was called up and they took a house at Brighton, and so I organised with the government

15:30 that I could take this child, this boy, for the holiday at the beach, and have Christmas. So this friend Helen that had decorated the tree, afterwards she said, "Well, we would take him," as they had a son Joe, about the same age as this child. He was twelve I think and so they had him living with them and I went off to war and apparently in the end

16:00 they had to give him back to the welfare `cause he was so difficult to control and look after. But I had this kid with my family for the weekend and then only this year [2004] at Kapunda they unveiled a memorial for the nurses up there and this woman came beetling up to me and she said, "Do you remember?" naming this boy, and I said, "Yes," and she said, "Well, that's my brother."

16:30 And he lives in Melbourne and he's been writing to me since but he's been divorced twice, so his behaviour hasn't improved from since he was a kid.

And he remembers that weekend?

I don't know, I didn't ask him. It was more than a weekend. I think he had a fortnight. My parents looked after him, so that was that.

And you started to show some tendencies of wanting to bring all the strays home with you?

17:00 Yes, especially dogs, yes.

Definite country girl?

Yeah.

So when you were called up and you were starting to work on North Terrace?

Wavell.

Wavell, sorry.

Yes.

What were your parents saying at this point of time?

Well they were in Hawker then of course and they weren't terribly worried I don't suppose until

17:30 I got my call up but I used to spend most of my time at the Keats and of course we were getting ourselves equipped and in those days they gave you fifty pounds I think it was, and you had to provide your uniform. They gave you that to provide your uniform and you had to have your greatcoat and your jacket and skirt made at Fleurs which was the most expensive tailor in Adelaide

18:00 and so therefore you had to have shoes and you had to have a hat and you had to have grey, your indoor uniforms, and you had to have a trunk and of course fifty pounds just didn't even cover it, so of course my father had to pay the rest. And then you had to have, I've forgotten what the greatcoat cost, but I know it was terribly expensive. You had to have gloves and you had a special wallet but however as I said

18:30 I think a lot of fathers had to cough up. I know I had no money and I know he had to pay for a lot of my equipment but the Travellers' Aid or the travellers that used to go out to the various shops they were very good. They gave us some money and there was a group The Nurses, what did they call themselves? The Returned Nurses, I've forgotten the rest of it but

19:00 it was run by some women who used to collect money and they gave us cosmetics and a carry case and things like that. And so we got ourselves equipped and we were at Wavell and then we got this call up and we had to leave and of course there was great excitement. And I can remember

19:30 one of the old honourees at the Adelaide Hospital took Nell and I out to lunch and he was a real old granddad, stiff-and-starch old boy. We were always a bit terrified of him but he took us to lunch at the hotel which was on the corner of North Terrace and King William Street, which has now been demolished, but we went there for lunch and then we packed up. And my parents didn't come down. I just said I was going but I had my brother, who was now in Melbourne,

20:00 and we all went down to the railway station and of course the whole Keats family came in and we went on a troop train and Nell was marvellous, but as soon as we left the station she started to cry and she cried and she cried until we got to Murray Bridge. I thought she was, and we used to be great bridge players and there were a couple of officers in the carriages. One I'd know for years. He used

20:30 to come as a traveller to Hawker, so we played bridge for the rest of the night until we got to Melbourne. And then we hung around in Melbourne for quite a while and of course the governor and his wife had been the Governor of South Australia and so any South Australians that came were entertained there before they took off. And we had these greatcoats, well Melbourne weather, where we were going it was winter and it was pouring with rain and it was freezing cold

21:00 and we were invited up to Government House to have morning tea or afternoon tea, whatever it was, and we weren't allowed to wear our greatcoats because it wasn't uniform and I remember I got this terrible cold and before we took off and I really was sick. So we went up there and had our chocolate cake and a conducted tour over Government House and eventually

21:30 we were boarded on the ship to go. And to this day I just can't go, sitting on the deck as you went in was a telephone, no-one's looking after it and so my brother was in Melbourne and I rang up and I said, "We're just going," and that's really when you think today, there was the phone and anyone could have rang up and said "This ship's just going." [Such communication breached military discipline; banned for security reasons.]

22:00 But anyway there it was, and it was the old Zealandia and that was a sort of transport. It used to do transport backwards and forwards to Singapore and they had a few nurses on board because they used to bring back anyone who was sick, because the troops in hospital had already been over there.

Did you know that you were going to Singapore?

We had no idea where we were going.

22:30 We thought we were going to the Middle East. We really thought we were and Betty Jeffries who wrote that book White Coolies, she was on board and she was most terribly seasick because it was very rough coming round the Great Australian Bight. And when we got to Perth we were allowed off the boat and I went to my aunt of course, and uncle, and she [Betty Jefferies] bought this pot plant which she called "Agatha" and when we took off again, you see, she used to smell this and she said, "As long as I can smell the dirt I won't be seasick." And of course she was one of the girls

23:00 that became a prisoner of war and she wrote that wonderful book White Coolies. Have you read it? I must give it you. You'll enjoy it. I've got several copies there. She kept a diary all the time as a POW [Prisoner of War] and hid it so the Japanese wouldn't find it. She wrote the book afterwards. Several books have been written since, I've got them all, but nothing comes up to Bette's and she died last year [2003] in Melbourne. However, when we left of course we thought that we'd be going to the Middle East.

23:30 **And did you know, sorry to interrupt, but did you know anything of what your brothers were doing at this point?**

No, I only knew that Dean was in the air force and he was in Western Australia but I couldn't see him because he was training, he was training over there and of course my eldest one in Melbourne hadn't joined up then. So I sort of didn't know.

So you were the first to go of the family?

Mh, to go overseas, yes.

So you were a troublemaker?

24:00 **Took off to be a nurse and then the first to go overseas?**

To take off, yes, yes, yes. I mean my youngest brother eventually did get overseas but my oldest brother never did. He got up to the [Brisbane] Line that they put across Australia; which, I mean, everyone volunteered and everyone wanted to go, and those that didn't sort of resented it in the end. I mean he was always, my eldest brother was very hurt that my youngest brother and I we sort of got over, but he never

24:30 became a returned soldier. That was always a great feeling.

So on your way to Singapore and…?

Well it was when and we had the [HMAS] Sydney as our escort. I think that was almost the last trip before the Japs sank her and then it started to get very warm and then we decided we were not going in the right direction

25:00 and we arrived at Singapore towards evening and of course the Australian soldiers with their quirky sort of idea of fun, cause all these locals came to the wharf and they were hotting up pennies and throwing them down, cause those people were calling out, which was very unkind of them because the pennies were hot. And we were just taken from the ship. We had no idea where

25:30 we were going, to the railway station at Singapore and there we were in these safari jackets, woollen jackets and woollen skirts, shoes, kid gloves, felt hats, shirts, collar and tie and we nearly died of the heat. We had no idea. They jumped us on this train and the Salvation Army came along

26:00 and they gave us fruit and also they gave us a little square of paper which we could write. We couldn't say where we were. All we were allowed to write is "We are arrived, love" to your family and they posted them home for everyone but we were not allowed to say. Then the train took off. There was no food, nothing to drink. There we were there in our collars and ties and we rattled off on this train,

26:30 not knowing where we were going and if you opened a window there was steam, you can imagine what with the tropics and this train. If we opened a window all this soot and all these insects would blow in and if we shut them we stifled and then about three o'clock in the morning the train stopped and we were told to get off. And this matron came to meet us and we were stuck in, I don't know what we were in, trucks or something or other,

27:00 and we were transported to Malacca and this was the 10th Australian General Hospital and we were sharing a hospital with the British. It was a hospital which was a permanent hospital building and we sort of had half of it. And of course we'd had no sleep, so we went off and had a sleep and the next day we went on duty and then we were allowed to just discard our collars and ties

27:30 and even when we went out we could just go out in the uniforms which were just linen and long sleeve. Eventually they had a special tropical uniform, which was short sleeved and just turn back reveres. Didn't have to wear collars or anything with them so that was the 10th Australian General Hospital and it was at Malacca.

28:00 And of course Malacca was one of the very old towns in Malaya and of course it was just fascinating and Nell and I really had a good time there because we became friendly with the headmaster, who was Chinese, of the school and if we wanted to go shopping - the hospital was a fair way out of the town of Malacca - we only had to ring up and he would send his driver and his car and we could go shopping.

28:30 And he organised for us to go to a Chinese funeral, which was really funny. They had a band playing and everyone eating out at the funeral. And then of course you always, well you didn't always, but in the end you always had a friend, a male friend, and I always stuck to the same one. You never asked if they were single or married, but they had a picture theatre and a dance hall in this little town and we used

29:00 to go dancing when we'd got out. There was a swimming pool. You couldn't swim in the sea but they

had a swimming pool and the British, who were very uppity, they allowed us, they had these clubs and they allowed us, as officers, to join, not the other ranks. And that was the thing that was always, as far as I was concerned, upsetting

29:30 because I had two brothers who were not officers and they were not in Malaya but in Malaya I had the husband of my girlfriend I'd grown up with and been the bridesmaid at the wedding and if he called to see me, I couldn't invite him in to sit down because he wasn't an officer. And this was always. It was the same in New Guinea. My brother, who'd left the air force and joined the army, or he'd

30:00 transferred to the army, he was a corporal. If he came up I had to, they had an outside tent. They called it "the brother's tent" and I could entertain him out there but he couldn't come into the mess and sit down in the mess, which I was. It used to make me very cross.

Was it the British who enforced this?

No, the Australians who copied the British. I mean there was no British troops up there, but that's just one of the things that happened. And it was the same then when

30:30 war ended. I was at the hospital out from Parramatta, at Baulkham Hills and my brother was a staff sergeant and he used to come and we'd sit out with him unless I went off with him, which we're not supposed to do, go out with other ranks.

It was quite forward.

It was stupid. But there you are.

There are a couple of things I'd be grateful for a quick explanation of.

31:00 **The hot pennies: how were they heating this money?**

On the ship. I don't know where they were heating, but that's what they were doing.

So they were making them hot somehow maybe?

Yes, that was the Australian humour, these boys, that was what they do.

So they were heating up these pennies somehow and dropping them overboard?

Yes because people were on the wharf calling out.

Wanting money and so they dropped hot money?

31:30 Yeah, yeah. They were quirky, the Australian soldier, yes.

The poor Singaporeans probably didn't know what had hit them?

No, I don't think that they did.

You were describing the Chinese funeral and that sounds quite extraordinary. These are very extraordinary times for the little girl from the bush to be experiencing. Was it a big cultural shock for you or were you just accepting of the changes in climate and

32:00 **culture?**

Oh I think, I don't know, I suppose I just accepted them. I guess it didn't worry us or didn't worry me. I found it interesting. I think that's the thing. I've always been a great reader of books, even as a small child and I just found them interesting and I wanted to go and I even went to the funeral house to see the body laid out. No, I was very interested in what

32:30 everyone else was doing.

So your inquisitive nature overcame any sort of shock?

Probably, yes. But I think I was mature. It wasn't as if I was young and silly, and I think I was just interested in other people and what they do and I still am.

Your poor parents. Did you get any correspondence from them at this time?

Eventually yes, the letters started to come and of course being over there,

33:00 and in those days you know the things were cheap, the tablecloths and all the things they made over there and we always seemed to be buying and sending parcels but the thing was again was the food. I don't know if I was finicky [fussy] with my eating but I used to beg my mother to send me peanut butter of all things and so these parcels. I never liked pound cakes but

33:30 the only cakes that would travel would be Christmas cake and of course I had all these loving aunts and grandmothers and my mother and I'd get these parcels. On the boat going over to Singapore, the troops, because it wasn't very big, were slung in hammocks around the ship and when we went down to dinner of a night I had a seat and there was a porthole and this little soldier used to sort of look in and

talk to me.

34:00 He'd be in his hammock in bed and I used to hand him food around the place. Anyway he was absolutely tiny. He should never have been in the army to begin with. He had tall brothers and he had volunteered and because of his height they wouldn't accept him. So this particular day a friend of his was on duty when they were examining these kids, so this boy got a box and stood him on it

34:30 and measured him and of course he wrote down what he was on this box and so he got in. He was always called "Titch" which is, Titch is Malayan for small and he was on board the boat going over and on guard standing up. I used to be, I don't know, I suppose as practice… and he was terribly seasick and his bayonet and his gun was nearly as tall as he was, so I sent him off sick, so he sort of attached himself to me. And ever since, and he's only just died,

35:00 I used to get all these cakes and he came into hospital sick then so I used to send all my cakes off then to him, to his unit and eventually long after the war, when I was going to England, he came all the way from Tasmania to Melbourne, to hold a streamer for me on this, I was going on a cargo ship, while the ship went out. And he only died last year. He was lovely. He was a POW eventually.

35:30 And one of the letters I'd written to him he carried the whole time he was a POW and I didn't go to his wedding. He invited me but I didn't go over but his wife, I still hear from his wife every Christmas.

It seems like you were forming extraordinary friendships along the way?

Well, with odd people. Well I was never one who liked to get mixed up with the general or the colonel. I was always

36:00 one that was happier with the lesser people. 'Cause I think they're always genuine, although all the time I was in Malaya I did go out with this man. He was from Melbourne and he was a captain and some of the girls used to trip out with various ones and had very unhappy experiences but whether he was married or single I have no idea. I never inquired and he never said and I never…

36:30 I know he became a prisoner of war because I saw him a couple of days before we left Singapore but whatever happened, I don't know and I've never asked questions.

Did Nell end up with you?

She did, yes, we went, we were together and we went to the hospital and matron was very good. She always organised that we'd have our leaves together

37:00 and then we were at Malacca and the war started and we were going to go to, the Saturday night, we were going dancing or going out and we got ourselves dressed up as much as we could, which was the same uniform and we waited and we waited and not any of our escorts arrived and we were getting very hostile about this. And then about ten o'clock somehow

37:30 or other they got through, someone got through, and said there was a red alert and they wouldn't be there and then of course that was when they bombed Honolulu and Singapore, later that night. From then on, of course, things absolutely changed.

What year was that?

That was 1940, 1941, [actually, December, 1941] that's when they first started.

38:00 And then as the Japanese came down the coast they decided the 10th Hospital was, well, we were sort of, the Australian troops, we were between the Japanese and the Australian troops, and we were at Malacca on the shore and so they decided we'd have to shift. They'd

38:30 bombed the area round about and so they said the time was to go and in twenty four hours the whole of the hospital was packed up. We sent those that only had skins or not very sick, we sent them back to their units. Those that were very sick, they got ambulances and took them off down to the 13th which was Titch's unit which was in Johore, just over Johore [Johore Bahru, bridge way to Singapore Island] and in twenty four hours the hospital was packed up and on it's way to Singapore.

39:00 So to begin with all we staff went to the 13th and then some stayed with the 13th and the others went on to the island to set up our new hospital. And of course we couldn't get a building large enough, so we had two hospitals. One was on Chancery Lane and the other was in Bukit Timah Road and Nell and I were at the 13th for a while

39:30 and then we went and joined our own unit again. We lived in houses round about. The British people had already left and these houses were just standing there and we had our camp stretchers and because Nell and I were friends, she worked in one hospital and I worked in the other. We were separated but the matron allowed us to be together and she used to send a staff car every morning to pick up Nell and take her

40:00 to her hospital which was further away from where we were. And you know by this time there were air raids. You could set the clock by them. They would come over and we had tin hats, which we used to have and the hospital that I was in had been a boys school, two storey, not made for a hospital and we had theatre going there too. Two theatre tables went all the time.

40:30 **Oh we might stop there. Get onto the next tape.**

Tape 3

00:38 **I just want to go back in time a little bit. You were talking about how the girls would go out with men and it was perfectly acceptable to do that and you just didn't ask whether they were married or whatever, but you said some of the girls had unhappy experiences?**

Yes, well, one of the other girls and she's since died, she went out this, I

01:00 didn't go. It was to some officers' mess. They were invited. And she came home and she was absolutely furious and she said, "That's the last time going out. I'm not going to be chased around the rubber trees." `Cause you see rubber trees were growing there. And apparently her and what's his name were listed. Everybody knew. We used to do that. If anyone went out with someone who wasn't really acceptable, if he turned up and asked again he was

01:30 always refused.

And how did the British people who were living in Singapore treat you?

With disdain. As I said the only - there was a girls' school in Malacca,- it was run by a Miss Sadler, she was an American in charge - and there was a hill station, Frasers Hill, where we would go for leave.

02:00 You only got one leave up there, and this road was very narrow going up and you could only go up so far and then you would have to wait so the up and down cars could pass at this particular, because you couldn't pass anywhere else. And Miss Sadler, we got to know her up there, and we used to invite her to the school and it was Chinese girls that were there

02:30 and the last Christmas that we were in Malaya, just before we had to leave Malacca, we went there for Christmas dinner and there was this little Chinese girl there and she attached herself to me and I've still got some amber she gave me and she also made this Chinese, a real Chinese, costume for me and I've got a photograph of myself in it and I've given it [the costume] to Kate. She's her [the Chinese girl's] daughter, I can't even fit in it now but

03:00 we had our last Christmas dinner out there before we left.

But the British women weren't welcoming of you?

No, never been in a British home, no. We were invited to become members of the British Club and then you were set up. Some of the other girls may have done but I don't know of any of my friends that ever went to a British home. As I said Nell and I

03:30 met this Chinese man and his wife and Miss Sadler in charge of the school.

Why do you think that was?

Well I always laugh at our matron. See before our hospital went there, the boys had to go to the British hospital and of course the British boys would lie in bed with long sleeved pyjamas down and the sheets

04:00 up to here and of course the Australian boys… and when the matron would do, they'd have their trouser legs up here and their sleeves up here and no sheets on. And when our matron sort of arrived to on a visit and the matron said, "How do you put up with the behaviour of these boys?" Because they'd lie in bed like this, see.

04:30 **And how did the men treat the nurses? What was their attitude towards the nurses?**

Our boys? Oh they absolutely adored us. They were grateful and the only thing was that no-one was allowed to go out with them.

You weren't allowed to go out with your patients?

You're not allowed to go out with privates. You're only allowed to go out with officers and this funny little boy, Kitchy,

05:00 oh Titch he was, not Kitch. I would send letters to him but no, we just didn't. As I said my very dearest and oldest friend, her husband was there and if he came up I used to have speak to him out on the runway.

Would that have ruined your reputation if you had gone out?

Oh you would be sent home. It wasn't just accepted.

05:30 You'd be reported to the matron and all hell would probably break loose.

Can you understand the thinking behind that?

No, I can't. But I think the thing is that they were following the British, in as though the British privates, I don't know. I didn't have much to do with the privates but they followed in the British tradition that you only went out with officers. `Cause we were considered to be officers I would presume. But yet some of the girls

06:00 did marry. Some of those girls who were POWs came back and married boys they had known.

And can you describe to me the hospital in Malacca. How was it all set up? Was it like a hospital in Australia or was it quite different?

Well it was a two storey, ground, the first and second and these wards

06:30 ran out. They had cement floors with a sort of gutter down the centre, so you could swish water. There was a veranda all around which had window shutters. There was no glass anywhere, and you could either open or close these or whatever. And that was all. It wasn't a bit, the theatre was quite good, the theatres we had there, but we only had

07:00 primus stoves to sort of pump up and sterilise the things. They were very basic and I know one of the jobs when I was a sister in the ward, we had some Chinese or whatever, the Malays, to come in and be the cleaners and so what they would do was come in with a bucket of water and go swish, you see and all this water was supposed to run down the

07:30 little drain thing in the middle. But I think the way that they were built was so any air would come in. There was no air conditioning of course, so the shutters you could shift them any way there was a breeze. There was just a veranda round with the main ward in the middle.

And how did you go for supplies? Were you well supplied with medical equipment?

Well, seemed to be. Yes, we didn't seem to have any lack of that. It was all right there but once we, of course we had to shift

08:00 down on to the island, things were quite different down there. We had to use primus stoves to boil the instruments on. Well the school was two storey, there was no running water and trying to bring stretcher cases up a narrow stair... and it was just beds, no lockers or anything. It was just very basic.

What were the primary injuries that you were receiving or treating at Malacca?

08:30 Well the only things there were accidents because the war hadn't started and malaria and skins [tropical skin diseases], appendicitis. The usual things that you'd get in an ordinary community, because there were a lot of them around. I mean the boys used to get on the beer over there. Tiger Beer as the, and of course I think

09:00 these boys used to get on it and perhaps have an accident on the roads, because the roads weren't very good. And I now our old CO [commanding officer] if they appeared up and had to be, if for some reason they'd done wrong or they shouldn't have done, and he always used to say to them, "Never let the tiger bite you." Old Colonel White was our CO.

Was there many incidents of STDs [Sexually Transmitted Diseases] then?

I don't think.

09:30 What are STDs?

Sexually transmitted diseases?

Oh well, if there were, we would never know. The only time that I ever had anything to do with that was when I was in New Guinea and I had a ward of skins, because the hospital we didn't have any surgical things, and I had, and there was a special tent out the back for them, but we would never have known in Singapore, `cause they would be whipped off. The boys,

10:00 I wouldn't know about the girls. I don't know any that were.

So when you were in Malacca, where were you living?

We were living in the hospital.

Oh you were in the hospital?

Yes, they took over some of the wards and there was just this big long place and you just had a bed and that was all.

And were you safe there? Was there good security for the nurses?

Well it must have been because I don't think anyone had any trouble,

10:30 but I suppose I don't know what went on round about but there was the Q [Quartermasters] store and the food store, and all the other buildings around. They used to use them that they had. We had a chapel

and no, it didn't seem to be. I think before the Japanese came and the war started Malacca was a very quiet place and it

11:00 was quite attractive because Sir Francis Assisi, well one of the saints, he was buried in the old church there on the hill and the Dutch had been there and the buildings were Dutchy. There was a lovely square with a lovely little Anglican church and when Nell and I used to go, it was sort of open, all the birds used to fly in and out during the service. And they always had the Chinese shops.

11:30 The shop would be downstairs and the family up and I went back last year to an International Thropmore's Conference in Kuala Lumpur and I actually went back to Malacca just to have a look and the place was absolutely a shambles. It was dirty and all these little Chinese shops had now closed and it just didn't look like Malacca as I ever remembered it, although I had been back once [before]. We went back for the,

12:00 must have been the fiftieth fall of Singapore, we went back to Singapore and we did a trip to Malacca then.

So it's completely changed?

Mmh.

From your day?

Mmh.

What was a regular day in Malacca? How would you be spending a day as a nurse?

You mean on a day off? Well we had an amah [maidservant] to do our laundry. We didn't have to do that ourselves and you'd just, if you were not going out, we'd get a taxi and

12:30 there was a swimming pool. We'd go down and spend the day at the swimming pool or we'd go shopping or you'd just stay home and write letters. We had a tennis court. We used to play tennis and we'd go to the pictures.

English pictures?

Oh yes, English pictures. As I said they had a dance at night. You'd go out dancing and we used to get invited out to the other troops.

13:00 We were invited, the bloke I used to go out with, they were over at Tampin, away from us, and the drinks boy in the officers' mess there, his sister was being married and they were Malays, so we had an invitation to the wedding and it was really quite interesting. They'd put up a special shelter for the officers and their friends and then we were expected to

13:30 look at the house and of course in a Malayan wedding the bed is always two tiered. I don't know whether the wife she's the lower or the upper, I never made out and then we went down the back and we're eating this food and there they had this food on the ground, chopping it up with an axe. It put everybody off their food. Yeah, it was quite interesting.

It almost sounds like there wasn't a war going on anywhere?

Well, there wasn't.

14:00 There wasn't you see, there was no war going on so it was quite a social set up and we had no wounded unless someone had an accident with a gun or something else. It was just like living in a city, except it was a bit exotic, not what we'd been used to. And of course the shopping was magnificent. You could buy all those lovely Chinese baskets and linen and what have you cheaply.

14:30 **And on top of that you were getting to spend time with one of your best friends?**

Yes, yes, yes, and I mean you'd have your time on duty but as I said you had your tennis and the swimming, the swimming pool.

It all sounds pretty good.

Well it was. It was the life really that the British had lived there without doing anything. We didn't have to wash our clothes, you didn't have to iron them, you just looked after yourself; but of course that came to an abrupt end.

15:00 **It would have been quite a shock because all of a sudden war is on your doorstep?**

That's right, yes and I'll always remember that night, how angry everyone was, sitting around and waiting and nothing happened. And the thing was the [HMS] Prince of Wales and the [HMS] Repulse came into Singapore, the two British ships and everyone was thinking, "Oh right, they're there, everything is," and it

15:30 was mess, it was lunchtime mess and matron came in and she said, "I've got some terrible news. Both the ships have been sunk." And I think that was the most devastating news I think that we'd sort of had,

that these two ships had sailed up: “Oh, we were saved.”

They represented a safety net?

Yes, yes, yes.

So when you found out that the Japanese had entered the

16:00 **war, was that an announcement made to you, or you heard that over the radio?**

Oh no, it was just announced in the hospital because this was when no-one turned up and I said, “Well, the Japanese have just sort of attacked up north” and of course not for one minute did we think that they would get down. Because it was quite a way up there and of course the only way through was the road, because the road was very jungle-y and full of rubber trees.

16:30 And we, not for a minute, because everyone said, “The Japanese haven’t got this and they haven’t got that, they haven’t got the other thing,” so we were absolutely staggered when we had to get out.

So you had to get out of Malacca because that was under threat and you’re all moving down, all were retreating?

Yes, all our patients were moved down to the 13th and our

17:00 equipment and most of the stores and part of the staff went on to Singapore Island to set up a hospital there. As I said we had two. One was in Bucateema Road and the other was Chancery Lane and we set up there and eventually of course the Japanese were coming down further and further and

17:30 old, the, who was he? In charge of the Australian troops? There’s my mind going. Anyway he called around to our hospital that day and he was sort of concerned that our hospital was in direct line to the main city of Singapore and he was worried about that and that afternoon the Japanese shelled

18:00 the island and hit our hospital.

Which hospital was that?

The 10th, the 10th, and I remember I was upstairs in this ward and one of these little - of course the boys had their tin hats - and he said, “Here Sister, get my hat and put in on your head.” And one of our orderlies was killed and a couple of the patients and so

18:30 that was a blow.

Everything happened quite quickly, didn’t it?

Quite quickly in the end and then when the 13th came across and then the last two to cross the bridge, or whatever they called it, going between Singapore and Malaya were two Scottish pipers. All the troops: there were Indians, there were British, there were Australians and there were the Malays and

19:00 these two Scottish pipers came and piped over the bridge and then they were supposed to breach the causeway between the two but of course the Japs took only a few minutes to mend it and they were all on the island. Well, they were on the island with us and we were called to come on duty and wear your veils and your red capes, because

19:30 we weren’t wearing our veils. Everyone is going to be taken prisoners of war so of course we all tore up to the hospital and waited and waited and nothing happened. So I didn’t go back to, well that’s right, so we went back on work and then the matron said, “Now you pack up, you’ll probably have to leave.” So Nell and I packed our things together and I went up to our hospital, she was over in her’s, and I took our things with me and

20:00 so then, “You’re going, you’re going” and then they said, “No, you’re not going,” so I didn’t go back to where I slept and Nell didn’t come back and I slept in another house, just on the floor with this lass from New South Wales. So in the morning they said, “Get up now and put on your veils and your red arm bands,

20:30 because everyone is going to be a prisoner of war.” We had Red Cross armbands and then of course nothing happened and so then the matron said, “Well, now you’re leaving.” And she called out the names of those that were leaving and Nell’s name wasn’t there but I had Nell’s luggage. So I said to her “I’ve got Nell’s luggage and she’s coming,” and she said, “Oh no,” and of course I put on a turn. I was rude. I should not have been but…

How did she decide who was going

21:00 **and who was staying?**

I don’t know, I would never know who decided who would and who wouldn’t. And so I said, “Well, I promised her mother faithfully that I wouldn’t leave her.” And she said, “Well, never mind, we’ll catch you up.” And I had Nell’s luggage with me. We were allowed to have our kit bag, that’s all you could have, so of course, the transport came. I’ve forgotten whether it was trucks or ambulances or something or other and we loaded up and we went into

21:30 St Andrew's Cathedral and we had to wait there for the girls who were, apparently, afterwards I found out, it was the girls from the 13th who were coming to join us and anyway we waited a long time. So we went into this hotel and waited and here were these little kids still riding round on bikes and everything else. So we eventually got down to the wharf and it was absolutely crowded with people and there were cars pushed over into the water. There was smoke, oh,

22:00 it was just a terrible mess because they'd set the oil tanks on fire and they burned and we arrived at this ship, all of us and the officer with us had the list and the captain said, "No, you're not coming on board, not so many people."

Who were the people on board? Who were the people escaping?

Oh there were British, there were men, there were women, there were children. Not only civilians but we had British troops on board too.

22:30 See, there were over a thousand on that [ship] which had room for sixteen passengers and so anyway this bloke had a revolver and he said, "I've got a movement order," so away he went. So one of our senior girls was very sick. She'd been in the sick bay, and it was hot and she felt faint and I said, "There's a suitcase, sit down on that." And this Englishman said, "Would you mind getting off that suitcase. I don't want it damaged."

23:00 So anyway then eventually they said "yes" and they walked across the deck through this mob of people, down this down perpendicular ladder, into this hold and they had a canvas awning over the top, they didn't have it closed in. And so that's where we were. They provided buckets as toilets. We didn't have a toilet.

So if you had not have got on that ship, you would have been prisoners of war?

No, we would have been on the

23:30 Vyner Brook, the next one, which sank.

So they were determined to get the nurses out?

Yes, we went in the morning and they went in the afternoon.

And I just want to go back in time a bit. When you got out of Malacca and you went to the hospital on?

We went to the 13th .

The 13th. Now the 13th , they had to leave men behind is that right?

No.

They cleared out the whole hospital?

All of the hospitals were cleared. See, our hospital went first.

24:00 Some of our patients, the very sick ones went down to the 13th and that was a mental, that was a new mental hospital that was being opened and so all they did, they were just long wards and there were bars on one window, so all they did was just knock the bars out and these became the wards. And of course as more came, they opened more of these wards.

And at what stage did you start to receive war injuries?

Oh, we had them there then.

24:30 **Right. You'd gone from treating car accidents?**

Yes. The 13th were really, because we'd left, the 13th were the first ones who took in the war injuries and of course because we were sent down there of course you went on night duty and I remember going down to this ward this night and you're not allowed any lights at all. You had a hurricane lantern and this place

25:00 was absolutely stacked and they had no names on any beds and this one was on the serious illnesses, on the dangerous ill, and in the dark you wouldn't know who was who. It was absolutely shocking. You wouldn't know whether you were treating a dangerously ill because they were all wounded. They were all wounded boys.

At what point did it hit you that things were serious?

It didn't. Not even from the very end, nothing hit you as being

25:30 serious, and the only thing that hit me as serious, I mean we went onboard this ship, down the hold, and we had buckets for toilets. And the next morning, one of our physiotherapists, she was twenty one, Merrilie Higgs, she was a young girl and this sister who I was looking after who was sick, and I said. "Let's go up and find a toilet and we'll have a bath." So we

26:00 went up and went up these stairs, because the accommodation was on the second floor, and the wheel house and the rest was up and when we went to go in this door, this Englishwoman came and she said, “You can’t come in here, this is a private bathroom.” I said, “There are three of us, just see.” So in we went and it had a toilet and a hand basin and a bath and a window looking out over the deck.

26:30 It was up high, you could look out, so Merrilie, who was just twenty one, she got into the bath and the other lass was cleaning her teeth and I was sitting on the toilet and I looked out and I said, `cause it was just packed with soldiers. There were all these British soldiers and I saw them all running and I said, “Oh, there must be going to be a raid.” And there was a wooden window thing, so I put in this window and turned the little butterfly nuts. And I’m sitting here and suddenly there was this tremendous bang and the ship

27:00 jolted and this bit of thing shot off with I suppose with the force of the explosion and Merrilie hopped out of the bath and ran into the corridor and one of the stewards came and wrapped her up in a tablecloth. So anyway she got herself dressed and we sat on the stairs and I don’t know whether, it must have been when the bombs missed the ship but it displaced the water and it

27:30 would sort of go up in the air and you could hear the screws going roo, roo, roo and then suddenly down you’d go again. Well we sat there for quite a while and of course no-one had any lifejackets and guns were going off and the thing was bumping up and down and I said, “Look, let’s go down and be with… I can’t swim so let’s go down with the troops, because if we’ve got leave behind, I’ll see if someone can swim.” We went down and the ship had a sort of cover way half way down with these steel doors and the first

28:00 officer was standing there and he was watching them and saying, “They’re coming again, they’re coming again.” And he’d shut this door and then there’d be this explosion. And on the back of the ship they had these little Bofors guns and what they were doing was calling for volunteers and of course the Japs would machinegun the deck and these kids were being killed. Well anyway some of the 13th girls were very wise. They’d gone down to the crew’s quarters because there was food down there and they saw these boys being shot on the deck and they

28:30 were rushing out and pulling them in and that’s where two of them got their decorations. And one of them, she threw herself over this boy when they were strafing the deck. And of course eventually it was all over and that afternoon, as the old boy in that letter I’ve had, said, “We had a burial service but we didn’t have enough, we just threw the bits overboard.” And the captain had a thanksgiving

29:00 service and we went into the port of Jakarta and then the Dutch came along with a truck, oh a bus they had, and the nurses we were all taken off. I still had Nell’s luggage as well as my own which was only two suitcases as well as a kit bag and they took us, and they had these ships in the harbour sort of set up for refugees and there was a straw mattress and as you went up the gangplank you were given

29:30 a spoon, and a mug and a plate and we had our first meal. It was a stew-y thing or something. It was very good and again we had just the thing on the deck to sleep on and the next morning I got up, looked up and I’d left Nell’s luggage on the wharf and it was still there and so then the bus came along again to take us and I’d been out with this British officer and he’d said.

30:00 “If you ever go to Jakarta, go to this special club. Wonderful place, this special club.” So we got back to the ship and the captain said, “Well, now you can do what you like, but you must be back on Sunday.” This was Saturday, by Saturday, we must be back Sunday afternoon, in the afternoon. So we got, we were filthy and one of the girls had torn her uniform on this boat hooks and she had it done up with safety pins, so we got a taxi

30:30 and of course we only had Singapore money and we went to this club that I had. This taxi driver took us and as we went up these marble steps this little boy, Javanese boy, came and he polished all the steps again and we left one girl. We said, “Now you go off in the taxi,” while we asked this bloke to change our money. So we’re sitting there looking absolutely terrible and this immaculate Dutch officer came up, and they had beautiful uniforms, and he clicked his

31:00 heels and asked what he could do with us. And we said, “We want a meal,” and he said, “I’m terribly sorry but this is an officers’ club.” It was only for males. So anyway he was very good and he organised and sent us around to some Chinese restaurant, where we had a meal and we got back to the…

There’s not much sympathy for people’s circumstances is there?

Oh no. Things were in such turmoil I suppose. I mean it wasn’t sympathy,

31:30 it was only help that was needed I should think. Anyway, we had this marvellous meal and we rocked back to the ship and on this Sunday afternoon the captain said, “Well, I’ve got bad news. Singapore has fallen.” So the next day we sailed. Well, of course, there was still all of we girls, over thirty of us I suppose there were, and plus these women and children, and they weren’t equipped for passengers. It was a cargo ship and so the captain asked if

32:00 would we help and we said, “We will do anything but we will not help the mothers with their children.” Because they would not let us have a bath. We couldn’t have a share of a bath or anything, so we said...

These were British women?

British women, they were all British and of course we said, “They’re used to having almahs and the sooner they learn to look after their own children before they get to Australia, the better.” So we helped in the galley, we set the tables, we did things like that,

32:30 but we still, by this time, of course, we were sleeping on the deck. And this lass I was looking after, we slept on the deck outside the captain’s cabin and so he used to bring his greatcoat out for us to use. But in the meantime, we had no idea what was happening to any of these.

Were you getting scared at this stage?

33:00 No, not really, not when, even when, the ship was being bombed. I don’t know whether we were probably young and silly, I don’t remember being frightened. I have only ever been frightened when I had my first plane ride in New Guinea with a Yank pilot because I was always told what dreadful pilots they were. Anyway we, but after the bombing, that’s right, the ship was bombed, we

33:30 decided we weren’t going to go down the hold of that ship again and the sister in charge of us, we never liked her, she was a grumpy sort of woman, so this other girl from Victoria and I we decided we’d stay up on deck. And `cause you’re not allowed to have lights after dark. And so she and the first officer were at the gangway counting the people going down to sleep and so these two little Tommy soldiers, never knew their names, said, “Come over here and we’ll cover you with our ground sheets.”

34:00 So we just got on the deck and they covered us up and then four o’clock in the morning one of them said, “Now I know someone in the engine room. I’ll go and get us some tea.” So he went down and he came carrying a fruit tin opened by the lid with this thing of black tea and the four of us shared that. I haven’t any idea of their names and haven’t seen them since, so anyway that was that. Well, then we arrived in Perth, the ship arrived in Perth and of course

34:30 Darwin was bombed when we were at sea and we thought, “Oh yes, they’re in Australia.” So we arrived in Fremantle and there wasn’t a soul anywhere in the harbour that we could see. The ship was tied up, the men tied it up and then this man came cycling on his bike and he put a hose in the side of the ship and I called down, “Will you do something for me?” I said, “I haven’t got any money but if you call my uncle and just say ‘Betty’s here.’” So of course, my

35:00 uncle was the secretary of the Primary Producers [Association] and so he knew him and that and away he went and he came back and said, “Yes, he’s fixed it.” Well of course as soon as my uncle knew, he rang my mother and said “Nell and Betty are here.” And she rang Mrs Keats and said, “No need to worry, Nell and Betty are here.” Well, they took us off the ship and of course they took us to the Hollywood [now Repatriation] Hospital I think it was and the Red Cross came along and gave us some bits of things of

35:30 soap and powder and stuff because we were just standing up in the uniforms we had. And then they took us off by train to this hospital, camp hospital up from Perth and we had this big ward and we were all stuck in this ward and early in the morning I woke up and I saw this sister came in to a cupboard, I was near a cupboard, and when I looked I knew she was one I did my training with at King Edward.

36:00 And I said, “How are you?” “Oh bugger,” she said, “what are you doing here?” Because she knew that what we were there and we had a couple of days, we could leave and go to Perth. And we were allowed to ring our parents and of course by the time I got round to my mother it was about twelve o’clock because everybody was having a go and of course she’d told Mrs Keats we were here. And I just said, “No, Nell’s not with me,” and then I had to try and get onto Mrs Keats and explain what had

36:30 happened.

Did you have any idea at this stage what had happened?

No idea what had happened.

That must have been one terrible part of it, not knowing where she was?

Well, we thought we were out and we probably thought they were following in another ship because there were lots of ships in the harbour. But we had no idea. And they put us on the train eventually, the east-west and of course Hawker had, in the days when the droughts were on, all the local boys went to

37:00 Commonwealth because the Commonwealth Railway used to go through Hawker, going to Alice Springs. And blow me down, the driver and the fireman on this train were two Hawker boys and so when they got to this stretch where there is this hundred miles of straight they came back looking for me. They’d heard these nurses were on board and they said, “Come and you can drive the train.” Well this sister in charge of us, she gave, I think, the report she gave, I never recovered from it

37:30 actually. And oh it insulted her to think that I could go with a train driver. Anyway I didn’t go with the train driver and to make matters worse, my cousin had a property this side of Gawler and they were lumping wheat `cause he had a property there and I suddenly looked out the window and there’s my cousin with one of those singlet things they wear lumping wheat. And I said, “Roy, how are you?” So he rushes up and puts his arms around me, so you know the report I got with the

38:00 people I knew. They weren’t top pole.

It was all very stiff, isn't it?

Oh it was terrible, it is terrible, anyway of course we eventually got to Adelaide and there was Titchy and the lass in Melbourne that's still there, and also Betty Gertrude who's away with the fairies, and they came to the Adelaide railway station.

A lot happened

38:30 **in a short period of time and I've heard reports from other nurses, not who had been with you, that they had had to leave some of the men behind. When the Japanese were advancing into Singapore they had to leave their patients behind.**

Everyone was left, everyone. No-one, to begin with. The hospital ship came in and just before we left

39:00 this hospital ship came in and four of our girls went off with some of our wounded but they didn't get back till after we did, because they went from there to India and that way home. Four of my girls from my hospital, and they took some British sisters and British soldiers, this ship went out. It wasn't a hospital ship. It came into harbour and they decided the very seriously wounded they

39:30 would get rid of, and they converted this ship, if you could call it "converted" but made it available, that these wounded soldiers, I forgotten, a couple of hundred, four hundred boys I think it was or something, and four girls from our hospital and four from the British hospital bought them out and they eventually got home.

So do you remember when you were told to evacuate, to get out?

Yes, I remember it quite well. When I was told

40:00 and we were told that we could only take what we could carry and as I said in the main, we could only take our sausage [kit] bag and everybody took their photograph albums and I'd had a food parcel I think from somebody or other, and I stuck that in and I think it was a cake, but I did put that in. But by and large that's all we had.

40:30 **And we'll leave it there.**

Tape 4

00:38 **Betty we'll just go a little bit back in time to being on the ship. What did you have to eat on your journey?**

Well between getting to Singapore from Batavia [Java today] we had nothing. But afterwards, when we left Batavia on to Australia, we had meals. They were not overly, they were

01:00 just ordinary meals, because it was still a crowd on the ship. There was still sixty of we nurses who were still sleeping anywhere, out on the deck and we had all the women and the children. But the friend I was looking after, Marjorie Crick, who wasn't very well, we slept on the deck outside the captain's cabin and he used to come out with his greatcoat to cover us of a night.

01:30 But we were, you couldn't have any lights of course after dark. It was just blackout all the way.

Was the ship crowded?

No, well it was only crowded with women and children. I don't know how, there were sixty nurses, so there was no room for us to have cabins and beds. We just slept where we could find a place on the deck. Some of them still stayed down the hold where we left but I preferred to be up on the deck. Because they had a lot of

02:00 women and children and there weren't that many and they were sharing. They were sort of piled up too.

And what was that trip like?

Well, it was quite pleasant. There was nothing to do. You just sat and looked at the sea and it was dark. Of course once it became dark you didn't do anything. You just sat down. There was nothing to do. You were in a blackout.

Was anybody, were people writing correspondence or

02:30 **playing cards or…?**

I suppose some of the girls wrote. I don't know. I mean if you had something to read you would read. I don't know what they did. I used to just sit and look at the sea or chat with the girls.

Were you worried at all after your experience in the harbour about further bombings?

No, no-one seemed to worry, nobody seemed to worry about it. I mean I don't know why we didn't worry but they

03:00 kept a lookout and eventually, I think once we got away from the islands they relaxed a bit too, the people on the ship, but they kept a lookout and they knew what they were doing. And I mean the captain had been so good, sort of pulling us through the first thing, getting out, that I suppose everyone sort of felt so confident in what was going on. I think perhaps you didn't worry in those days.

03:30 like now you worry all the time if you fall down and scratch yourself.

So you think there was a different attitude towards those things?

I think so, yes. I think it was. No-one seemed to worry or, I mean we - well the lass I was looking after wasn't very well - but we were all fairly fit. The only thing we missed, the food wasn't very good. We

04:00 had to cope with what there was and we didn't mind sleeping on the deck and that was that. When you were in the army whatever was handed out you just take. No good worrying about it. You were there and you've got to stick there.

What sort of railings did the ship have, if any?

What sort of?

Railings around the deck. Were there any?

It had the ordinary, just like any ship, the rails. Any ship was the same, they just have the top rail and the posts and then the things in

04:30 between, just like a fence. I mean they were not sort of tall, or bullet proof, it was an ordinary ship, just a cargo ship. It didn't have the same amenities that you would have on a liner.

Did you ever feel unsafe sleeping on deck?

No, never, not at all. And that's why, you see, when I went to England the first time, I went on a cargo ship, because I

05:00 think it was so good.

You said before that there was a bucket?

That's what we used, that's when we were coming out of Singapore. We only had buckets for toilets but I mean once we left Batavia and we'd gotten rid of all the troops, well we just, the people in the cabins, just had to share with us. They had to share their bathroom facilities with us.

05:30 I mean we didn't use the cabins or we didn't have berths or bunks. We just all slept, all those that wanted to, down the hold still stayed there and the others on the deck, on the deck but they then had to share the amenities with us.

So this would have been some horror to the person who thought their bathroom was private?

Well it probably was and then as I said the captain asked if we would help because there was more than the crew could cope with and

06:00 we were quite happy to help in the galley and on the tables but we wouldn't help the women.

Did anyone become sick on the way back?

Not that I remember. You see you just sort of stuck with whatever group that you were with. I don't remember. I don't remember anyone being sick and as I said on the way out, apart from water,

06:30 was when the little boy went down in the middle of the night and bought up the tea in a fruit tin, that was to Batavia, that was all we had and what we happened to have in our kit bag, there were no meals served. But after that the meals were just plain. I mean they couldn't, the staff had so many to cope with, more than they would have ordinarily so I think they did very well. And after all we were army. We were used to army tucker [food].

Any bully beef around?

Oh there

07:00 was, not there, but I got plenty of that in New Guinea, yeah.

How was the trip to Batavia?

Uh?

How long did it take you to Batavia from Singapore?

From Australia? From Singapore to Australia? Oh, it took us five to six days to get there from when we got on the ship because we left Singapore on the,

07:30 what did we leave on? On eventually the twelfth and we arrived in Adelaide on the twenty second of January, so it took twenty days really to get home, although we had stopped off in the camp in Western Australia before we got on the train. But we arrived back at Adelaide railway station and there were five of us that came back.

08:00 **You mentioned before that in Singapore that a hospital had been built in what was to have been an asylum and the bars had been pulled down?**

No, that was on the Peninsula before we came to Singapore. That's where the 13th were. It was out from Johore Bahru, a little place out from Johore Bahru, which is just across the causeway.

Who's asylum was that? Who was building it?

Well I suppose the locals. It was to be for the local

08:30 people of Johore Bahru. The Sultan I suppose, I don't know who, there was a Sultan of Johore Bahru. Apparently he was, see Malaya was all little sorts of kingdoms and this was in Johore Bahru and there was a sultan there and he lived in his palace, which is still there. So I suppose it was the local, the local population.

09:00 **During your time in Malacca and then on your way back as the retreat was happening and people were being sent home, did you see any cases of difficulties with mental health?**

No, no I didn't. I know some of the boys were sent home but I did never work in a ward. They used to separate those with malaria or anything like that.

09:30 I always worked in the surgical side, because that's what I always did because I used to be a theatre sister at the Adelaide Hospital.

So you wouldn't have seen them even if they would have?

No, I had nothing to do with the, like the medical part. I was always on the surgical team.

When the Japanese were coming there was a point at which you thought you were going to become POWs?

Yes,

10:00 we were called, we used to wear tin hats. We didn't wear our veils. We always used to wear our tin hats and we were called to come on duty. This was sort of the day before we left Singapore, to come on duty wearing our veils and our Red Cross armbands. We didn't wear those when we were on duty but we were all going to be prisoners of war and we sort of went up to the wards early and nothing happened so they just said, "Go back to work." And then

10:30 the matron said, "Now you're leaving." I mean we had packed to leave, we knew we were going and so that's when we left. But that was the only thing, that one time, that we got into our veils and our Red Cross armbands and little good they did because all the girls on Bangka Island had Red Cross armbands on.

What did you think would happen if you were made prisoners of war? Did have you have any expectation?

11:00 Didn't think about it. We didn't think for a minute that we ever would. I mean I don't know about the soldiers, that might be different, but we didn't ever think about that. I mean you just did what you were told and we were happily doing what we did but never anticipated or even thought about it.

Even when you'd been told to prepare yourself to be a prisoner of war?

Yes, yes.

You still thought you'd be saved somehow?

Well I don't know. I don't think we thought about it.

11:30 You just went back on duty and you see when you're in the army you're just sort of shifted and you don't have to think for yourself really. You're just shifted from there and you're sent to this ward or you're sent to this unit and you just go. That's all there is to it. Somebody else does the thinking for you.

Had you been given any instruction or warning on what to do if you were made a prisoner of war?

No, no, never, never, no.

And none of the nurses had any arms?

12:00 **You, there were no arms?**

Oh, no, no, we were absolutely, well we old girls were absolutely horrified when we heard of the first matron running around with a revolver but they all are now armed, all nurses, but we were, that was

one of the things that was supposed to protect us, under the Geneva Convention, that you didn't carry arms. That's why hospitals had the Red Cross and you were supposed to be not attacked by the enemy, which of course wasn't

12:30 true.

Had you heard anything about the Japanese at that time?

No, not a thing. All we knew at the time was that they were coming down at a rate but we weren't told, Gemas was the place where they apparently caught up with them there and there was an ambulance coming through with all these wounded on and they killed them and the boys driving the ambulance. But we were never told

13:00 these things.

Did you feel as though you had an enemy?

No. No. I think when you're in a hospital it's different, you haven't got, you're not confronted with it, you don't have to compete with it. You just have to do as you're told, that's all there was to it.

But you were seeing your boys hurt, seeing Australian

13:30 **boys coming through with injuries, it must be quite hard to keep those boundaries and feel as part of the Australian Army that you were distinct from the violence of it all?**

Well I mean the thing is of course we admired the boys and they were absolutely uncomplaining. They made marvellous patients and as I said, when, the day when they bombed our hospital and

14:00 this lad was there wounded in bed and he leans over and says, "Put the hat on. Sister." Never mind whether he was going to need his hat or not but no, they were always wonderful patients. They never complained and they always had a joke.

And all from the 10th got out? They were evacuated or moved?

The boys?

Mmh.

None of them, not any. I mean the

14:30 only ones that got out were those who left on that ship and they only took four hundred and they took some from each hospital, the 13th and the 10th, and they were the most seriously wounded. We left our hospital full of wounded and then when the Japs got on [Singapore] Island they shifted them to, what they call the Café building there, and they shifted them there and then they shifted them into the Cathedral, St Andrew's Cathedral, I

15:00 think it was St Andrew's in Singapore and they were even doing operations in this, they had a sort of, they were shifting them as the Japs came down but then there were only the doctors and the orderlies left then looking after them.

And did the Japanese treat them? Was it still operational as a hospital once the Japanese came in?

I have no idea. The hospital we had of course had been evacuated. We'd left that and they were just in temporary things.

15:30 I don't think the Japanese treated any of them. I don't know what happened. I really don't know what happened to those boys who were wounded. I've only read stories.

So you managed by sheer luck to get back to Western Australia?

Yes, it was sheer luck. I mean our ship could have been, could sink. I mean it was bombed, it was hit,

16:00 it was damaged, but we managed to keep on, whereas the Vyner Brook coming out was smaller and overcrowded and they had a, it was only smaller and they sort of left and they island hopped. They sort of sheltered and the Japs, as soon as they found them, they sank the ship in a few minutes.

16:30 **When did you hear about the fate of the Vyner Brook?**

The war had ended and I was at, in Sydney at the hospital there and I was in charge of the theatre and the war had finished and I came on duty one Sunday morning and we had a VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] orderly with the theatre staff, and they

17:00 had a Sunday newspaper and they said, "Sister, you'll be interested in this," and look there was the names of all these girls that had been killed and Nell's was one of them. That's the first we heard.

One person survived that, didn't they, to tell the story?

Yes, [Vivian] Bullwinkle ,yes and she's written books. Yes, she was shot but she was on the end of the line. They made them walk into the water and they went along a

17:30 line like that and she was shot through the side as she was. And there was one man, `cause there were men got ashore, their's was not the only ship, there were all these ships being sunk, and there was a lot of British soldiers and the Japanese took them away first of all in batches, and came back wiping their bayonets. And then they made the girls walk into the water, shot them. And when

18:00 Bullwinkle eventually came ashore, she didn't shift out of the water for quite a while, for one thing I suppose she was shocked. She was frightened they were still around and she came out and went into the jungle and then she came down, apparently there was water or stream or something there. She went to have a drink and this man, this soldier said, "What are you doing here, Sister?" And she nursed him on the beach. Of course, you've probably heard the story.

18:30 He was badly wounded and she nursed him on the beach and then they decided that they'd have to give themselves up, and they started walking towards Mentok, which is the little town there, and they were picked up by the Japanese in a, I don't know, in a truck or whatever. But in the meantime you see, a lot of women and children landed on Bangka Island, with the nurses and

19:00 the matron, she was the matron of the 13th, the children they hadn't had anything to eat and they were getting grizzly and this English officer went off to find the Japanese so they could all become prisoners of war, so the matron said to the women, "You start walking" towards this town of Mentok with these children, so that's how they were not shot. And so when the soldiers came back with this officer, they just killed everyone that was on the beach. See there were lots of ships sunk,

19:30 coming out of Singapore, so that's why there was a lot of men that got ashore too.

Troops?

Mmh, troops. Anyway the boy didn't live. He was so badly wounded. They became prisoners of war but he died a couple of days afterwards.

She was lucky to survive with that gunshot wound?

Yes, well the thing was of course, when she walked in the other girls that were saved,

20:00 they had life jackets and they sort of leapt into the sea and there were pieces of wreckage and all sort of things. And you see it was those that got in the lifeboat and got ashore that were shot, but a lot of the life boats were damaged and a lot of the people drowned but the girls tell all sorts of stories about getting ashore and how they got ashore. And apparently they were swimming and these

20:30 Japanese in small boats were passing them. Didn't even offer any assistance till eventually they got to Mentok, to the jetty, got ashore.

So you escaped this fate that you didn't even know was going on at the time, but circumstance had been kind to you and returned you to Australia? Do you remember how you were received in Western Australia?

21:00 Well very well indeed. The Red Cross came and they gave us undies and soap and all sorts of things because we had only more or less what we stood up in. And they treated us very well and then, as I said, we were taken off. I don't know if we went by train, I think we went by train from Perth up to this camp hospital,

21:30 then from then on we came home.

How long were you at the camp hospital for?

We were there, when we arrived, we arrived in, I think we were there about six days, seven days, almost a week probably.

And what were you doing there in that time?

We were just resting and they did give us a weekend. We could go to Perth and stay overnight on the Saturday night and

22:00 so we went to Perth and I stayed with my uncle and aunt and yes, Singapore fell on the 15th and as I said we arrived, eventually arrived back in Australia on the 22nd.

Your aunt and uncle must have been happy to see you?

Yes, they were, but of course, they were very happy to see me. I suppose I was lucky that my parents knew before anyone else, that I was able to get this bloke to ring my uncle so that he let my mother know

22:30 but unfortunately she had to ring Mrs Keats to say Nell wasn't there and of course no-one knew, all those years, from then until the war was ended. Some of the girls wrote home and I think we knew because one of the girls was a South Australian and I think twice all those years they were POWs they were able to write two letters home and she said that

23:00 there were several South Australians, “We are the only South Australians,” so I think those that didn’t, their names were not there, I think they had an inkling something had happened.

Were Nell’s family probably hoping that she was a prisoner of war and that she…?

Yes, yes, right to the very end they did.

And a tough time for you not knowing?

Well it was really, it was tough but the worst part

23:30 was when I sort of read the paper and of course all these girls that I knew, because we knew the girls in the other hospitals `cause when they first came, their hospital was established, so they came and worked with us and then of course, when we were getting out, we worked there. And yes, it really knocked me for a six, quite a lot.

So after your week in Western Australia then how did you get to Adelaide? By ship?

24:00 No, by train we came over on the Express and as I said I knew the driver and the two, the engine driver, they wanted me to ride with them and how incensed and horrified, and I think that’s why I never ever advanced. I started off, I mean some of these kids that were coming in after me, they came in as captains but I think the report that I got wasn’t very good.

24:30 I didn’t, my rank didn’t ever increase.

Cavorting with strange farmers and train drivers.

Yes, could have been.

So back to Adelaide, and how long did you have in Adelaide?

Well, I shipped out to, Daws Road had just opened. It was a new military hospital and they had four wards open and two other wards which we occupied and there had never been a theatre sister. The boys, all the troops

25:00 were sort of coming back from the Middle East and there was a big army camp opposite. It’s now a high school and any operation would be performed at the Adelaide Hospital and the boys would come back, so when I came, being a theatre sister, they decided they’d operate there. And off each ward, they were long wards with a corridor and they had one room, about as big as my bedroom, off, a special room if you had any patients that had to be away, and

25:30 so that was my operating theatre with an examination couch as a theatre. And I used to share the steriliser with the ward and all the, all the bandages and gowns and anything that had to be autoclaved would go to the Adelaide Hospital and would come back. And that’s where I started as the first theatre sister out at Daws Road, which is now, it was 105 AGH [Australian General Hospital] then. It’s now Daws Road Repatriation Hospital. And the

26:00 matron called me up one day and she said, “You are going to leave the unit for a week,” and I said, “What am I going to do?” She said, “You’re going to sell war bonds,” and I said, “I can’t do that. How do I do it?” She said, “I don’t know.” I said, “I’ve not sold anything, I’m not going.” She said, “That’s an order,” so I was picked up by a taxi and taken in. I’m don’t where it was, which bank, the Bank of New South [Wales] or

26:30 an Adelaide bank and I went into this room and there was a boy, a lieutenant, a soldier limping very badly and there was an air force man with his wings, much older looking than the boys and then there was this gorgeous looking sailor. And then we had a little, there was a little girl, an army girl, she was the driver and

27:00 there was another, I think he was a corporal and he was sort of a mechanic and we had old Mr Aidie, who used to be the director of education here, in charge of us. And so what we had to do, we had to write a speech which had to be submitted to see that you weren’t giving any information to the enemy, and then we started off and we had a staff car and we had this little girl who used to drive and this terrible squadron leader used to sit next to her and play with her leg.

27:30 And then there’d be dear old Mr Aidie, the retired Director of Education, gaunt and with his glasses, and the lieutenant was very lame, he was limping and he crawled in first and I got in next to him and oh, it was so cold, his leg against mine, was so cold. And he looked so sick, poor boy, being wounded in Tobruk. And then of course the sailor got in next to me, and this terrible squadron leader he always used to be pulling

28:00 Mr Aidie’s leg with things like “Now you were the director of education, Mr Aidie. is it correct to say ‘is sold at Coles’?” and of course this gaunt man with his little glasses “Oh no, no, no, when it’s the plural you always put, so it would be `are sold at Coles’” and he used to do this to him all the time, all these jokes. And anyway we used to

28:30 walk miles through these munition factories and clothing factories and food factories. Anything that was producing war things and we even had a weekend up at Mannum where shearers up there were

producing, I don't know, they were parts for machine guns or tanks or something and so then we had that. And then of course Owen went off and I didn't see or hear anything of him again until well after the

29:00 war and I became the Matron of the Port Adelaide Casualty and he was assistant town clerk next door, so that was that.

So the handsome sailor disappeared out of your life?

Yes, well only for that time and then he turned up again.

So how long were you selling war bonds for?

Well we had ten days. We used to visit two places. The first place we ever started off was Holder's and what they'd do was get all of these people, all the work would stop and we'd each make our little spiel

29:30 and this is to sell the war bonds you see and then they'd give us morning tea and if it was late they'd give us lunch. We went to Holder's, all the munition factories out at Enfield and out at Northfield out there and G & R Wills, at Kelvinator's, the woollen mills, and we even went as I said to Mannum because shearers were doing some, I don't know, they were doing tanks and we did that for a fortnight. And I lived out with friends of mine. I didn't have to go back

30:00 to the hospital.

Did you enjoy that time?

Well I hated the beginning of it because I said I wouldn't go. I'd never made a speech in my life and they said "It's an order, you just go," but I enjoyed it afterwards because on Friday nights we'd go in and Owen and I used to go, there was a dance place up the end of Rundle Street and of course there was no grog allowed so they used to take, get a bottle of lemonade or something or other, tip half out and fill it up with

30:30 something nice and alcoholic and you'd go in and they'd pass it because it was a cool drink bottle.

So you were smuggling alcohol into a Rundle Street dance club?

That's right and of course he had no transport so when the last train went, so this particular night the last train had gone and these friends of mine, had a place in Whitemore Square, so I said, "You'd better come home and sleep there." So I put him on the lounge,

31:00 it was a two-storey place, and I left a note on the, because the husband always used to get up and bring us breakfast in bed, so I just left a note on the stove, "There's a sailor in the lounge upstairs". But it took all those years afterwards but apart from that I didn't see him again until, oh, long after the war, when I'd been out of the army.

So back to Daws Road and you,

31:30 **because you were a theatre nurse they'd been able to start the theatre. Did they have an anaesthetist?**

Oh yes, they had doctors. There was no trouble with doctors. I mean they, see the surgeons and the people were honorary. I mean they were not in the army. They were made honorary members and they would come and work there.

And what sort of surgery were you doing at that time?

Well then,

32:00 nothing very interesting but there was only, then they built a theatre and it was very nice and that was only, the only time we really had casualties and these troops were back from the Middle East and there was a Western Australian group. And apparently some of the boys had gone AWOL [Absent Without Leave] in Perth, and so when they arrived here they were told they wouldn't get leave and

32:30 so apparently all of these, they were just ordinary troops, were having a discussion in one of the latrines and carrying on and the two officers of the watch who were on guard that night came and sort of tackled them or said something to them, so one of them grabbed his revolver and they were both shot. One was in the head and one in the abdomen, and it was night time and so, one of the specialists, old Sir

33:00 Elky Lendon was the one that used to do brain surgery. So we started off and he started with him and then the other one who had all these abdominal wounds and we had a special, two little special beds down there, and we had these lads down and of course most of his boys used to always pick up some girlfriends. We were told they wouldn't recover, these two boys,

33:30 they wouldn't recover because you couldn't get all the things out of either of them, and so the matron sent a message that these two wives of these men were coming and they'd had these two girlfriends visiting them, so we had a rush to get the two girls out the backdoor so the wives could come in. And that wedding invitation is the granddaughter of the girl that was my offsider in the theatre.

34:00 Yeah, so both the boys, they did die. But apart from that we only used to do running repairs out there.

Did you ever hear the full story behind that incident?

No. No, I mean they used to pass off your hands and you sort of didn't know, so I have no idea.

Were the boys conscious after the surgery? Did they regain consciousness?

Yes, they were, yes they were but anyway that was it.

34:30 And then another funny little boy, must have been, he was shot in the head too and came over and he was a West Australian, a little tough, and he recovered and he used to help me. He used to come and dry the instruments for me and so then they were moving on, this particular group, this unit, and suddenly I got this letter, a very dirty envelope, not a stamp on it, from this kid and

35:00 apparently he had been arrested because he'd been AWOL or all this business. And he was in the compound, the prison compound at Keswick and his troop was going to move onto New Guinea and he wasn't going because he'd misbehaved and so I went down to Keswick and I went to see the officer. And I said, "I believe you have this Private So-and-so here and I've had this letter from his mother in Perth.

35:30 He's only twenty", he was only a kid, "and I believe his troop is being shipped and he's not going." And I said, "If he's not on that train, the night troop train with the other boys," I said, "I'm taking it higher." So anyway they took him. He got out and went. I've never heard a word from him since but he was a real tough, but he was not going to go because he'd misbehaved.

And why was he, how did he know you? Why was he in hospital in the

36:00 **first place?**

Oh because he had, they'd had a fracas and he'd had this wound. He'd been shot. I don't know who shot him but someone did. He was a real little tough. Funny little boy and of course the thing was if I went to the pictures or where ever I went, I had to leave my picture seat or a telephone number because if anything happened in the night , I had to get up and do it. We didn't have anyone. That was in the very beginning but after that,

36:30 when they had the new theatre block, then we used to have people that could take over in the night.

Must have been a strain when you were selling war bonds or was that after that?

That was after, that was a holiday. When I had my war bonds I don't know who looked after the place when I was away but I had a fortnight with, after the first time was nervy. To get up before, there was a few hundred of these people and I'd never made a speech in my life and to have to get up

37:00 and talk to all these people but I enjoyed it afterwards.

Were you getting some leave at this time, able to see your family?

No, no I had leave. We were given leave when we got back and then dear old Miss Ranain, who was the matron out there at Daws Road then. She was a First World War sister and then my brother was getting final leave,

37:30 coming down and then I went to her and I said, "Could I have leave?" because I had to go to Hawker and she said, 'Yes," and so what we had to do to get to Hawker. We used to get the train to Carrieton and then my father would pick us up. So we started off and it rained, it absolutely rained and he couldn't get there, because you had to cross all these creeks, no bridges. And so he said, "The best

38:00 thing you can do, is to get a train, or a troop train, that goes on through Hawker, at Quorn and Hawker," so this is what we had to do, but we got off at Peterborough and stayed the night there and then we caught a troop train and got off at Hawker.

And how was your brother?

Oh he was fine. I was the one that was just back, having my leave and he was only just, he didn't get very far, he only got to the top of Northern Territory so

38:30 he was never in strife at all. But my youngest brother was in the air force to begin with and he was in a flight of planes that came back. They'd been bombing some of the islands and they were just arrived back in Darwin when the Japs bombed Darwin and they were trying to land and he said. "All these bombs were landing." And he said all they did was they leapt out of the plane into slit trenches. And then because, if you were a pilot you've got to have good eyesight apparently, and when

39:00 he had his medical his eyesight wasn't good and he transferred to the army and when I was in New Guinea he happened to be up there too. Not to begin with, because I started in Moresby and then Buna and then when I got up to Lae, a hospital ship to Lae, he was there. But as I said he couldn't come into the mess. We had to see each other out on the steps until when I was coming back. You only had a year up there in the tropics and you came back.

39:30 And that day the matron invited me to have lunch in the mess, but he was so overcome with all these nurses he couldn't eat, `cause he was only very young in those days.

It must have been nice for you to see your brothers and when you came back to Western Australia to see your aunt and uncle, to touch something that was of your old life?

Mmh. Yes, and of course when I got home to Hawker,

40:00 it's only a little town, not many people and of course they put on the big welcome and I had to get up on the stage, and of course you couldn't tell them anything. You're not allowed to give any information at all, "Oh we had a good trip" and da, da, da, and they presented me with something. I don't know what it was but they had a, I was able to speak to my parents about what happened, `cause they wouldn't sort of divulge anything.

40:30 And there was a great friend of my parents, he'd been in the 1914 war and he was most interested in what went on. But by and large you were not, you were just having a jolly time all the time.

So you were a local hero?

Oh well, I suppose. For about five minutes.

Five minutes was good enough. We'll stop there.

Tape 5

00:37 **So how did you cope with life in Hawker after everything you had been doing?**

I did never go back.

Oh, you didn't go back?

See I was on the permanent staff of the Adelaide Hospital. I only used to go back on holidays. And then from the army I went back to the Adelaide and I got fed up with that and I went and relieved for a month

01:00 at the Port Adelaide Casualty to see if I'd like it `cause the matron of the hospital department said if I liked it, I'd get it at the end of the year because the matron who'd been there hundreds of years was retiring. So because I was on the hospital department, so that I didn't loose my time, I transferred for a month down there and then I transferred to Meribah, which was a babies hospital and they used to have children, only up to three plus prems [premature born babies].

01:30 So I was a theatre sister there. I had a ward and I was a theatre sister there.

Did you enjoy that?

I loved it, I loved it with, I hated the prems because they had to be gravid, they wouldn't feed. You had to put a tube down their nose and you couldn't pick them up. But I had a ward that had sort of sick children and this baby was born down the south-east and we used to have

02:00 babies with hare lip, cleft palate, hare lip and cleft palate and the woman came from, I don't know, Mt Gambier somewhere and I was absolutely attached to this child. They are hideous to look at, to try and feed them their milk comes everywhere and I was on night duty one night and about two o'clock in the morning there was a ring at the front door bell and I went and there was a woman there with a shoe box. And I said, "Do you want something?" And she said "I've got a baby" and she'd

02:30 driven all the way from Port Pirie. Apparently her, she didn't know, whether she knew her daughter [was pregnant]. Anyway her daughter gave birth to this baby and because the locals, they didn't want them to know, she kept this baby in a shoe box by the wood fire. And I said, "Well, did you give it any fluid?" Yes, she gave it water and brandy and so the people wouldn't know, so in the middle of the night they leave with this baby,

03:00 the grandfather and mother and bring it down. It was a little girl.

What because it was illegitimate? Was that the problem?

Yes, yes, in those days it wasn't done to have a baby. Now they go and have them at the drop of a hat but it was a stigma for the whole family to this girl. And so of course we had this there, it was this little girl and then it got to the stage when I think it was three months and some woman came and she wanted a girl baby and we had this special crib. They used to

03:30 be in the funniest little things when we were looking after them, but if they were up for adoption we had this special crib all to sit up. We had these beautiful clothes and we'd put these babies in and take the people in and leave them. Anyway this little girl was adopted but the little boy with the, we did his hare lip in the theatre there, and I think eventually he went too, but the mother wrote to me. And then when Kate was born, I mean I didn't hear from the woman

04:00 after she left but it was in the paper when I had Kate and this beautiful set of baby clothes came from this woman and I don't think they were very well off but they lived down from, I looked after this kid.

What is cleft palate caused by? Because I seem to remember it being more common?

It's a defect in the development of the child. There's something in the development. I don't know if it was a gene or what, a bit they have that's missing.

I remember at school there were quite a few kids with cleft palates but maybe they get them,

04:30 **these days they get them fixed a lot earlier?**

Well they do and of course they're terrible to feed because there's this and it goes right and they snuffle and it comes out their nose and they really and even when their lips are repaired it's never, they always. I think they're better these days but in those days they just used to, this bit they just put it together and they always had

05:00 the full lips.

And how did you keep your prem babies warm?

Water bottles. You have three. You have two at the top and one at the foot because they were very small those babies and every hour you changed them round. So you'd start with a hot one and then, the same in Perth. We did the same there.

And what was the cut off point for a prem baby at that time? That could be kept alive?

05:30 Well I don't, not now. I mean they're much more sophisticated now. I don't know because only those that I had dealings with all survived but they would be a month, six weeks premature but I don't know anything beyond that. It was the same in Perth where, when I did my infant welfare, we had prems there. And this is the old sister who became the military matron eventually, if she went off duty and a prem died

06:00 you had committed murder. She used to carry on. I mean they were very, and we didn't have the things that you could, we used to gravid. We used to put a thing down their throat and put their milk in because they couldn't suck and we used to do it through their nose actually. I used to hate doing that because I used to think if I get it in a lung that will be the end of the baby.

And it was a birthing hospital also?

Where was this? Meribah? No.

Just taking care of?

It was

06:30 a children's, it was a smaller affair than the children's hospital, yeah.

And was that a common thing that babies would arrive in shoe boxes?

I don't know. There were lots of babies there that, well there were a number but how they arrived I don't know. It was only this particular one that I knew. I don't know how they arrived, but that the thing that annoys me so much now that Meribah then was taken, when it gave up having children, it closed as a hospital with children,

07:00 it became part of the Queen Elizabeth and it was an abortion hospital. So all these girls would come over there to be aborted and I thought that was absolutely horrendous.

Did you have or what was the, what was the procedure if a woman couldn't go through with a birth or was it that she just had to go through with it?

No, oh no, only at the Adelaide in the "gynie" [gynaecological] wards, as we used to call them.

07:30 I mean if they had a heart condition that they would be jeopardised or they couldn't go the full time, then they would be terminated but not now. You can get a termination at the cough of a hat. I mean to terminate a sort of a child in those days, the pregnancy, the mother was fit, well that was sort of frowned upon.

Different times weren't they?

And of course

08:00 you see any abortion done would be in these, Sarah Gampsee, if a young girl got pregnant she would know someone who would know someone and they'd go off and they'd be fixed for an amount of, but it wouldn't be under.

They weren't always the safest operation?

Oh no, of course it wasn't. Because there were these women, I mean whether, what their asepsis was

one wouldn't know. And what methods they used I wouldn't know.

08:30 **And how long did you stay in this hospital for?**

Meribah? I was there I suppose for eight months and then the matron ship at Port Casualty became vacant and I applied and I got the job. So I went down but the first time, when I went there for leave for a month, because this sister was going off first of all, and the old matron had been there from when she finished her training and there were only two, only two.

09:00 The matron and the sister were there and although the door used to close at nine o'clock at night, anyone could ring that doorbell and the matron would get up. Didn't matter because there was no Queen Elizabeth Hospital, there was only the Adelaide and of course it was a big industrial place and shipping place. And so it came my turn to have the night off and I said, "Good night, Matron. I'm going home. I won't see you to Sunday." She said, "You are what?"

09:30 She said, "You sleep back here every night." And I said, "I've never done that before and it's my day off and I'm going home." So dear old Doctor Cherry was the doctor. He was the local bloke in charge and she rang him up and said, "A dreadful thing's happened. Sister wants to sleep away at night." Anyway I did and from then everybody did when you had your day off.

It was almost as if a nurse's morality was tied very closely to her

10:00 **work?**

That's right, yes. You didn't have any outside interests or not supposed to.

It's almost like being a nun?

Well just about but I'm afraid we weren't.

And when did you, when was it that you were sent to New Guinea?

Ah well I, when did I get back? We got back in February `42 and

10:30 in October `43 the matron called me up and she said, "You're going to be sent to a casualty clearing station." Of course a casualty clearing station always has a theatre sister because it's mostly theatre work. And she said, "Who would you like to take? You have to have an offsider." There was one particular, the girl I wanted, was dear old

11:00 Jean who was one of our POWs, it was her sister, and I said, "I'd like have her." And she said, "Oh you can't, she's being sent to the," - this is the Matron of South Australia - "she's been sent to Alice Springs," so she said 'I'm going to send Probus." Now Probus came to me, because every month I'd have a new sister to come and learn how to do the theatre. And this girl, Probus, came and she was twenty one. She'd trained at the Children's Hospital and she was young.

11:30 I suppose I was thinking I was old and she used to dance around, whirling her finger and she was always out the back chatting with the corporal and little private I had. I had a sergeant, a private and a corporal on my staff and she said, "Oh Probus." And I said, "I'm not going to take her." "You'll have to take her." And we ended up the greatest of friends and she eventually, we went to England together. I came home to marry Owen. She went to Canada and married over

12:00 there. Her daughter's my god-daughter, `cause unfortunately she died some time ago, so that's how. So we were supposed to go to Milne Bay, to this casualty clearing station and when we got to Brisbane, as I said, I was walking along the street and I saw this kid with a colour patch [shoulder-borne indicator of unit] up and I said, "Are you going up to the 4th Casualty Clearing Station?" And he said, "Oh no, we're just down." And so then we ended up at Port Moresby, to the hospital there and

12:30 then we flew over the Kokoda with this Yank, which scared the daylights out of me and we formed the 8th AGH [Australian General Hospital] there. And from Buna we shifted to Lae and then of course, my twelve months was up so I came back. Came back to South Australia and then I was sent off to Baulkham Hills, which is just out from Parramatta. They'd taken over this boys school there and that was an orthopaedic unit and that was, and the

13:00 mother of the invitation I've just had to the wedding, she was there too. And war ended when we were in Sydney, so we went in to Sydney and we were absolutely mobbed. We had to leave and come home, the crowd… We were danced, we were thrown, we were hugged, we were, everybody went absolutely mad.

Because you had your nurses' uniform on?

Yes, we had too. Yes, of course and there was this orthopaedic ward there and

13:30 there was one boy that had lost a arm. There was another boy that had lost a leg and an eye, and so they ordered taxis, all these boys and away they went. And this poor boy without the leg and the eye, and he came back and he'd lost his eye and he'd lost his artificial leg! They'd had a wonderful time. And from there I was sent back to Northfield. I think that was 101 and

14:00 my eldest brother then was out of the army and he was in charge of Elder Smith at Broken Hill. And he

rang me up and he said, “They want a theatre sister at the Broken Hill Hospital, why don’t you apply for it?” I wasn’t out of the army, but I thought we’d soon get out because the war was ended. So I applied for this job and all the girls out there knew that I had, and I was on night duty and the phone went and I answered the phone and this

14:30 voice said, “The Matron of the Broken Hill Hospital here. Would you like to accept the position?” And I said, “What about pulling the other leg?” I thought it was all these girls in the mess, and it was the matron. However in the end I didn’t take it. I went back to the Adelaide.

Just to go back a bit when you first went to New Guinea, what had you been told about what to expect over there? Had you heard anything about?

15:00 Nothing, no.

You weren’t given any given any information about what you were flying into, what you were going to?

No, no, no, no. We were just going to the 4th Casualty Clearing Station, which was Milne Bay. And then as I said we ended up at Moresby at the 8th AGH and when we got to that hospital we didn’t even have any surgical things there. It was a tropical disease hospital and I had a, and it was all tented. We lived in tents

15:30 and I had this tent of seventy boys with skins because the skin diseases were terrible up there. And we had no fresh vegetables. We had no fresh anything to give these kids except we used to have lime juice, mix it up. Some of them were so terribly ill with these dreadful skins you’d never seen in your life.

Fungal problems?

16:00 Yes, and this one boy, he was just about to have his twenty-first birthday and I really thought we’d lose him. All the skin was off his feet and oh he was terrible. And of course we were in tents, no air conditioning in the tropics so I had him stripped and I had a sheet over him and a bucket of water with a fruit tin with holes in it and we used to water him, over this sheet to try and keep him cool. He got better, he really did, but I really did think, I thought he would die.

16:30 He always had such a high temperature.

What did you have to combat those kinds of problems?

What did you have? Nothing, there was no air conditioning. The only ones that had tents were the ones that had that disease caused by the mites up there and a lot of those boys, they died. They didn’t get well but we were just tented.

You didn’t have antibiotics?

Well they had some but

17:00 not like they have now. But antibiotics wouldn’t have done anything. It was a skin thing and it wasn’t one of those infections that you need that for, but, oh, it was quite fun. But then the patients complained, “There’s no light in the shower room.” There was a shower room and I couldn’t make out why and then we found out that they’d taken the globe and they’d been to the engineers and they had this long line of cable

17:30 and out in the bush they had a two-up school and this was what they were using the light for.

Priorities.

Yes, the Australian really could turn his hand to anything, no doubt about it.

And had you, when you did arrive there and you were working at that hospital, had you heard much about what had happened at the Kokoda Track?

Oh yes, I mean they’d long passed that. By this time they were further

18:00 up the coast and Buna there was a big battle. Once they got over the Kokoda it was Moresby and then they were at Buna and there was a big battle at Buna. And this young officer bloke, someone always used to turn up and take you out on a picnic, and he said, “I’ll take you through to where the battle is,” and there were all these bones and

18:30 bits and pieces round. Well then our hospital was shifting from Buna, going to Lae.

This is just recently after the battle?

Yes, well, as the soldiers moved on, well so the hospitals followed them.

So who’s idea of a picnic was it to take you to a killing field?

Well he asked me whether I would like to, and I said I would and so then we had to move up to Lae and so we were going to go on this hospital ship and of course there was no jetty so you had to go out in lighters and go

19:00 up there.

In lighters? They're small?

They're small boats and up the stairs sort of on the side of the ship. Well, of course we were absolutely the colour of that with Atebrin, cause that's what we had to take and we had soldier's hats with the side turned down. We had grey tops, grey pants, soldier's boots, and gaiters. And of course on the top, on the ship,

19:30 it was the Wongalara, I think, the hospital ship and there were these sisters in their grey uniforms and their red capes and their beautiful white veils and right colours and these two orderlies were watching us and one looked at the other and he said, "Gawd, I wouldn't give you two bob for the mob of them." We looked absolutely shocking, but it was marvellous. Breakfast the first morning they said, "Now you can have anything you'd like," and I said, "I'll have liver and bacon," and I got it.

20:00 **Well, that's not so bad.**

Well, it was the first decent food we had. See, there was nothing up there.

Well, what were you feeding the soldiers who were sick?

Well it was all tinned and nothing, you had nothing. There were no vegetables growing. Everything came out of a tin, the meat, the cordial.

Where did they get their Vitamin C from?

Oh I don't know. They didn't I suppose. I have no idea.

And what kind of state were these soldiers in

20:30 **because conditions were very difficult, the fighting conditions were very difficult in New Guinea?**

Oh yes. It was only in the short while that we were in Port Moresby that I had anything to do with boys that were wounded and I didn't sort of have any of those that were desperately sick. Oh they were always cheerful. Even one boy lost his two legs and he had a couple of things on his knees and he'd hop around the place. If you had

21:00 a dance, he'd dance on his little things on his knees. They were always cheerful. They were, there was only one boy that was ever and that was at Daws Road and these two boys came in with gunshot wounds to the back and one of them eventually married a girl I'd nursed with. She wasn't in the army but she eventually married him and he was always

21:30 with it and didn't mind, but this other boy just died. He was engaged and this girl would come and sit with him but he just died.

Shot in the back, that's unusual?

Yeah, it meant that, yes, well they were crippled, they couldn't walk. And a gunshot wound, yes, I mean they often used to, they'd be shot anywhere because not just, they spray the bits and pieces. But there was the other boy, in a wheelchair

22:00 and being active and this boy just turned his face to the wall and that was it.

Gave up?

Yeah.

Did it ever get on top of you?

I mean it was no good letting it get, you just had to go ahead. But there's this little curly Mern, that had lost both his lower legs and he had pads and I mean he'd ask you to dance and he'd be up to your belly button, getting around but it was different. Personality

22:30 has a lot I think to do with that.

And did you feel like you were out of your depth with the tropical diseases?

No, only when I got it myself.

Oh did you?

Yes. When we came back you had to take [anti-]malaria [drugs], you had to take the Atebrin for three months after you came back and I came back from New Guinea. I came back in October because it was just the twelve months and one of the doctors that was working in the lab

23:00 had been a patient and I was sort of very friendly with him, and I sort of felt pretty off, so I went down and I said, "On the sly, do a blood test," which he did and nothing showed up and then I was on duty one day and I had a rigor [muscle reaction, sense of chilliness, shiver], that's what they have with a

temperature. You know (demonstrates) and I went down and there I had malaria. So I had the treatment and I only ever had one relapse and that

23:30 was when we were, I was being transferred to this hospital in Baulkham Hills and I had two other South Australian girls with me and I arrived over there and I said to the matron, “I’ll have to report sick,” and she was furious, “Sending somebody who’s not fit,” And I had malaria again. Only twice. I’ve never had anything since.

So the Atebrin didn’t really, did it, make a difference?

Well it must have done but whether, you could have been bitten but at the time you didn’t develop malaria but it could stay and then sort of, the same as

24:00 when you had a relapse. You hadn’t been bitten again but you could, it just used to turn up again.

So Matron wasn’t too sympathetic?

No, she was furious, absolutely livid.

And when you were in New Guinea, did you have spare time at all? Did you have time off?

Oh yes we used to have time off and the thing was, of course, you always had to go out in pairs and it was always handy to have an officer who had

24:30 a jeep and we used to go, there’s a river up there which was all right when it wasn’t raining. Because then it would be an absolute torrent coming down but we had a swimming pool out there. We used to go out there and the boys would organise an, sort of an eating. I don’t know where they got, used to get it from or what they used to do and we used to have a dance. We’d have a dance in our mess and I know that when we first went there, over to Buna,

25:00 there were only a few girls and we hadn’t a matron and we hadn’t a staff and we hadn’t any patients. This hospital was just setting up. And he was a terrible old bird, the colonel in charge, and our mess huts we were sort of in a compound with a fence all the way around. And I’d met this little Yank boy in Brisbane and chatted with him and there were two guards on the gate, of course,

25:30 and this young guard came down and he said, “There’s a Yank at the gate to see you.” And of course they didn’t think much of the Yanks and I said, “Well let him come down.” And it was this young kid and he’d bought this bottle of champagne all the way, he’d been on leave from Sydney, and so he said, “We’re having” - it must have been going to be Christmas, that’s right - “we’re going to have a Christmas dance. Would you and your friends like to come?” So I asked the CO and he said, “No way, you’re not fraternising

26:00 with the Americans.” And of course this other hospital was across the way with the matron who had been a sister at the Adelaide Hospital. We went over and we said to her, “We’re not allowed to go and so and so,” so she came over and gave him rounds of the kitchen and we went off. We had a lovely time at this dance with these Americans, all young lads, years younger than we were of course. They were an air force squadron.

But the Aussie blokes weren’t too keen on the Americans?

No, I mean I suppose

26:30 they didn’t but that was the only time and the only other time, of course, that this [Australian] air force man that had been on this tour with us, selling these War Bonds, he used to say, “You never want to get in a plane with an American. They’re the most terrible pilots. They don’t do a cockpit check. They don’t do this, they don’t do the other thing.” So when they said we were shifting to Buna and we had to be out at the airstrip at Port Moresby at six a.m. in the morning and we were all kitted up,

27:00 covered so the mosquitoes wouldn’t bite us, and along comes this Yank and he had these trousers with bare legs and sleeves rolled up and it was an old Doug[las aircraft] and in those days slanted, so when you got in you sort of hung on until the thing got itself up into the air. And of course, we had to cross the Kokoda Mountains and they are terrible. They can only cross when there is no cloud. Even today, if there is cloud they have to stop.

27:30 And I just clung and you had to sit sideways. There were only seats running each side and they were tearing down and you could just about touch these mountains. I thought all my birthdays had come at once.

Oh so you did get frightened at least once?

That was the only time. I was terrified.

And how was Buna? What did you arrive to there?

There was nothing, nothing. There was nothing there. We used to swim and we’d have a dance in the mess and we’d go down to the beach and

28:00 you’d just work.

And still tropical diseases were the main problem?

That's all we had there. That unit and when we were there we only had tropical diseases. Skins and tropical diseases, pneumonias, all of those things. And of course those boys that got some of those tropical diseases they didn't survive. They were terribly sick.

How many nurses were running that place?

Well eventually I think we had about twenty but to begin with there were only a few.

28:30 And of course the other thing we had were rats. You see when the Japanese, they landed in New Guinea and they didn't put the [quarantine] discs on the hawsers [ship's mooring ropes] and when we were there in Port Moresby this girl Probus and I were rooming together, no, we were only in tents. And we had a rope between the two tent poles to put our towels on.

29:00 You had to be under mosquito nets and I heard, if you left a handkerchief down, you came in the morning and it would be chewed. If you left any drop of food on yourself in the morning there'd be a big hole. And I heard this carry on, squeak, squeak, and I put the torch up and here are these two rats doing a dance across our bath towels which are up there. They were hideous and when we got to Buna the orderlies on night would set traps

29:30 and they would see who could catch the most a night. And they'd put it down, bang, down, bang and they were everywhere, everywhere.

You would have had to have been very clever with your food, your food storage?

Well you couldn't. Well I mean that was up to the staff that looked after the food but you couldn't, our families would send us cakes and various things and you couldn't leave it out. Anything that had, even if you spilt some

30:00 cordial on yourself, it would be eaten.

You've got the mosquitoes on the one hand and the rats on the other?

That's right and I think I preferred the mosquitoes.

Was there points when you were wishing you were just back in Australia?

No, no.

What was it that was in any way pleasant about being there?

Well it wasn't pleasant but you had your friends and you were busy doing a job that you liked doing and

30:30 no, of course we all hated getting out when the time came and when you had to come back from New Guinea we said, "Oh, this is the pits coming back to work in Australia again." There was something about it. It was a carefree life.

And adventurous I suppose?

Adventurous, it's different, yes.

And you would have met quite a few interesting characters?

Yes.

There was mention of a squadron leader who had a bit of a racket going with alcohol?

Well yes.

31:00 Cookie, I'll never forget him and I've read a book written by an air force man and he was scathing about him because he said his plane had ditched in Timor and he and his co-pilot had been taken off in an American submarine. Well this man writes his book and he left his gunner and the two other people, the gunner and whatever the

31:30 boy was, and they'd been wounded and he just walked off and left them in the jungle.

This guy Cookie?

Yeah, and then of course his squadron was down at Milne Bay and he spent all the time in Port Moresby and you see he'd be at me, "Now I'll get a lugger today. Now get some of the girls." `Cause we had no food, "Would they like ham? Would they like this?" And what he was doing, he was flying, we didn't have

32:00 any PXs [stores]. You couldn't buy anything but the Yanks did and he used to buy cigarettes from the PX, Yanks, and he even bought down tyres for his wife's car and he'd load them on his kite and he'd send it down to Townsville and then he'd load on the grog and come back and flog it. Well, of course I didn't know this until afterwards and just before I was to come home our matron was going to fly to Madang with

32:30 one of the generals of the Australian Army and of course you couldn't go alone and Barbara, this friend of mine, was engaged to this Australian boy, and he was in a unit in Lae. And so she said, "Would you like to have this trip to Lae with the general and myself? We're going in." I think the general had a bit of a yen for her, in this plane, and so of course we were delighted and so we were flying and I went up to speak to these two pilots you see, and

33:00 I said, "What squadron do you belong to?" And they told me and I said "Oh" and I mentioned his name. "Don't talk about him. He's been dismissed and sent back to Australia." And apparently the Americans caught up with him, making all this money and he got ripped off.

He got found out in the end?

He got found out, yeah.

And what was your, I mean you got malaria. Apart from that, which is very serious,

33:30 **how did you keep your health good given that you didn't have fresh fruit and vegetables or were you getting snuck things?**

No, no, there was just nothing and you'd, lunch time you'd come off and there'd be, they used to have tinned butter and we used to call them whitebait. We used to call them "silver something or others," I've forgotten, "silver fish" and at lunch time it would be hot and our mess hut was a sort of a shed.

34:00 It would be an up roof. Just half way up it would be covered in and then just posts and this oily butter would be floating around and oh it was dreadful. And even when, I've got the menu somewhere, we went to the, in Port Moresby, to the local eating place and the menu was so and so but everything was out of a tin, everything.

What about the locals? What kind of foods were they eating?

Well I didn't see any locals. I mean we used to love to get out to, the

34:30 natives, the New Guineans used to have gardens and they used to grow stuff which we used to like to get hold of. You could eat some of the greenery stuff and they used to eat it and I suppose there were not many locals in Port Moresby. I think because most had left. That sort of became the headquarters of the army.

Most of them went bush?

No, went down to Queensland.

Oh the native people?

No, the Australians or the English or whatever. No, the native people were

35:00 always there. They never, but I've been back. I started a Soroptimist club New Guinea, in Lae and I've been back. I've been back there three times since.

So it didn't disappoint you the way that Malacca did?

No, no, but when I went back of course there was just nothing, there was nothing, I even, everything was changed. The only thing was you go and the cemeteries

35:30 are just the same.

And did a lot of the men get buried in New Guinea?

Oh yes, there's a cemetery in Port Moresby and there's a very big one in Lae. I don't know there must be one in Madang but I haven't been up that far.

And so you came to the end of your tour, I suppose, and it was time for you to come back to Australia and you weren't too happy about that. I guess life must have seemed a bit boring?

36:00 It was absolutely uninteresting. It really was, except of course I was in Sydney and there was always something you could do there. There was the harbour to go on and so on and so forth.

What happened to this Owen man? What happened there?

Who? Owen? Oh I didn't see him. I didn't see him from the time I finished spruiking because he went off. See he was on the ship that sank and then apparently after he went, the navy, he was

36:30 sent off to England to bring out a ship. The British gave us a battleship so I didn't see him. Not again until and the only reason I saw him, after I went to Meribah, this Nancy, the youngest sister of my friend Nell, she trained. She was on the staff of the Adelaide Hospital and she rang up and she said, "The Adelaide Hospital is going to have their ball,

37:00 which is to be in the Palais opposite, would you like to come?" `Cause I was going out with her brother Don, had gone out with him for years before, from when I went to the Adelaide.

You don't stand still long, do you?

No, and I said, “Yes” and she said, she didn’t have a friend at the time and she said, “Well, do you think your brother Dean would come with me?” And I said, “Oh well, I’ll ask him.” So I asked him and oh yes, he’d come and Dean had a little single seater car and they lived at Largs Bay and I was at the Port Cas [Port Adelaide Casualty] by this time.

37:30 I was at Meribah, that’s right, and so she rang me up again and she said, “There’s a girl from Queensland here, she’d like to come too. Do you think you could get someone else?” And I said, “Well, I don’t know anyone else.” I said, “Oh yes, Largs Bay, there’s an Owen Bradwell lives at Largs Bay, I’ll ring him up.” So I rang, I looked in the telephone book and rang him up and I said, “Would you like to come to the Adelaide Hospital Ball?” Oh yes, he’d like to come and I said

38:00 “Oh Dean will pick you up and pick me up at Meribah.”

So you hadn’t spoken to him for how many years?

No, I hadn’t spoken to him for years and years.

Then you just ring him up out of the blue and ask?

Yes, yes, so then we arrive up and of course Don lived at Dulwich and so Nancy and Don and oh she was out doing her mid [wifery course], out at Rose Park, so this girl and Don and Nancy were at the Palais and we went in you see and the band started up and

38:30 Owen said, “Have a dance?” And I said, “Oh I’m not with you,” and he said, “You invited me.” So that was that, so I had to get up and have the first dance with him, so of course then Don wasn’t happy and that was that.

That was that?

That was that and so then of course, you see, when I went down to the Port Casualty that was next door to the Port Adelaide Town Hall and he was the assistant town clerk and he used to come in of a lunchtime and eat his lunch.

It was meant to be?

Mmh, but then you see I decided

39:00 I would go off to England for a year, so away I went and when I came back he was on the wharf, so that was that.

He sounds like he enjoyed your adventurous spirit?

Yes, he did and we did a lot of tripping, the two of us afterwards. We went to Honolulu and first of all we went back to Singapore and Malaya and

39:30 all over there and then the Threoptimists, the international meeting was going to be in Honolulu, it was America’s, cause there are four. There is America, Australia, Great Britain and Europe are the four sort of federations and we came back from Western Australia and he wasn’t very well and he had been a smoker. He had given it up, so anyway I said to him, “You must go off and have a chest

40:00 x-ray.” And I was working with the geri’s [geriatic patients] at a local doctors in Port Adelaide and he came back and said, “I went along and had a chest x-ray today.” So I said to Dr Wilson, “Will you ring up and find out the report?” So he did and he said, “In the hospital straight away,” and he had to have a lung removed.

We’ll leave it there.

Tape 6

00:39 **Betty, would you say that on the whole you had an enjoyable time in New Guinea?**

Yes, interesting, more than enjoyable, yes.

Why do you say interesting?

Well the people, the country, the trees, the different

01:00 atmosphere but it was living uncomfortably actually, but I mean I enjoyed it, yes, as much.

Did you have a good sense of camaraderie?

Well I hope so. I seemed to have a lot of friends and we used to have a good time. We used to make, although you’d sort of have your friends, you’d stick with them more than, everyone was friendly but you had a special group you’d go out with.

01:30 I think it was the same in everyday life. You have your friends.

And what were your most favoured things? Were they the dances at officers' mess or?

Well that was the only thing we had. There was nothing else. Oh the pictures. You'd take a tin or a chair along, the open-air pictures and that were the only two entertainments there were.

And what kind of films were they showing?

Oh I don't even remember now.

02:00 American I presume, on a whole. It was open. They'd just have a screen stuck out in the middle of the jungle and you'd bring along a seat and sit down.

Was there any alcohol available?

No, it was dry. As I say there was no alcohol at all unless you could meet up with a Yank. We used to brew it actually.

Can you tell me about that?

Well what we used to do, was you used to get

02:30 friendly with someone who was in the air force and get a bit of pure alcohol, you know they use in planes. And we used to get fruit juice and things like that and we'd just mix it up and that would make your drink.

What sort of process did it have to go through or did you just drink it like that?

We just left it for a day or two and then drank it. No, there was no grog [alcohol], it was quite dry.

Do you remember having much to do with the fuzzy-wuzzies [natives who helped the allies] or the indigenous people?

03:00 No, only a couple of times. I went out with an officer and one knew this guard and we went to this village and that was when we were in Lae and we went out and apparently he knew one of the villagers. Whether he'd been helping with the army or not I don't know, but we went out and had a look

03:30 through the village, their gardens and all their little kids and their houses. Only ever once that I went out to but apart from that we had nothing to do with them.

What do you remember about the way they were living?

Well, they had these sort of huts made out of the usual stuff and there were always a few chickens or something running around the place and always a lot of little children. They were always happy, chattering people

04:00 and since the only dealings I've done with them since that was when I started the Soroptimist club in Lae and there were some New Guinean women that became members and each club I chartered I'd give them a gavel with a little silver thing on it for their meetings and I had been back some time and I had this letter to say ,"Please could I send another one. The president's children had been playing with it in the

04:30 backyard and it was lost." But I had not a great deal to do with them, at all, and we didn't really go to their villages only one this one occasion that I went.

Were you aware of the army having more to do with them?

No, we really wouldn't know what the army were doing and I mean the men never used to speak of what they were doing. They never used to say a word about what they were doing or anything.

05:00 **And being a surgical, being surgically trained and being used to surgical?**

I found it very uninteresting to be with the 8th AGH because we had no surgery at all. As I said I had a skin ward in Buna and then when we shifted to Lae our hospital wasn't established. We were sitting there without even any patients. We were just there as a unit.

05:30 "Staging" they used to call it and by that time my twelve months was up and I came home so I never ever saw the 8th AGH as a working hospital after we left Buna.

And what did you do for the time that you were there?

Oh we just slept and went for picnics, went for a swim. There was a beach. You could go to the sea, swim in the sea there, the pictures at night. There was just nothing. I mean you just hung around, as you do anywhere.

06:00 **Doesn't sound like the kind of lifestyle that appeals to you?**

Well I suppose I enjoyed it at the time. I mean you're better when you're occupied. I'm sure you are but I wasn't there that long because from there it was I; and my brother was in Lae; and Hoagie, this friend of mine, she's still going and she was, she eventually married him; [and] this eccentric doctor bloke and

he used to take us out on picnics and he

06:30 had a jeep and we'd be roaring around the countryside. And that was the only time I was able to hobnob with my brother, because he was only a corporal, this is my youngest brother Al, because he wasn't allowed to, well he'd come to the mess and you could sit out in the brothers' tent but Hoagie and her friend used to join us, so that's what we used to do when he had time off, cause he was in the Signals up there.

And he was in Lae? Where was he actually?

He was in Lae.

07:00 I don't know, it was just around the area of Lae where his unit was and I don't even remember what his unit was now but he was there. I came back and he was still there when I came back. He came back later.

Were you concerned about him after you'd left?

No. I mean it was no good being concerned about them. I wasn't concerned about him at all, even when he was in the air force. I mean for one thing you didn't ever talk about what happened and I mean all those letters, my mother she's

07:30 kept every one, but there's no mention of the war or what we did. The only thing that I think the last letter I wrote and said to her, when the war started, "not to worry, everything's all right." For one thing when you first went in the army all your letters were censored, so that anything that you put in that was not supposed to be there would be cut out. But after a certain time you were on

08:00 your honour not to put anything in that was appertaining to what was going on, so you never did. I just used to say whether we'd been for a picnic, or we'd been for a swim or we did that and the other thing and that was all there was to it.

So you were talking about the happy moments?

Well yes, I mean you couldn't say anything about, as I said there was only that last letter I wrote and said "don't worry" and I didn't mention anything

08:30 about it. But one thing I did tell them, `cause they had not one idea where I was going but a great friend of theirs was a Doctor Hill and he had a hobby which was making Malacca canes and so of course, when I arrived at Malacca I said, "I'm not allowed to say where we are, we're settled here, but if you remember Dr Hill's hobby, you'll know where I am." So that's how they knew where I was, cause he was in Malacca.

09:00 **As an officer, sometimes in units officers were the people who had to censor the mail, did you ever have to do that?**

No, I never did. In our unit the 2IC [second in command], there was the matron and the 2IC, she used to do the censoring in our unit and then when after you'd been there nobody bothered. But the officers always censored and that's the other thing I hated about

09:30 that Cookie man because he used to censor his boys' letters and he used to cut these bits out and bring them and he'd read them out which I thought was absolutely demeaning, especially if they were boys who were married.

What parts was he cutting out if it was pertaining to the war? Was he just randomly cutting out pieces?

Cutting out bits and pieces randomly I should think because they never used to mention the war but

10:00 I think that he probably thought it might be upsetting the wives. I have no idea but he always used to cut out these bits. I despised the man, very much.

So your brother was still left there and at some point after the war were you able to discuss where you'd been and what you'd done together?

Well we did but I mean it wasn't,

10:30 I suppose we thought it wasn't very exciting. Actually he's the only brother I've got that's alive because Mary's husband was my eldest brother and he was also in the army but Dean, my youngest one, is still alive. But we never discuss it. We didn't much then. He was always very gay and full of beans and nothing seemed to worry him.

Would it interest you to know what his experiences were, retrospectively? Would you like to have known?

11:00 Well only if he liked, no, not really. I mean I knew where he was all the time and I knew which unit he was in and that he was well and that was all as sort of long as they were still going and that was all that sort of concerned you. No, he really was lucky. Getting back to Darwin when it was bombed, they were just landing. I mean he was on the planes up there and but he wasn't in any trouble other than

11:30 that and he never talks about it. You just don't bother. We talk about the funny things that happened when we meet, we girls, but you don't sort of dwell on the, I try not to.

Is it the kind of thing that you'd discuss with your children?

No, well Katie's read some, she's typed out some of the speeches

12:00 I've made and I mean I sort of just say a bit about that, the leaving and the bombing and how the last two to cross over the causeway were two British pipers piping Bluebells Over The Border and no, not very much. Because when you're talking to people you don't put all the grisly [gory] bits in. You don't do that. I mean

12:30 all the talking I've done around the place - I just make it light and airy.

That's seems to be a common phenomena amongst World War 11?

It is with everybody, yeah.

And you think that's because people aren't interested or it's not worth going over?

Well I suppose, well I suppose people are interested in the gory

13:00 bits and some of the horrible things but you sort of put it behind you. I mean they might be interested but I don't think it needs to be told and the girls who were POWs, I thought that they did a very good job. Betty Jeffries for instance. They told it but smoothed it over. It must have been absolutely horrendous

13:30 for those girls and then Patty Gunther, she's still alive, a friend of mine in Sydney, and she never talks about it, never talks about it.

When you arrived back in Australia did you go straight to New South Wales, to Sydney?

No, we arrived in Perth, Fremantle and from

14:00 Fremantle we had the time in the camp hospital and then we just came home.

And after that time, when were you discharged?

Well that was in 92. I was discharged in 1945.

And what were

14:30 **you doing after you came back, in between those two points?**

After I was discharged?

Before you were discharged?

Well I came back, I was at Northfield. When I was discharged from the army and then I went straight back to the Adelaide. And I arrived back at the Adelaide and of course the matron, Miss Daw, who had been the matron, had retired and there was this other woman was the matron and she was a "lily white scholar," we called them. She had won this thing to go to

15:00 London and do this course. Miss Scrimgore, she was the Matron, and did I tell you this? I think I did. Anyway I was sort of, not a junior but a middle sister and when I arrived back I was the only sister of all of the dozens who left the Adelaide Hospital to go back, so I was now a senior sister and had to sit at the… The Matron used to sit at the table

15:30 with four senior sisters, eight of them, on each side and of course, some of these sisters had been there when I trained, when I went there as a nurse and some of them I didn't even like when I was nursing. I didn't even like them now and I was down there and this one sitting on the matron's right had looked down the table and said, to me, I probably said this before, the other lass, "Pieman, all of those men in the Army and you couldn't catch one."

16:00 Because I was back you see. And I said, "Sister, just like you I'm very fussy," `cause she was an old maid. So I couldn't stand it. It was: not one of my friends, not one came back and so this is when I went to the Matron of the Hospitals Department and sort of had the trial at the Port Casualty and

16:30 then went to Meribah and then took over as the Matron and then I was Matron of the Port Cas until I took time off and went to Sydney and did my training, had four months doing that and then I came back and I took another year off and I went to England and then I came back and then I got married. And I took some time off but I hadn't been at home very long when the sister who was with me, she became the Matron, a new one came in and this new one couldn't stand

17:00 it and the doctor rang me up in great distress and said, "They're going off, will you come back?" So I used to trot backwards and forwards and then at sixty you had to retire. I went back again to be the matron and at sixty you retired, so I came home. And I was lying down reading one afternoon and there was a knock at the door and this doctor from the Cherry Clinic came and knocked on the door and said,

"You can't be lying on your arse here, come and

17:30 work for us." So at sixty I went and became the doctor at the Cherry Clinic in Port Adelaide and then I was going to England, again, and going over to Canada and so I said, "Well, I'm going off" and they said, "Will you come back?" And I said, "No, I've had it." So that was it, so I didn't go back again.

It sounds like the hospital system was regimented and quite a military sort of fashion with the hierarchy

18:00 **not being able to eat with the?**

It was always, you mean in the army?

In the, at the Royal Adelaide?

Yes, there were always the seniors and the juniors and then you had the staff nurses and then the nurses.

Where did the staff nurses sit in the pecking order?

They had their own table, they sat at their own table. I mean sometimes, a staff nurse always worked in a ward under a sister unless sometimes when that sister had leave

18:30 that staff nurse would take over and run the ward. I mean I went back as a staff nurse. Nell and I both went back as staff nurses to begin with and I always worked in the theatre. I worked in Number One theatre and there were two theatres at Adelaide, the other one was called Number Two and all they did ears, nose and throat, so she worked in that theatre. We were always theatre sisters.

What were the main things being done after war in hospitals

19:00 **in Australia? You seem to have travelled around a little bit. Were there many hangovers from the war? Still things that needed fixing? Returned service people?**

No, not many because there were still the repatriation hospitals where they would go and after I left the Adelaide, of course, I just went to Port Cas. Oh I did go back to the Adelaide and I worked in the cardiac

19:30 clinic there and I saw the first open heart operation done in the Adelaide.

Can you tell me about that?

Well it wasn't one of these tremendous ones but it was a sort of a vital valve thing and there were three of us worked in the cardiac clinic, which meant you went around all day pushing one of these machines and going to take the cardiac traces on all the patients. And

20:00 Darcy Sutherland was the surgeon and so because we were the ones that would run the cardiographs from the patients and we were invited to watch and the first things they did were the micro-valves, putting the valves in. And it was absolutely up-market because the heart was stopped and the blood machine thing worked, very interesting.

Was that biggest medical development you think you saw in that time?

20:30 Well it was, because after that I sort of left and I haven't been back since but the things they do now are out of this world, especially that thing on the TV with the hospital in Melbourne that they show. The things they do now are just fantastic. `Cause that was really something because no-one had ever opened a heart before and they had to have this bypass machine so the heart was stopped and so on.

21:00 **Did you think the patient would survive?**

Oh they all survived. The only part I thought was really terrible was because they would have these sort of tubes down their throat and they'd still have them in when they regained sort of consciousness and that used to be terrible for them. They had to have them there for so long and then they rip them out but I thought that would be horrible.

Once again you didn't like the tubes down the throat?

No. I hated it and I'd hate it to be done

21:30 to me.

Babies and open heart surgery. So that kind of technology now is pretty taken for granted?

But it's much more sophisticated now, the things they do. They put bypasses in and they take veins out of their legs and put it in the heart. They do all sorts of things. This was really very minor, the first thing, just to put an artificial valve in this little place

22:00 but now what they do is, well I haven't been back to the theatre but I do watch when they have that hospital thing on the thing and the things they do are just absolutely fantastic I think.

Were you confident? I'm just imagining that not ever having seen this before this must have

been quite a, were you confident that it would succeed?

I don't think we were, we were just madly interested and to think

22:30 that this should be done and this marvel, we hoped that it would be all right but I think it was the surgeon who had to be confident or otherwise, not us. We were only onlookers, sort of party people.

And after the war were there any outbreaks of any disease?

Yeah, polio. I do remember there being polio outbreaks and they were before the war too.

23:00 Had all these people and this used to be terrible. They'd be strapped into these frames and that's a terrible thing but now, you see, if they sort of have their injections and look after themselves they don't get it.

Was there anything surgical that could be done for them?

No, nothing, no. They'd be on these, with their legs strapped and their arms strapped and oh it used to be terrible.

23:30 All you could do was to rub their backs or do something for them but they were really marvellous, I mean how they put up with it and a lot of them were teenagers too. They were not all adults.

So in your later career did you have any non-surgical experience, or did you manage to stay with surgery?

Oh yes, no, no, as I said I went back to the Adelaide and the cardiac clinic

24:00 and that was just running, run pushing the machine and taking ECGs [electrocardiographs] and I did the same at the Adelaide Hospital, at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and then of course when the Port Adelaide Casualty came up I sort of went back there. And then when I finished there I went and worked at the Cherry's, the rooms.

At Port Adelaide?

Yes, Port Adelaide.

What sort of casualties?

Oh I can

24:30 tell you stories about the casualties at Port Adelaide. The Casualty Hospital, there was no hospital except the Adelaide Hospital before the Queen Elizabeth and there was lots of shipping in those days and lots of alcoholics, these people.

Were they returned service people?

No, no, just the ordinary people around about the place, the deadbeats. They were always around the ports and there were these two old boys and

25:00 they were always falling over and having bits of skin knocked off and we'd patch them up and one of them came running in. They used to drink methylated spirits actually I think in the main and one of them came in and said ,"I think he's gone, I think he's gone," and I said, "Where is he gone?" and she said, "He fell off the wharf into the water and the bubbles have stopped coming up." So of course I had to ring the police and they had to go and rescue him. And then there was another alcoholic used to come in and poor

25:30 old Doctor Cherry had no time for them, he hated them when they'd been drinking, and he'd hurt his ankle this fellow and he came and what used to make me laugh, see those chairs over there? One of those was, they used to put their foot on it, it's cedar and this old hospital was very antiquated and so he's looking down at the ankle and he says, "Now take off your boot and I'll look at the other," and of course, the foot

26:00 was absolutely black. He'd only washed the one that was going to be looked at. And of course, I didn't only have patients. I had two dogs bought to me. The kids used to go and fish on the wharf and the dogs would get the fish hooks stuck in them, in their mouths. And of course the kids knew the casualty was here and they'd come up and I'd get this out of the dogs. I'd get them to hold the dogs down and I used to have a pair of pliers which I used to rip them out and then some other kids bought me a sick

26:30 seagull another time. And the funniest patient I ever had at Port Casualty was this man came in, a man bought him in, and he was bent over, right over and I said, "Have you hurt your back?" And he didn't say anything but the man with him was convulsed with laughter, giggle, giggle, giggle. So anyway I got the man up on the table and I said, "Now, have you hurt your back?" And he'd caught

27:00 his zipper in his scrotum and so I said to the man, "Now you go back to work, I'll fix him up." And so I said, "Now I don't know how to start about this but the first thing I think I'll have to do is cut the zipper out," so I took the zipper out of his, they were overalls he had on. And then, of course, I thought, "It's going to be very painful," so anyway I got some anaesthetic and then I went (demonstrates) like that and of course before

27:30 he went back I had to button him all up the front with safety pins so he could be decent. It was a stunning place to work there, it really was. We'd have kids, little children and one woman who used to bring this, and I know she used to bash the child and he was only little and he wouldn't be more than four. He'd been in several times and he came in this time and poor little boy and he had this terrible face, so I rang up the doctor.

28:00 We used to ring up the doctor if we needed them. They wouldn't come but we would ring up and he said, "Send him to the Children's Hospital." So I rang a taxi and put her in the taxi and rang up the kids' hospital and she didn't even take him there. She just went home. And I used to keep a jar of lollies there and these kids, the first thing would be a lolly but he was a battered child. No-one did anything about it, it was terrible.

28:30 **I know that at the moment you're compelled to report your suspicions?**

Now you do, but then you didn't.

You weren't encouraged to report?

No, no, no. And then another old alcoholic used to come in and the district council had a nurse on their staff and she used to call in every morning for a chat and this man, he was one of our old alkies, we knew them all, came in

29:00 in bare feet and she said, "Haven't you got any boots?" And he said, "No" and so she said, "Well you come tomorrow morning and I'll bring you some." So he turned up the next morning and so she bought in these boots for him and she went to go back into the council and she suddenly saw him running down the street with the boots off and he took them down to the second-hand shop and sold them to get some more money. She was absolutely livid.

29:30 They were marvellous people in the Port but there were some funny ones.

Were any of the people at Port ex-service people?

Oh the Cherry's, I mean both Alan, well there was Doctor, there was Alan Cherry and his brother and Doctor Alderman. They were all ex-, one was navy, the other two were army. They were ex-service people.

What did you know about your husband's time in the navy?

Not very much. He never talked about

30:00 it. All I knew was that he'd stepped up from the ship was going to sink and the Yanks picked him up and that was all and that he'd been via America to England to bring out the [HMAS] Shropshire. They sent some Australian sailors and he had a, he was the youngest of the family. There were six of them and his eldest sister had married when he was quite a small child and gone to live in England.

30:30 So of course he was able to visit her and in her very late age she had this small child, her husband had died, so when I was coming home from back from England, old father Cherry, Owen's, Bradwell I mean, father said that if she could come back to Australia that he would look after her and the child, he would give them a home, and he would educate the girl. And of course, it was just when

31:00 all the migrants were coming out and Max had been with Elder Smiths and he said when you want to come home go to Elder's in London and whoever the bloke there was would get you a berth on the ship, because they were bringing the migrants, the English migrants, out with all these ships. And so I did this and I bought her home with me and she was a member of parliament. She was a very brainy child and she went to Melbourne. She was the Mayor of Carlton and she was a member of parliament and she

31:30 still lives in Victoria but she rings me up every month, which I think is very sweet of her, Caroline.

Did you have much to do with Caroline's point of views when she was with you?

Well she wasn't with me. I used to see her because after all I was friendly with Owen and eventually married [him] and she lived with her mother in the old Bradwell home and so I knew her sort of from when, I think she was six when she came out, until she finished her education, married

32:00 and went off to Melbourne, so I've really known her ever since and she's very good at ringing me up I think.

So what position did Owen have in the navy?

Oh he was only a leading seaman. He was a bit of a bird and he was sent to the officers' school to be an officer and he went out to a mad party and had a few drinks and he got a broken leg,

32:30 so that was the end of that, so he was just a leading seaman, that was his.

And what did he do on ship?

I have no idea. Whatever leading seamen do I suppose around the place.

And he was there for the full duration of the war?

Yes, he joined up when the war started cause he was a Sea Scout to begin with and he joined up straight away and I said he was on the ship that sank and then he went to England to bring this one out

33:00 and I guess he was in the whole time. So I don't actually, well if I look, I've got his discharge papers, but I hadn't met him until he was discharged from the navy. I didn't even, only that time when we were selling our war bonds but I didn't see him again until the war was over.

Do you remember being discharged?

Yes, I remember it. I was very happy, very happy to get out.

33:30 There was nothing to it, you just packed your things and that was it and went back to the Adelaide Hospital.

Didn't miss the uniform?

No, not really, no.

What about the camaraderie?

Well I missed that because when I went back to the Adelaide there wasn't anybody there. But we still stick together. There's Hoagie, who was in New Guinea with us and she shared the house in

34:00 London we had. I still see her and then the mother of this invitation to the wedding I've just had. I still see her. There are not many left and you see, this Betty, Betty Two as we call her, the only reason I've caught up with her was that I'm on one of the councils, the National Council of Women's Memorials Committee. I was sort of, I don't know how I got onto it but I

34:30 did, and they wanted someone else you see and I knew she was a younger woman and she'd be different, so I rang her and I asked her if she'd like to join the committee and she did, and so I pick her up this Wednesday. I pick her up and drive her to town because as I said she won't drive. She never drives in the city, and so we've become quite friendly. But she's got that awful laugh, she keeps laughing all the time.

35:00 Yeah, but she, but I see a lot of her and then she of course she's President of the Returned Sisters' Sub Branch so I see her then, two Wednesdays a year I see her, a week, a year, a month, I'll get it right in a minute.

Two Wednesdays a month.

Yeah.

So you were in Australia when the war was declared over, is that right?

I was in Sydney.

You were in Sydney? Can you tell me about that

35:30 **period of time, what that was like when?**

Well I've already sort of said it once but I'll say it again. Well it was quite exciting because…

For the nurses, not just for the patients that were there?

Well for the nurses, and Molly, the mother of the girl on the wedding, we were in Sydney together and the war was over and so we were behind the

36:00 Town Hall in Sydney. There were rooms we used to have and we used to be looked after the VADs. It was a voluntary thing they had and when you had your day off you could go into Sydney and stay there and they'd give you breakfast in bed and I don't know, Molly must have been coming back from somewhere and of course the war was over and great excitement so we went out into the street but we lost our hats. Everybody, they just went absolutely mad.

36:30 In the end, we had to, we were thrown around, we were swung around, all these civilian people just went absolutely haywire, so in the end, for our own safety sake we thought we'd better go home.

And did that euphoria last long?

I don't know because we didn't go out again but I suppose it did with the general public. With us, although it was good, you felt a bit lost because you'd

37:00 lived in this setup, like a large family. It was different to an ordinary hospital and I mean in the end when you left the unit you felt as if you were bereft or something or other. And especially to go back to the Adelaide where there wasn't one friend or one person you had there and all these old dolls and first of all I had to be the Home Sister and then I had to be the Tutor Sister and I had to do this and that, which I hadn't

37:30 been accustomed to and I felt it was repulsive so I was glad to get down to Port Cas.

How long did it take you to?

Get a transfer?

No, reintegrate, feeling like you'd lost your family?

Well I think all the time I was at the Adelaide because there wasn't one girl, of all the junior sisters who left, not one went back as a sister working in. Some of them went back eventually working in out-patients and to

38:00 chest clinic, the TB clinic, and the blood bank. The blood bank was started at the Adelaide before the Red Cross took over and Brigid Cooper she took that, and so it was all right. I didn't mind working in the cardiac clinic because the girl in charge of that, she also was an ex-service woman. So at lunchtime we'd all go down to this clinic and we,

38:30 all the old army girls, we'd have lunch together. You always took your sandwiches so we'd meet every day.

Might just hold it there for the moment. We do it on the spot. Do you, you obviously participate, with Betty too,

39:00 **in some good works. Can you tell me what the work is that you're doing there? With the opening of the memorial and so on?**

With the Nurses' Memorial Fund? Well we raise money. The house on South Terrace, it's an old fashioned villa house and the National Council of Women actually decided that they would collect this money

39:30 for a nurses' memorial but because they were, they couldn't use the word because they were not army, or not something or other, and so they turned it over to a committee and instead of being National Council of Women, this committee was formed which was National Council of Women Nurses' Memorial Committee. It was the only way they could get the money from the government and so

40:00 I don't know how I sort of got on the committee. I think the reason was the Secretary was a Theroptimist. She belonged to the Adelaide club and somehow or other I had this invitation a few years ago when I came on the committee. So I did and then, they're mostly elderly, well I'm elderly, but these women had been on the committee a long time and so they said "Did I know of anyone else?" And I said, "Well a youngster?" and being a

40:30 nurse, as a nurse on the committee, I said, "This Betty Lawrence, perhaps she would?" So they asked her and so I pick her up. I go down to Grange and pick her up and we go up to the NCW which is on South Terrace and I park the car there and then I drive her home again, so that's what happened with her. But I don't know, but the thing is we have to raise the money for the upkeep of that. The

41:00 NCW, they have a room which they hire as their headquarters. The Sports Girls they have a room there, the Sports Girls Association, which they hire and like the place, a wall was knocked out so it made a larger room like a small hall and that is let, people can hire that but we have to pay the rates and taxes.

Tape 7

00:40 **You've had a lot of good to say about the Australian soldiers and how they dealt with things, usually with a sense of humour but there were some that didn't cope so well and post traumatic stress disorder is quite prevalent. Did**

01:00 **you see any signs of that when you were nursing overseas?**

Oh yes, not so much in New Guinea but there were a couple of people I had to deal with when we were in Malacca and one of them he went quite bonkers and we were, the ward was on the first floor and he leapt out the window, cause there was no window, no window panes, there were just open windows and he didn't even

01:30 break anything. He sort of landed and I know we had him restrained there until, I don't know what happened to him. He was just taken off. But by and large, not many. All of the boys, the soldiers I had to deal with, they were all cheerful. They were all helpful. If they could do anything to help you, the nurses, they used to ask or they'd run around but by and large I

02:00 had no trouble with any patients whatsoever.

Does it surprise you that post traumatic stress disorder has become so prevalent?

It's a modern day thing. I think that everyone these days gets things handed to them without hard work or striving and I think the least little thing tips them over. I really think that because life

02:30 now is really so easy and so soft that they've, if it doesn't come up to their expectations, that's it. That's what I feel anyway.

You think that people were made of harder stuff, the ones that lived through the war? They had to be a bit harder?

Well they had to be. I mean the conditions and I mean if you had someone away in the army you worried about them, there were food restrictions,

03:00 there were clothing [restrictions] and I mean things were tough then and now they have so much, just so much, really they do.

And it not always appreciated?

No and they want more. I mean what they've got is not good enough. It must be something better, yeah, so perhaps you'll be interviewing someone on the moon or on Mars.

Well they're selling bits of the moon at the moment.

Are they? I won't buy it.

03:30 **So when you look back on your years in service, what are the major changes that took place in you, being a young girl from Hawker and then having quite a lot of adventures overseas as a nurse, what are the things that you think changed you the most?**

Well I think the thing that changed me the most was I wanted to get out and see more.

04:00 I think that it sort of fed your appetite and when I went to England after the war I decided I wouldn't go on a liner, I'd go on a cargo ship, because we came out of Singapore on this cargo ship and it was the thing that saved our lives and I thought that was good. The only thing about on this cargo ship, my friend Barbara I went with, they had a doctor on board, he was an Englishman

04:30 retired and he used to drink whisky and he had a shaky hand and one of the crew got very sick and he came to us and he said, "I think that he has an appendicitis. We'll have to operate" and I thought "This is the last thing." However I think he only had a stomach ache but before we got to England we went into Cape Town and we went into Dakar [modern Senegal, West Africa]. We went to the places you wouldn't ordinarily go and the day before we went into England

05:00 we struck this terrible storm and we'd had a sort of party the night before and at lunchtime I got up. The ship was swaying so much that the trunks we had, Barbara and I, with our, were swaying across this cabin. We had a lovely cabin up on the deck and I went down before lunch and we were sitting having a drink and the ship rolled and the chief engineer was an older man but we'd been very friendly with him

05:30 and he had a glass of beer in his hand and instead of dropping it, he shot across and they had open windows in this little place and his knees came across this deck and his face hit the window ledge. And when I looked he had a broken nose and this big gash across his cheek and another big one across his forehead, so the old doctor, with his shaky hands said, "You'd better bring him down to the first aid." We started across the deck and it was wet and we both fell over. Anyway I got him down there

06:00 and the doctor said, "Well, I can't stitch him up. Will you?" And I said, "Well yes, I'll do it" and suddenly in this awful atmosphere, he'd had this little cabin shut with the heater on and I knew I was going to be seasick. I hadn't been the whole time but I think I had the night before and so he said, "You'll have to do it." So this poor man was lying on the bunk and I'm sort of sitting trying to, I couldn't stand, it was so rough and he bought these thundering great needles,

06:30 great abdominal, anyway I sewed the bloke up and I tried to lever up his nose with the fracture, but I couldn't do it. And we were getting into Liverpool the next day and so I said to him, "You must go off to hospital as soon as you get in." So he did. So I didn't see or hear anything at all and I came home and we were married and Owen rang up and he said, "Oh you're having a visitor tonight. There's a man here wants to come and see you." So I

07:00 said, "Who is he?" He said, "Oh well I'm not quite sure of his name." Anyway all of this time afterwards and in comes this dear little old chief engineer with two pairs of silk stockings for me and his ship was in port. And then when the doctor said this crewman had appendicitis, "We'll have to do an operation" I said to Barbara, "You and I'll be doing it." But it was a lovely trip on that ship. And we were at sea,

07:30 it was Christmas time, before we got to Cape Town, and there were a few other passengers on board and the wireless operator came down and he said, "There's a cable for you," for me, and on it, it had "Happy Christmas, love Dad." And I said to Barbara, "My father doesn't even know you can send a cable to sea." And I was so enthusiastic so I wrote this long letter to post in Cape Town to say how thoughtful it was, I was the only one [to get one]

08:00 and there was a letter from Owen to say, "Did you get my cable?" And he'd signed "Brad," `cause they used to call him Brad and the wireless operator had taken it wrong.

So you and Owen had already started going out with each other?

Well yes, I was at the Port Cas then.

And you took off to England for another adventure?

Yes, for another year and had a wonderful time there, wonderful. I worked at a hospital, it was a cancer hospital

08:30 in South Kensington and up on the notice board would go tickets free. Any tickets that weren't sold they sent to hospitals. I saw every ballet, everything, for free and the English nurses would never take them, never take them at all. Anyway I got myself into trouble there. I didn't work in the theatre. I worked in this ward and if a patient went to theatre you had to go up with them and stand during the operation and bring them

09:00 back and this little short English doctor came in, about knee high to a flea, `cause we were all Australians and we were beneath thinking about. And they used to start the patients off with Pentathal before the general anaesthetic and a man went purple in the face and I said, "Oh sir, his breathings not good." "What are you? A bloody Australian?" And I said, "Yes, and I'm bloody proud of it and I am

09:30 accustomed to working with gentlemen." And he reported me to the matron of course. Anyway the matron she didn't say anything at all but he calmed down after a while. But I thought he was, and they were rude, they really were. They used to treat you like dirt.

And were their methods much different from what you were used to, apart from the doctors being incredibly rude?

Well I only worked in the ward and that was post-operative and I think they used to be tough, I thought they used to be tough on the patients but

10:00 some of them had terrible wounds. It used to be dreadful and of course the sister was the same. There was a Canadian, myself, a South African and a Scots girl, we were the staff nurses. They didn't have nurses, we were staff nurses and one sister and she'd arrive in the morning and they used to wear those funny bonnets and all this gear and we'd say, "Good morning, Sister." Not a word, not a word and then the

10:30 matron was coming, doing a check of the equipment and she found out that two cups were missing, probably they'd been broken and chucked out and nobody said anything. Well she absolutely panicked and I said, "Don't worry, Sister, I'll fix it," so I rushed out to the next ward and I grabbed two cups and bought them up and left them, so her count was right.

When you think about the things you got in trouble for, I think you should be kind of proud of them as well.

And then of course, Barbara and I decided, we asked for the weekend off because we wanted to go

11:00 to the Isle of Wight and so I went to the sister and I said, "Oh Sister, may I have my weekend this weekend?" "And what do you want it for, nurse?" I said, "I'm going to the Isle of Wight." "Oh you don't go to the Isle of Wight. You have to go there for a holiday, not for two days." They thought we were mad. We used go all over the place on our days off.

So you got to see a lot of England?

I did, yes and we wanted to go to the, we would love to go to the Edinburgh Festival, because we had no money

11:30 and so this Scots lassie who was working in the ward with us said, "I know this lady. She's a bit elderly. She's retired from the telephone exchange," and saying what her name was, "and I'm sure she'd let you stay there." So I wrote to this woman, yes, she'd let us stay, so we had to sleep in a double bed but that didn't matter. But she was one of those raw-boned Scots ladies and very Scots with her,

12:00 and so to pay her, she wouldn't take any money from us so we bought her a ticket to go to the Festival that they have up there. So we were standing in, and she was such a lady, and in England and there, you never pushed. If you were in a line you never broke the line and went somewhere else. Anyway this woman pushed in ahead and I've never heard such language from this woman, "Yon bitch," she kept calling her all the time.

12:30 So it was good and we went all over the place. We had a lovely time there and when I was coming home, I was coming home soon, and I hadn't been down around the south and Cornwall, so I booked myself a tour and I went off myself. I had ten days in Paris, all by myself and I've got, I'm only just reading the diary and really I sort of had a marvellous time.

Sounds like you had lots of marvellous times?

I did.

You made the most of things?

13:00 Well yes, on nothing. I used to pay the rent because there were four of us in the house. Hoagie is still alive, she's the only one. And they never had any money. Barbara never had any money and I think she went to England with seventy five pounds or something or other and we were going to be there for a year. And we found this house. We were in a pub to begin with and then we tried to find a place and we went to this one place and it was just behind

13:30 the Palace. It was a beautiful place, no furniture you see and the money was too much and so we said, "Oh no" and she said she knew of this place out in Kensington but the only trouble was the woman was dark. She was a Negro. I said I didn't care whether she was black, brindle or what, so anyway we tore out and this Miss Hammond, she had a sort of studio up top and it was two storey.

14:00 One storey then they always had a basement and so that's where the four of us and I used to pay, go down and pay the rent for a month, and then they would pay me what they could and when I came home, I've still got all the money. Eventually it all came to me, the money that these kids owed me, and we went skiing in Austria. We went third class

14:30 across the Channel and then Barbara and I decided that, she had twenty pounds, we would go to Vienna. We must see Vienna, we must go down to Italy and we must see St Marks and we must go to the opera and all this nonsense. And so we had our skiing time right up the Alps, very cheap place and when we got to Vienna, the Vienna was divided into the four sections. Never get in the Russian zone. If you get into the Russian zone you'll never get out.

15:00 And one of the girls said go to this hotel so when we went there it was on the Ring and they wanted so much a night and Barbara said, "Oh we can't stop here, I haven't got the money, I haven't got enough money, I haven't got enough money." So I said to the people, "Is there another hotel?" Well of course they took umbrage and they gave me the name of this place and the street, so I went and found it and I said to Barbara, "You stay with the luggage on the footpath, and I'll come back." So I found the

15:30 place and picked her up and we went around and when we got there they wanted to take our passports away. They said "Never give up your passport". And it seemed a funny place and we didn't want to and we were arguing the point and then this very dapper man came up and clicked his heels and said, "Mademoiselles, it will be all right if you leave your passports." And he was a Czech, he'd been from the Czech Government and of course that had been taken over and he was there. He couldn't get out. He didn't have a passport and he had to stop there but he was marvellous and he organised

16:00 our trip to the, a private, he took us privately to the Chondrin Palace. He knew someone there so we went in the morning and he organised a trip to the Vienna Woods. He wouldn't take any money from us but we ate at night together but he would pay for himself. So we used to buy in the markets and buy a bit of bread and butter and cut a sandwich and away we'd go. And then we went to Venice and a very cheap place we stayed. I don't know how we found it.

16:30 Anyway someone had been there previously and we were about to leave Venice. We couldn't afford a trip on a vaporetto, had to be just the ordinary boats and we were third class rail tickets and we were in this carriage with all these men and it started off. When it leaves Venice it has to go over sort of causeway to get to the mainland and then suddenly the train stopped and there was all this yelling and rifles going off and they were carrying bloody underpants on sticks. And the

17:00 train went back into Venice and so we couldn't find out anything because we couldn't speak the language, so anyway we had food with us. We used to buy it cheaply and so night came and I decided to get up in the, they had the racks to put your luggage, so I got up there and of course Barbara was a big girl and all night I could hear "Take your hand off me, take your hand…" Anyway it was quite good and we eventually got back

17:30 and we went to the opera in Milan and eventually got back to France and caught the boat back to London and arrived home. I think we had about two shillings left. We had a good time.

And then you came back to Australia and how long before you got married to Owen?

It wasn't very long. He was on the, I came back in October and we got married in May, the next May.

18:00 **All worked out pretty well?**

Yes, yes, it was quite good and then we were going to have our first anniversary and I'd ordered a duck. We were going to have a thoroughly good wedding anniversary and then Katie decided she would arrive so he was playing all this music because I wouldn't go to hospital. I said, "Oh no, I'm not going yet." Eventually I did go and I'd only been there five minutes and she was born. And Ed Cherry, the Cherry's I worked with afterwards, he was the doctor

18:30 and he said "I bet you were enjoying yourself more twelve months ago than you are tonight?"

Good point.

Yeah. So that was that.

Given that it may be your grandchildren or your great grandchildren that watch this and all that you've seen of life and death and war and peace, what is something, or is there anything that you would like to say to

19:00 **people that will never know the kinds of life that you have known?**

Well I think they have missed out on something. I mean I really have, I've had a wonderful life. I went and took Kate to Istanbul. We went to Greece first and a conference in Istanbul and then we decided we'd go across Canada in the train and see those beautiful mountains when you sort of

19:30 cross the prairie. No, I don't know. I think they miss out a lot because they have everything served them on a plate. They've never done it the hard way. I mean most of the travelling and things before I was married, of course, was always done the hard way, saving up.

And what do you think is your approach to having a good life or a sane attitude

20:00 **through life? Because you've seen some horrible things and it doesn't seem to have affected you too adversely?**

Well I think if you're happy with your life and I mean everyone has their ups and downs and their bad times but I suppose that I was lucky. I had a good family, parents and grandparents, and friends and

20:30 I enjoyed what I did. I mean it was what I always wanted and I suppose I've never been ill. I think most, I mean I've lost my parents since but the most terrible thing of course was Malaya and losing all those friends but I think that if you be honest and do the best you can and enjoy what you have. And not want more than you can afford.

21:00 I think that a lot of people get into trouble because they will have these things and they are not able to pay for them. That life must be very stressful I feel.

Well it's been a pleasure talking with you and hearing of all that you've done and it's an inspiring story and thank you for letting us share it.

Well I've enjoyed every minute of my life

21:30 except of course, for the bits and pieces which you always have but I really have had a wonderful life and not being ill. I think that's one thing, apart from having malaria. I've had nothing since I was a kid. I've had diphtheria and the measles and things you get and a supportive family. I'm lucky in that. Some families are so disruptive.

And you married the man you were in love with?

22:00 Yes, I don't think I was in the beginning. No, he was a, you could say he was a true gentleman. I had never heard him use a swear word in his life, although he must have and he was marvellous with the kids. They thought he was a marvellous father though he would cook the meals on Sunday nights and it was always something exotic they didn't like. But

22:30 no, I was really very lucky. I've been lucky with my parents, my friends, my children and also with my husband.

Well thanks for talking with us today.

Yes, it's a pleasure.