Australians at War Film Archive

Olive Weston - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 11th January 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1305

Tape 1

00:42 **So Olive, could you try and give us that five minute life that we were just discussing?**

Yes. I was born in Townsville in 1926. I'll get to that in a moment, with my age in the army.

01:00 I was born on the 4th of July and my father always used to say to me, "You remember you were born on the 4th of July, you were born on American Independence Day and you were born independent." He instilled that into me as a child. I went to school in the convent, the nuns in the convent in Townsville and Cairns, and I was actually training to be a medical missionary to go to New Guinea.

01:30 My grandfather was in New Guinea. He had been there since 1901 and he wanted me to go up there and work with these natives, but the war came along in 1941 with the 7th of December, February, March, when the Japanese had come all the way down through into New Guinea and Curtin had just

02:00 sort of said, by that time I had joined the VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachments] in 1941 and then I went into the army. The commandant of the VADs said the Americans were wanting people who were trained in tropical medicine, which I'd been studying for, and I went into the army and I gave my sister's age. She's two and a half years older than

02:30 I, so I gave her age and they never even asked for my birth certificate or anything, and that was it. I've always got to, "How old are you, Olive?" And I think, "God, my army age or my normal age?" You know, sort of, but when MacArthur came and Curtin said the Brisbane Line, every household up there in Far North Queensland, they sent out government officials to tell us

03:00 that we were, if we stayed, we're in no man's land and they couldn't come to our aid. My father was on the wharves. He couldn't leave because he was in essential services. My mother said – we had a family meeting on the back steps of the house – my mother said if my father couldn't leave Cairns, we were living in Cairns, she wasn't going to leave my father. So I'm sitting on the back steps as well and I said, "Well, to hell with it." The Japanese,

03:30 so fast in two months have conquered Philippines, Malaysia, gone into Burma, gone into New Guinea and were heading for Australia. I said, "To hell with it. This is my home, this is my country and I'm not going to run away. I've never run away from a fight in my life." That's how I stayed up there in the north for the whole of the war. Then after the war I went back nursing for a while and then I went over to England.

04:00 I'd met my husband and got married ten years after the war, and then of course I had Steven, and I didn't like England in the winter. The cold and the snow was too much for me, so we came back to Australia and I settled here, and all I've done all my life is just to be a humanitarian and try to do the best I could for other people. That's the nutshell.

04:30 **Very well done. Olive, let's look a bit at your early childhood. Can you tell us your earliest memories, what your family structure was like?**

Yes. I can go back to things that happened, I was born as I say in 1926, in 1929 I can remember my cousin's wedding and Grandma,

05:00 she had a great big gramophone, the one with the big trumpet, in the lounge room and what have you, and I can remember that quite vividly and I'd only be what, two and a half, nearly three? And all my childhood I was a real tomboy as my book tells you. I,

05:30 a tomboy, I've got to think about this one. I know, I actually had a wonderful childhood. I mean it was the Depression years, we had no money. We were dirt poor right through the Depression, but we had everything. We made our own, grew our own vegetables, had our own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. We used to go out fishing

06:00 and crabbing, beautiful mud crabs. See the price of Queensland mud crabs today. I think about it, we used to catch them by the bucketful. I really had a wonderful childhood even though we had all that adversity. I was a free spirit I suppose you could say. I'd never seen a city until after the war when I came south and I saw the children playing in the Sydney

06:30 streets on the footpath I thought, you know, I felt so sorry for them because I'd had such a wonderful free childhood, a free spirit.

What games were you playing that were different to the kids in Sydney?

We made all our own entertainment. We had no, like to day when they go to all these pop concerts. We had nothing like that.

07:00 But we used to go out horse riding, bicycle all over the place. We did a lot of exercise in my young days, swimming, and swimming with the crocodiles, which is a very big controversy with Steve Irwin today with his crocodiles and what have you, but we just accepted them. They were just part of our lives.

Can you tell me a little bit more about that because that's quite a unique thing. I think today

07:30 **people probably wouldn't let children do that.**

That's right. Our property, we had a creek ran across one corner of our property and it was full of alligators, although they were crocodiles, but it was called Alligator Creek, and we would go swimming in there and think nothing, and the fishermen would come along in their boats and they'd say,

08:00 "Get out of that creek, you kids. There's a crocodile around on the next bend," or what have you. So we'd have to shoot through the mangroves just to satisfy our curiosity that there was a crocodile basking in the sun. But I can remember my sister, I'd be about twelve I suppose, she dared me once to run up the back of a crocodile. He was just sunbaking, lazing and snoozing off, and

08:30 from the back of him I ran right up his tail, over his back, and there was a tree like that and I went straight up the tree. By the time he realised what had happened I was up in that tree. But yeah, I always took a dare. No one could ever sort of say I backed out of a dare. But that was one of my experiences, running up the back of a crocodile, and he'd be about from memory I'd say

09:00 nine or ten foot, and I always brought home all the stray animals that I could find. I had all sorts, and one day I came home with a baby crocodile about that big and my mother had a fit and she said to me, "You can't keep that as a pet. You go and put it back where you got it from." So I had to go and take it back to the creek and put it in the creek. It was the only pet I was never allowed to keep, was a baby

09:30 crocodile, and snakes. We just accepted them as part of growing up.

What animals were you allowed to keep?

I had two turtles. We had great big clam shells in the back garden with the tap and the water, always full of water, and Tommy and Timmy were the two turtles I had, only little. I had

10:00 Cocky, he was a galah, and a pink and grey galah and could talk better than a politician, I can assure you, and every morning he'd be sitting on the gate. I'd go in to get my bicycle out of the garage and he'd be sitting on the gate and he'd sing out to me, "Hooray Olive, hooray Olive," and if I turned around and said to him, "Cheerio Cocky, see you later," that was all I had to do and he was instantly quiet. But if I didn't

10:30 turn around and say, "Cheerio Cocky, see you later," a block away I could hear him screeching his head off, "Hooray Olive, hooray Olive!" I had, Tiny was a little fox terrier doggie that I had. She ended up by getting, I had her for about ten years, she ended by getting bitten by a snake so she died. I had, what else did I have?

11:00 I had kittens. I could never resist anybody that had spare kittens to give away, but I was very disappointed my mother wouldn't let me keep the baby crocodile. Yeah, that's about.

So your family, there was you and your sister?

Yes, only the two of us.

Mum and dad?

Yeah, just the four of us. My mother did lose a son, a baby, he was born stillborn. I was made to sit

11:30 out on the back steps. I'd be about two and a half and I was made to sit out on the back steps when the midwife was there with my mother, and I can always remember this little still life foetus laying in the, I was on the steps like that and the sink was there, and all the bed sheets were all there and he was laying on the top, you know, and nobody was interested in me because I was just told to sit on the back steps,

12:00 which was the one time I did as I was ordered. I was rather unpredictable at times. Yeah, it was rather an experience I suppose. I've never forgotten that one, and such a young age to look and see this little baby.

Were you aware that your mother was pregnant? Were you expecting the arrival?

No, it was not like today, you know. Mothers

12:30 were a bit different in those days about having children and what have you. We were not exactly told that we all came from the 'cabbage patch', but it was not as open as it is today with children. Children know where baby comes from and what have you, but no, I didn't learn until all the commotion was going on inside

13:00 and, "You sit on the steps." Different era, different times.

How did you parents react to that difficult time?

Losing my baby brother? My father was always devastated about it because he always wanted a son. The closest he ever had to a son was me, his tomboy, and he used to say to me when I'd say, "Can I come with you Dad?" "No. Look, if you were a boy it would be a different thing,

13:30 but you're not." But 'Ollie' was as close to a boy as you could get, I can assure you. Even my cousins and what have you, we used to belt each other up and fight and God knows what, and I was always in trouble with the nuns in the school because if any of the boys would tease my sister because she'd been involved in a train accident in the school bus coming home from school and she was brain damaged for the rest of her life, and

14:00 I've lost my track.

You wouldn't sit by while your sister was being teased?

Oh yes. If any of the boys teased her, I mean I'd say, "Oh yes, OK Fred," and I'd go around their side of the school which was a co-op or a what do you call it? Yeah, and I'd have a fist fight with the boys.

14:30 Of course the nuns were always reprimanding me for being tough on the boys. They never got away with it.

You had to keep them in check?

Yes, yes, yeah, but as I say, I'd never run away from a fight in my life, and when we were told all to evacuate Far North Queensland in early '42, "No way, this is my home and my country and I'm not leaving it." Then I stayed

15:00 and did all my war right through to '45 when I had to go down to Melbourne to get discharged.

Can you tell me about what your family was like? Obviously there had been some trying times for your family and during the Depression, etcetera. Can you tell me what you remember about your mother and father when you were young and your upbringing?

We were a very close family. We were very family orientated

15:30 and just being very close we'd sort of never been separated anywhere. We didn't intend to be separated. Gee, I can remember when my

16:00 father ended up building an underground air raid shelter up in the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK run in the backyard, and the first time was about nine o'clock at night when the air raid siren went, and of course we got out of our beds and went down to the air raid shelter. We had to light a hurricane lamp to go into it and there was about two inches of water in the bottom of it. There were about thirty cane toads.

16:30 Charlie Dell rooster and his hens were all in there. You've got no idea what pandemonium there was in that air raid shelter at that time of night. I never got out of my bed again to go to the air raid shelter, I can assure you. It was hilarious, it really was when you think back about it, chasing these thirty odd cane toads out in the water and the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and the rooster. Oh yeah, fun and games I can assure you.

17:00 **Can you tell me a little bit about your mother?**

My mother, yes. She was a gentle woman, a very very gentle woman, and she actually died two weeks before their fiftieth wedding anniversary. My father was very devastated because they were really looking forward to having their fiftieth wedding anniversary,

17:30 but as I said, two weeks before she had a massive heart attack and died. One of the good old sticks that went through the Depression, she never complained. She was one of those women that accepted life for what it was and all the traumas that came with it, a very practical

18:00 sort of a person, and she had been, her mother had died when she was only eleven years of age and her eldest sister had actually reared her. So she was, yeah, but the good old staunch, married my father and they were still together two

18:30 weeks before their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

So still in love after fifty years?

Yeah, yeah. They were very much attached to each other.

Do you know how they met?

I think it was at a dance in Townsville from what I remember mother telling me. That would've been just after World War I in

19:00 probably 1919, 1920, something like that. I think they were married in '22 and that's how I got the name of Olive. 'Olives' are all usually around my age, you very seldom ever see a youthful Olive, as a name. We were all given this name after World War I, which was the olive branch, which was for peace.

19:30 So whenever you hear the name Olive you usually picture my age group, the post World War I babies. Yeah, I think Mum said it was at a dance that she actually met my father.

So your mother was a stoic, but caring woman?

Yes.

What about your father?

He was reliable,

20:00 very concerned, always made sure that there was always food, even during the Depression, that there was always food on the table for us, and he dug all the backyard up and he planted everything that he could and when he'd have a glut of something, anyone else who had kids, or children I should say, they'd get some of the extra

20:30 stuff that was grown and we all, that's how we all lived up there. We all helped each other. I couldn't understand when I first came south after the war, people could live in Sydney, Melbourne for forty years and not say 'hello' to their next door neighbour. I couldn't understand that because we'd always been, our front door was never shut. It was always open, the back door was open. We never went out and locked up like we have to today.

21:00 Sort of put yourself behind iron bars in some cases, haven't you? So things have changed, and not for the better, not in my opinion, no.

So you feel without putting words in your mouth, you feel the sense of community was stronger during that time in Townsville?

Yes, I do, I do. I think, I don't wish to be unkind, but I do think the

21:30 people of today are much more selfish, greedy, selfish. I'm not talking of all people, I'm just talking of a percentage of them. We didn't have that in those days. I can remember probably 1929, something like that, we were at the dinner table and Betty and I, we had a piece of cheese and a piece of dry bread and that was our dinner, and my mother and father were sitting

22:00 at the table and they were just having a cup of tea, and at that early age the penny dropped on me and I said to my mother, "Why aren't you two eating?" And my mother said, "Because there is nothing else in the house." All there was was these two pieces of cheese and a piece of dry bread, and that was our dinner and they just had a cup of tea, you know. I don't know whether it would happen today.

22:30 It might, I don't know. It was a different era.

They sound like quite selfless people. Is this something that was going on a lot around you? Would you find a lot of families were giving to you as well?

Yes, because as I say I think it was the Depression that caused your neighbours to all gather together and everybody looked after everybody in the community.

23:00 As I say, when you had a glut of something they would share with everybody. I doubt if there's too many of the younger people today would even dig up a patch in their own backyard to grow their vegies. I don't know. You've got more things to worry about today than we had in those days. I mean you've got a lot more on your plate, the younger people today.

23:30 As I say, I was a free spirit in those days and I enjoyed my childhood.

Do you think there's something to be said for self-sufficiency?

Yes, I do. I really do. I think over the last say forty years, not sixty, I'd say forty, when from the 1950s you had all these modern

24:00 cons all being invented and the theory was to free-up the housewife to have more free time to do things for themselves and what have you, like the washing machine and all the electronic equipment and all these things, and we had nothing like that in my younger days.

24:30 I think that it would be, how can I say that one? Yeah, as I say it's all gone into commercialism and you

get a computer today and by the time you get it home it's outdated and they've got something else on the drawing board to outdo

25:00 that. Do you know what I mean sort of? And I've never been a person who keeps up with modern technology and what have you. I'm quite happy to accept life for what it is.

Do you see those kind of advances and that kind of technology being outdated so rapidly as part of the problem, the sort of greed that you were talking about before?

Yes, I do, I do because

25:30 it's all commercialism. I mean you just go into the shop today and you buy a Mother's Day card or a Father's Day card. In my day if there was anything was like that we made them ourselves, we did it for ourselves and it cost us nothing, but today it's all geared up for, big multi-nationals

26:00 in my opinion are totally in control and I'm glad I'm in my twilight years, put it that way.

Do you think you've seen the best of it?

I have, yeah, and the worst. I mean both, I've got to say that. Yeah, I don't know. I'm glad in one way I don't have any

26:30 grandchildren to worry about the future. I don't know what the future holds, I really don't, and I don't like to think about it because I've had the best and the worst in both worlds really when you stop to think back on it.

Can you tell me, you've told me a little bit about the way the community coped with it, but it's something that will be quite hard for people perhaps

27:00 **hearing about this in future years to comprehend what it was like living through the Depression?**

Yeah. I'm with you on that one there. It's, I mean I would hate to ever have to see it happen again because we had well over ten years of Depression. As I say, we had no money, but we were

27:30 better off up where we were in North Queensland than people were in Sydney and Melbourne. They had it tough because they weren't able to provide the same as we did for ourselves, and that's why a lot of the men went away from Sydney and Melbourne on, what did they call it? You know, become a swaggie [swagman] out in the country to try and earn a few

28:00 dollars here, or pounds in those days to send back to their families in the big cities. They really had it tough. But I don't think it will ever come again. We do have two class systems I suppose now, the rich and the poor, but not in the same

28:30 category as it was during the Depression. A lot of it's been made today, a lot of it is self-made of people being poor. They just don't want to go out to work or they're finding it hard to be caught in or trapped in a socio-economic level and can't get out of it.

29:00 It's different today to what it was then.

It's different to fighting for your life I suppose with food?

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Did you ever have any swagmen who came through where you were?

Yes, yes. There was always something to give them. Even if it was only a slice of bread or something to suffice them for the time being.

29:30 I can remember my grandmother, because they were pioneers of Far North Queensland, and grandfather used to set up hotels, particularly up around the back of Cooktown in the Palmer River during the gold rush days and Grandma was always the cook of the hotels and grandfather used to provide all the, he'd go out and shoot the ducks, or go and fish for Barramundi

30:00 fish, but no one ever came to their door that was never given a meal. There was always food put on the table for total strangers, and that was how our lives were. You think about today, a stranger coming to your front door today and saying that he was hungry and what have you and sitting him down and giving him a bowl or a plate of food.

30:30 It wouldn't happen today. Trustworthy, trust has gone. People are very, particularly in the cities of course, they're very cautious of who they invite across the threshold of their front door. We never thought of it back in those days. It was just

31:00 part of life.

Do you remember your grandfather talking about the gold rush at all?

Oh gosh, yes. I've often thought, particularly Grandma, I used to love going to Grandma's and staying overnight and sleeping because she always used to tell me about their young days when they were on the gold fields up on the Palmer River, and of course in those days the Aboriginals, the Mayalls which they were called, they

31:30 used to kill and eat the people. They weren't particularly fussy with the white European men because they used to eat salt-meat and what have you, but the Chinese who came out from China to dig for the gold and what have you, they were number one on the Aboriginals' list because they were much nicer to eat, and I used to think years later, Grandma used to

32:00 tell me about how they used to be raided by the Aboriginals and stuff would be stolen, and golly be, you know, I wished I'd have had a tape recorder to have Grandma tell me and have it recorded. Just this last winter I went back up home and I did a four-wheel safari tour all around the back of Cooktown and up Lake Landon

32:30 and all that territory up on Cape York and the Palmer River, and I picked up a book called The River of Gold, and everything in it was exactly how Grandma used to tell me. So my next door neighbour has got it at the moment, she's reading it. At least I've got it now, it's all in a book somebody else has written how Grandma used to tell me exactly what took place.

Does it mention the cannibalism?

Hey?

Does it mention the cannibalism?

Oh gosh, yeah. It's really very

33:00 explicit. When I think about Townsville during World War II being a wild town, by gosh, in this book what Cooktown was in those days, it was a wild town too.

Did they look for gold, your grandparents?

Yeah. He found it. He got a gold mine. Both my grandfathers were gold miners. The other one was in New Guinea. He had one gold mine at Wau in

33:30 New Guinea and the other one was at Bulolo. Grandma, my grandfather on my father's side, he had the one up in the Palmer River and he called it the Louise Mine, and then their last daughter when she was born she was called Louisa. They, he sold that about 1911 or something for £11,000 which was a lot of money

34:00 in those days, and then he came back to Townsville and he bought horse-drawn taxis. So that was what he finished up in his working days, running a fleet of horse-drawn taxis.

And the other went into hotels?

No, that was the one who had the hotels as well.

The same one?

Yeah, yes.

During your Depression years you were saying that you were quite self-sufficient

34:30 **and that people banded together. Did either of your parents have any other means of earning money?**

My father worked on the wharves. He was a waterside worker in Cairns and Townsville. So that was his trade and that's why when war broke out he couldn't leave because he was what they called essential services. I can remember he was missing for

35:00 three days on one occasions during the war. Him and the crew he was working with were loading bombs on a ship in Cairns Harbour when an air raid siren went and of course the ship just up anchored and took off and went out to sea, and the waterside workers who were on the ship receiving the bombs were kept on. They didn't have time even to get off the ship,

35:30 and went out to sea. Three days later they came back into the port and my mother was almost frantic. She didn't know where my father was. Yes, so he was just, that was his profession, his trade. He was earning money when he was working on the wharves.

So was he loading goods?

Yeah, yeah. That was what they were doing when the air raid went

36:00 at one time during the war.

And during the Depression he still could keep working on the wharves? He was off work?

On and off, on and off. There was one occasion where they went on strike and we had, they wouldn't

load the ships. They had the station people that had the cattle stations and what have you came down

36:30 and they were a lynch mob and they were going to, they were running around trying to round up these waterside workers who were on strike and they came to, we were sharing a house with another family, and they came to the front door and wanted to know where my father was and this other family's father was, and Mrs Evans, she had a

37:00 shotgun. She was standing at the front door with a shotgun. My mother was standing with an axe and I'm standing beside my mother hanging onto her skirt, and they just sort of said that their husbands were not there, which they weren't. They weren't at home. That's how far they were prepared to defend their husband. They were not going to let them come in and do what they liked with the house

37:30 and look for our fathers.

Were they fearful for themselves and the children as well?

Our parents?

Your mother and Mrs Evans?

Well, that's what I'm saying. You stand at the front door with a lynch mob with a shotgun and an axe, I mean you're really determined that no one is going to get past your threshold.

So your mother had a bit of fire in the belly as well?

Oh yes, she definitely did.

38:00 Yeah, I got it from both sides of the family I think, sort of, I used to laugh about it. I used to think my grandfather, that's my father's father, he was born at the Eureka Stockade in Ballarat and he was one of twins and of course they were Irish Catholics, so I always said there I was, you know,

38:30 I had to be a rebel. My husband always called me his bloody Australian rebel. As I said, I had no choice with one grandfather being born at the Eureka Stockade and of Irish Catholic parents. I inherited that and then in 1988, which was the 200th anniversary of Australi,a was when I was awarded the Order of Australia

39:00 and I laughed and I said, "There I was, I come from," I used to joke about it and say I came from convict blood which I didn't, I mean they were free settlers. It was a joke I always had, and it even took me 200 years to exonerate the family.

How did you come to be living with the Evans family?

We were sharing a rent. It was Depression. It was ten shillings a week for the rent so the two

39:30 families getting together was five shillings a week rent.

Did you have enough land to grow at that place?

Yes, in the backyard. Most of the land, about a quarter of an acre of land to start with, you always had plenty of land to grow stuff, and everything got planted that would produce food. That was number one priority.

40:00 **Did you eat with the Evans family?**

No, no, no, no, no. We ate separately. It was just only sharing the house and the rent to keep a roof over our heads. I think during the Depression years I think I counted, we must've had I'd say twenty different abodes that we would

40:30 live in and sort of get behind with the rent only because of work not being available. Of course we'd get another place and we'd go from there. There was certainly a variety of living accommodations during my childhood. That was, as I say, back in the late '20s, early '30s, and then sort of after that

41:00 when Dad got a more of a permanent working position on the wharves that more regular income was coming in and things got, we were in the one house then for something like ten years

Thanks Olive.

Tape 2

00:39 Going back to my childhood, yeah, my learning curve.

The way that you've described your childhood it sounds quite idyllic in many respects. Was that always the case? Was it such a safe paradise?

We had to look after

01:00 ourselves. When I think about it my parents of course were educating us to the ways of life. I can remember, I was quite a youngster, we were walking up the street on one occasion, evening time it was, and this garish sort of person was coming the opposite way and she had this most vivid red hair and

01:30 red shoes and very garish clothes and what have you, and of course my father sort of saw me turn around and follow, my eyes followed this person and as we got further away out of hearing, he said to me, he stopped and he said, “Now, do you know what that was?” And I said to my father, “No, I don’t. I haven’t seen one like that,” and he said, “That is the red-eyed spider. She’s come down from

02:00 Papua New Guinea from Port Moresby. She is a prostitute and a prostitute is a woman who sells her body to men,” and that was my first learning curve on what a prostitute was. Then they used to say, during the ‘30s it was, they used to say to us, “Be careful. You’re not to talk

02:30 to strangers, particularly men,” and what have you because at that time there were quite a few white Australian girls going missing and it was common knowledge that they were ending up in the white slave trade in the Middle East in the Arabs’ and sheikhs’ harems. A couple of girls escaped and got back and blew the whistle, I suppose you could

03:00 call it, as to what was happening, but there were several never ever found. It was a warning my parents taught us and when I think about the young ones today having all their things to worry about with drugs. What else have they got? A lot of things, paedophiles and all these sort of people,

03:30 it’s becoming a sad world. To me it’s becoming a very sad world to what it was back in those days, and of course I suppose it could have been different in the big cities. As I said, I never saw a city until after the war. So I had all that freedom all through my childhood until the war.

You’re lucky.

That’s right, yeah, yeah

And you

04:00 **went to school where you were taught by the nuns. It used to be that there was an expectation in the Catholic family that one of the children would go –**

Yeah. They wanted me to become a nun, don’t worry. The nuns were sort of aiming to my mother and father about me becoming a nun or a school teacher, and I didn’t want to be either, and my grandfather was on to me about becoming a medical missionary. So

04:30 I thought, ‘I’ll do that’. At least I’ll have a veil, but not the one that everybody else wanted me to have, which was becoming a nun. I was too wild to become a nun. I was not the angelic type of person or even I would never have made a school teacher. It was

05:00 if you had boys they went into the priesthood or brotherhood and if you were a girl you went into the nunnery. No.

Did you want to become a medical missionary?

Yes. Of course I wanted to be a nurse, which I was training when war broke out and as I say I joined the Voluntary Aid

05:30 Detachment and I went into war. I tell you what, war makes you grow up very very quickly. It really does. You’ve got a free spirit one minute and the next minute the war changes everything. Well it did.

Do you remember when you first heard that war had broken out? Do you remember when you first heard about it?

Well,

06:00 of course we knew what was happening with the Japanese coming down from China into the Philippines, from the Philippines into Malaya, Malaya into New Guinea and of course there was no where else for them to go after New Guinea, but Australia, and you have, last year I think it was, some historian, young,

06:30 he wasn’t even born, had the audacity to have it all published in the news where he had convinced the RSL [Returned and Services League] that the Japanese never intended to invade Australia. Most of us all said the same thing, codswallop. You know, why would they have had all this Japanese money already printed for Australia if they had no intention? There was no where else for them

07:00 to go apart from the Antarctic and I don’t think they wanted Antarctica, but they wanted Australia because of our resources which they were short of. They didn’t have the resources. They could see Australia had it. They were definitely softening us up for invasion. But for people to sort of say that they never intended

07:30 to invade, no. They will never convince any of us World War II veterans.

And you'd started your nursing training when war broke out?

No, no. I'd started in '38, '39. You start about fourteen years of age in the hospitals, and of course it got to a stage when in 1941 our training course

08:00 was four years, but they cut that back to three years so that the nurses could get out into the war. Of course it was never taken back to four years, it was always left at three. We were bonded in those days.

Sorry about that.

That's all right my dear. Now where were we up to?

We were talking about you becoming a nurse and I was just interested to hear about

08:30 **what did your nursing training entail in those days?**

My first, you used to have to have, we were bonded to start with. My parents had to pay £50 to bond me into the nursing at the hospital and we used to have to do three months on each sector of the nursing profession. I started in the infectious ward

09:00 and I had lepers, anybody with infections of all sorts of things, and I had a little Aboriginal girl who'd been picked up by the police. She was supposedly eight years of age according to the doctors, but she was only the build of a child of about four and she had been abandoned in the jungle and they brought her in and

09:30 she was covered in scabies. She had malnutrition, she had rickets, she had malaria. She was one hell of a mess and the matron called me down to her office and said, "The police have just brought this child in," and asked me to do what I could with her. So I had to take her back and cut all her hair off her head and what have you and get rid of all the scabies that she had, take blood.

10:00 How that child ever took to me I don't know, because of the things I had to do to her. As I say, she'd been abandoned, and I never ever heard one elder come forward and say, when all that controversy was going on about the Stolen Generation and what have you, that they made a lot of these children outcasts out of the tribe. If they had mixed blood

10:30 they were just thrown out into the desert or into the jungle and what have you, and you had all that controversy going on about the Stolen Generation. Well as I say, she wasn't stolen, she was just abandoned and I finally, after about three months, got her back to a healthy stage and I bought her a little red satin frock, which was her Sunday frock she put on, and I

11:00 named her Frances. We had no idea what her name was, I named her Frances and she used to call me her 'mummy' and she used to put her arms around me and cuddle me. She stayed at the hospital until she was sixteen. The tribe wouldn't take her back and so the hospital said they'd keep her until she was sixteen and then she could go to work as a domestic to help pay for her upkeep. They educated

11:30 her. They sent her to school, normal school, high school. She was one of the lucky ones I suppose you could say, although she had a bad beginning.

So you did quite a lot of work in the infectious diseases area?

Yeah. So then you had to go from, you'd do your three months there and then you go from there to men's surgical, women's surgical, men's medical, women's medical,

12:00 emergency, casualty, operating and that was the, and in between you'd get three months night duty. It was tiring. So that was, even when I went to England after the war they almost hijacked Australian nurses in England

12:30 because our training was so different to over there. They just train in one hospital, either a medical hospital or a surgical hospital or an infectious hospital, whereas we had right across the board training, so we were in very high demand after the war in England.

Did you feel like you had good training for what you were about to encounter?

Yes, yes, I did, yeah. That was

13:00 I think one of the reasons why our commandant at the VADs sort of said MacArthur had arrived and the Americans had arrived and they had no nurses because he had left his eighty-eight back in Bataan and Corregidor when the Philippines fell. But by April 1942

13:30 we actually, well one came out in December '41 on a makeshift ship as a hospital ship. She brought casualties down, and then we got twenty came out of Corregidor when it fell and so that was eighty-eight that made it to Australia. The rest were incarcerated in the

14:00 prisoner of war camps in the Philippines. But it was the training because the nurses down in the south here had no idea what it was like to be in the tropical nursing field. It was totally different.

So they wouldn't have had the same experience as you with things like malaria?

That's right. They knew nothing of it, any of it.

14:30 **And you were living at home during this time?**

Yes. I was in the nursing home when I was nursing at the hospital, but I used to get a couple of days off every so often and go home. It was a very good learning curve, I can assure you. It toughens you up and in those days you needed a bit of toughening up I think for what we had ahead of us.

15:00 **What was, excuse me, what was the situation like back home? The war was on the doorstep, what was the feeling back home about how everything was going?**

Well, you did have quite a large number of people evacuated down south which left us a very skeleton number of people that

15:30 stayed. So it changed dramatically from a very close community, everybody being thoughtful of their neighbours and looking after each other and all that. Our street, I suppose out of about twenty houses in our street there would have been probably three

16:00 families left that didn't leave. So you had all these. It became like a bit of a ghost city until the troops started arriving and coming. Townsville, we went from I think, we had a population of about 20,000 of which something like 6,000 or 7,000 left.

16:30 It gradually went from 14,000 to 15,000 stayed and the troops came in, the Americans and what have you, and we went up to 120,000. It gives you an idea.

Do you remember what year that was when the troops came in?

1941. '42 actually. It was about April, May '42 when we started getting all these

17:00 troops in. It was a garrison town, as I say, until 1944 when MacArthur had gone back to re-take the Philippines, "I shall return," and the, that was '44 and I stood on the top of Castle Hill, or Kissing Point I should say, in

17:30 Townsville, I've got photographs there, which he loaded up 100,000 of the troops and made his trip back through the islands back to re-take the Philippines. But in Townsville Harbour on that particular day there would have been, I think it was 261 ships were loading the 100,000 of troops out of Townsville.

18:00 Then we had a very quiet country town again, yeah.

Townsville underwent some very radical social changes?

Oh yes, very much so, and of course it created a lot of problems because we had water shortage and shortage of everything, because as I say, you imagine something going from 14,000

18:30 or 15,000 to 120,000 people. We were lucky we did have quite a lot of vacant homes and things the government just took over and said, "That's it, you're billeted here, you're billeted there," what have you. There might have been a certain ironic thing about that, making the people go south to give us accommodation. No.

What was

19:00 **the feeling before the American troops arrived? Townsville was very close to where the action was happening.**

[UNCLEAR]

How were you going to defend, yes, can you talk a bit about that?

Which one? The bombing or the fact we were

If you could talk about the bombing and a bit about the Brisbane Line?

19:30 Yes. I don't know the reason why there was such a controversy that it was always denied that the Brisbane Line ever existed, but it did and it was created by Sir Ivan Mackay, I think, General Sir Ivan Mackay and the Menzies Government had just north of Brisbane, right and then down across

20:00 past Adelaide and they were only, the Australian Government was only prepared to defend that south east part of Australia. The rest of us, we were just cast adrift and told that was it, we were in no man's land. Until the Americans arrived we didn't have anyone to come to our aid and the Japanese could just walk in and take us.

20:30 I know we had intelligence and counter-intelligence and stuff that came out of the north to the people down south to know about, read about and hear about, were all a lot of, which wasn't what was happening because they didn't want to panic the people down south, but it didn't matter about us.

21:00 But it was definitely, it did happen but we survived it.

Were people armed? Were people in the country training to defend themselves?

We had 'Curtin's Cowboys', they stayed behind. They were bush people, bushmen who, they actually were all up

21:30 around the Cape York, around Gulf of Carpentaria, up around Darwin area, onto the Exmouth Gulf over in Western Australia. So they were scattered all around, and a lot of people don't realise it, but what MacArthur wanted, MacArthur got. He had something like, I think it was something like 200 Australian Aboriginals also

22:00 in his charge who were stationed up around, all around the Northern Territory and Cape York and what have you to pass information on if the Japanese had landed anywhere and that sort of thing. I think it would've been about 200 I think he had in his particular services.

22:30 The night the three Japanese planes came over and bombed Townsville, one bomb dropped in the, the Americans had a big poultry farm out at Noomba and it was, all the poultry was for the army, US [United States] Army, and the eggs and what have you, and

23:00 one bomb dropped in the middle of the poultry farm and frightened the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. They never layed for a week, they were frightened, and they dropped bombs right at the mouth of the river where the wharves were. They just went into the ocean, so they were bad drops, but they dropped a 'daisy-cutter', which was all

23:30 sort of muck metal, razor blades and nuts and bolts and all sorts of things and it just sheered a palm tree down and that was our one casualty was this poor palm tree. Yeah, hit by a daisy-cutter.

So not a particularly successful raid?

It wasn't, no. There were about three raids, but they were bad. They came out of

24:00 Rabaul, the planes. One got a bit of a shot up when our planes took off in Townsville after them. One got back, it was really damaged, but they all made it back, the three of them.

What impact, I'm sure there were many, did the American soldiers have on Townsville? There were so many of them.

24:30 Yeah. Well, the local people accepted them. As I said before, these young feral ones that were going berserk when George Bush was out here just recently and what have you, they don't know what they were protesting about really because we owe

25:00 the United States a debt that we can never repay for the amount of Americans who gave their lives for the freedom that the young ones have got today. We'll get around to that later, yeah.

What did the Australian men think of having all these American men

25:30 **around?**

Well yeah, some of them accepted it, some of them didn't. There was quite a bit of controversy. I think mainly, not the fact that they were American, I think it was, a lot of it I think was jealousy because the Americans had much more money to spend and of course they were smarter dressed and

26:00 everything. So I think mainly it wasn't they disliked the Americans itself, it was, yeah, I suppose it was envy, jealousy and what have you.

It wasn't a case of lock up your daughters?

Yes. Yes, it was,

26:30 although I'd say most of them were gentlemen. They had a different class of manners I suppose you could call it. Our Australian boys were very ocker, whereas the Americans who came out, lots of them had been to college

27:00 and, "Yes ma'am, no ma'am," sort of. They had a different make up to them to the Aussie boys. But as I said, what took place between the US troops and the Australian troops, a lot of it was just envy and dislike because they were,

27:30 because our boys, a lot of them had already been over in the Middle East in Tobruk and places like that. Really tough and hard soldiers, and of course to come home to these nice lovely young fresh invaders from the US was a bit of a cultural shock to them.

They must've seemed like quite exotic creatures to a lot

28:00 **of the young women?**

Yes, they did. In Townsville we had quite a few who married and I never had time for any romances. I was too bloody busy and I wasn't inclined to want to go out with either Australian or American soldiers.

28:30 My training had always been a one track, men and all that sort of thing were not part of my life.

I find that hard to imagine when you think of how many men there must've been in Townsville at that time, and how few women?

That's right.

How few single women.

29:00 Women were, yeah. Although I must admit once I joined the army I was well protected, very well protected.

Who made sure of that?

The CO, our commanding officer. We were out of bounds, taboo, and

29:30 sort of as I say, well protected. It was not like you had a choice that you could go out with anyone you wanted to or what have you. It was a different world and a different time, a different era, yeah.

With all those people from a different culture in Townsville, did the nature of the place change

30:00 **in that was different kinds of food being eaten in the town, were there businesses that**

Oh God, yeah, because like they were much, they loved their ice cream. They had ice cream for breakfast which revolted us, because the younger children, teenage children, they just thought it was wonderful because they could always get ice cream whenever they wanted it. I can always

30:30 remember my very first meal I had in the US Army and I was lined up in the mess tent with my tray. You'd go along and you'd get served. It was cold ice pork, baked beans, diced apple and diced celery. So that was a cold collation, and there was this plonked on my tray like that

31:00 and on the side was another section for dessert, and I moved to the next young American soldier behind, serving there and he plonked peaches and ice cream on top of this cold collation, and I'm standing there with this tray and I said to him, "What the hell is this?" And with a broad American accent

31:30 he said to me, "Ma'am, that's the way they all eat it." I said, "You're joking. Not me here," and I threw the tray and he just stood there wearing this – that was my first meal in the US Army. Every time I'd go into the mess tent after that they'd give each a nudge, "Watch her, watch her. Do it separately." But I'll never forget that meal.

32:00 **You made a fine first impression?**

Didn't I ever. I'll tell you what I got, I got anything I wanted after that I can assure you. Even in the middle of the night if I was on night duty at the hospital and I'd ring up to the cookhouse and say, "Gosh, I'm hungry," one o'clock, two o'clock in the morning, "Do you think you could make me some toasted sandwiches?" "Yes ma'am. Yeah, we'll be up with it," and they'd come up with toasted salmon, sandwiches with toothpicks with

32:30 olives. It was one of those things that really, yeah, that was one of my, I was going to say highlights I've never forgotten.

Especially after the Depression as well?

Yeah, yeah. The US Services provided everything. They wanted

33:00 for nothing. I can remember my author when he was writing the book saying to me did I feel guilty about things like American Thanksgiving Day when we always had turkey and always getting steaks, and Christmas we had turkey and all this sort of stuff. I wasn't particularly guilty of having,

33:30 it was available and they ate well compared to our Australian people. I didn't.

And they were bringing in all their own supplies, were they?

Well yeah, and what they provided for themselves, say with the poultry farm, with the cattle and all that. Yes, it was all well provided for. We wanted for

34:00 nothing actually. Even when I came across Australian nurses in the Australian Army hospital, one lot I came across, they were sterilising needles in sardine tins and I thought cripes. So I just requisitioned three beautiful big sterilisers out of the storeroom, the QM [quartermaster's store], and passed

34:30 them over and said, I mean our stores were stacked to the hilt with stuff, whereas the Australians were short of it. We're all on the same side, here, go. Of course we had what they call a PX [Post Exchange – American canteen unit] which was, we could go in and buy anything we wanted. Of course I always went in with a long list. Australian nurses

35:00 would say, "Get me some talcum powder, get me lipstick, get me stockings," all this sort of stuff. So I

was one of the best customers because I could get anything they wanted for them. You've got no idea, they had storerooms stacked with stuff. It had all come out from America of course.

I would've thought that would create a little bit of ill felling between the Australian

35:30 **troops?**

Well, as I said, there was from time to time. I just think a lot of it was envy, the fact one lot had so much and the others were short of stuff, but we used to try and spread it around if

36:00 we could. It was just the way we were brought up.

It sounds like you were quite instrumental in evening up the differences?

Yep, yep. I said as far as I was concerned we were all on the same side. We were fighting on the same side and I couldn't see why it couldn't be shared.

How far were you through your training when the war came to Queensland, Australia?

I'd done about a little

36:30 over two years, going on for two and a half years when I actually joined up. So they, and of course in those days it was so repetitious. Three months on the one ward doing the training, and I mean you picked it up within about the first two or thee weeks sort of what the whole thing was about. So it was,

37:00 a lot of it was wasted time really compared to today with the young ones. Today, to me I just always consider that nurses today are technicians and that's exactly how I see it. Everything to them is all on computers and machinery and what have you. We were just hands on back in those days, and three months of the same thing

37:30 and it didn't take you that long to absorb what you were training for.

How were you protected against the different diseases you were dealing with?

Oh, none, apart from, not nursing, but in the army we had to take Atebrin and stuff like that against malaria. It was fairly

38:00 rife, and dengue fever, and of course if you were caught and you hadn't had your daily dose of, which made you look as though you had hepatitis, you went all this funny yellow looking colour, if you were caught not taking your daily Atebrin you were on charge. So you had to prevent yourself from being infected,

38:30 and of course a lot of it started off when we started getting all the refugees out of New Guinea and they were coming in with malaria and the dengue in their bloody steams. Of course the mosquitos were just transferring it over from one to the other.

When you say refugees were these the indigenous people of New Guinea?

No, the white people in New Guinea. We didn't get the indigenous ones.

39:00 It was the white traders and people who lived in New Guinea when the Japanese landed. They were coming out on boats and aeroplanes. My grandfather came out on a little private plane out from Wau. He landed in Townsville and he was absolutely riddled with malaria and dengue and of course he used to have to have his quinine every day to

39:30 counteract it. But of course it just spread once these people came in from New Guinea and from Indonesia, from Java, a lot of them came in. My diaries, I was recording how many people were coming in daily or weekly from on ships and

40:00 what ships they were coming in on, and planes, what they were coming in on from Dutch Java, Indonesia, New Guinea.

So when war broke out do you remember your first war casualties in the hospital?

Yes.

40:30 It started in July of 1942 when we first started getting our casualties out of Buna and Gona, which was the east coast of New Guinea where the Japanese had landed. That was the beginning of the battle for the Kokoda Trail and as I said on the Bert Newton show just last month, October,

41:00 November, the dedication in my book is to the twelve people who were on the mission station on Buna who the Japanese, they beheaded every one of them and the youngest was a little boy of six. I could never ever sort of in my heart how any human being,

41:30 man, could ever do that to a six year old, to behead him. You know, I mean how sadistic do you have to be? I mean he was no threat, and all bar Captain Austen, he was the only serving member, the rest were all non-combatants.

Tape 3

00:50 **OK Olive, we were talking just before we broke about some of the atrocities that you'd heard about being committed by the Japanese.**

01:00 **How was that affecting people when this news was trickling back to Australia?**

Well actually we didn't know that it had been taking place. So we had intelligence and counter-intelligence and it wasn't until we started getting the wounded back from New Guinea that we heard that the atrocities had been

01:30 committed on the mission at Buna Beach. Up until November we had 2,600 troops brought back from New Guinea to our hospital in Townsville and in December we had another 2,400 odd, and we couldn't cope with them all.

02:00 We had to put all the walking wounded, we had to put on trains and send them down to Brisbane. Some we had to put on the Ormiston, which was a ship and send them down to Brisbane because we just couldn't cope with it. Then of course in the January, February things quietened down a bit. It was not as bad, but that part of 1942 from July until December

02:30 was hectic. It really was, six months of it. As I said, we didn't know about the beheading of the people at the mission at Buna until the troops started coming back to tell us what had happened. As I said, how could any man, any human being, cut the head off a child? I mean, who was no threat whatsoever.

03:00 **What other news were the soldiers bringing back that was of interest to you?**

Me? All the same. There was no different. Some of them were malarias, dengue fever, some were wounds, battle wounds. Whatever came before you, you just got stuck into and got them back to being

03:30 able to be discharged and sent either back to the front line or either back to their units.

What sort of news were they bringing with them, what were they telling you?

The horrors of what it was up in New Guinea, because it was all so foreign, particularly the Americans, it was all so foreign to them to be in jungle battle, which they weren't accustomed to, you know, but

04:00 the, of course the smell, that's something you've got to experience, the smell of the human body burnt. It's something that takes you months to get out of your smelling system, your senses, it's

04:30 horrific. We had, when I was at the Mareeba Air Hospital there, we had the 13th Station Hospital there, field hospital, we had two or three bad B17 crashes, full of bombs and blew up and the bodies were all charred and, yeah.

05:00 It's horrible.

Was there anything you can do for those men?

No, they were all dead. They were past history. Never, no.

You mentioned before the unpleasant memory of the smell, did some burns victims come back to you from other incidents other than the bombers crashing?

05:30 No, no. They were either, when the planes were taking off they had an aircrew, the B17s, an aircrew of ten to twelve on board and they were always loaded with bombs, and so if they crashed the whole thing was, you were lucky if you found bits and pieces of some of them.

06:00 We had several crashed like that in Townsville at Garbutt and up in Mareeba. They've got a memorial at the aerodrome there to ten of the men who crashed and were burnt to death on a plane crash there. I've got photographs of that,

06:30 yeah. But that was just part and parcel of it all. You just, whatever came in that was it, you got on with it. There was nothing routine about any of it. When you've either got to, you went and did triage and then those who had

07:00 fevers, they went into, we had actually in Townsville we had commandeered a whole street of houses. I've got photographs of them, and there were thirty houses, fifteen on either side and they built walkways, knocked a wall out of one side of a house and built walkways onto the next one and they went right around, you didn't have to go up and down steps and what have you.

07:30 And we had wards on one side and we had three operating theatres, the morgue and pathology and the laundry and the cookhouse was all on the other side of the street and that's where we set up the 12 Station Hospital. We were billeted in Armstrong Paddock in Townsville. We were in tents as accommodation and it was lovely in the monsoon season when

08:00 we had to wear wellingtons, up to here in water and what have you, flooding everywhere. It was lovely,

in mud, but you got on with it.

Would you describe those conditions as being unsanitary for the nurses who were in the paddock?

I wouldn't say unsanitary.

08:30 It was just a bit difficult having to get around in your Wellingtons in the water because usually the monsoon season started around about December, January, and you had January, February, March. I can remember one, as I child, this is growing up, one monsoon, it rained

09:00 for two months, never stopped, and the water had nowhere to go because it was saturated and I can remember jumping off the top of the back steps into the backyard into the water where it had risen up. It was just like a big swimming pool. Yeah, but solidly for two months, never stopped. The young

09:30 Americans who came out from America to have to tolerate what we just accepted as having grown up from birth. That was all we knew. So we couldn't understand why they couldn't tolerate what we were tolerating, but we did. Quite a lot of them though did go,

10:00 in those days we used to call it 'troppo', used to lose their sanity because of the conditions out here in Australia, in the tropics particularly. If they got classified as Section 8, which meant that they'd gone over the hill, they were sent back to America back to the US

10:30 veterans hospital there to try and get them back to normality. Some of them did, some of them didn't. It was hard but you did it.

Did you see any soldiers who had gone troppo?

Oh yes, we had them. In our hospital we had one house that was the psychiatric, had been made into a psychiatric unit and we had steel

11:00 bars on the windows and things like that.

Can you tell me about the symptoms, how the men would be?

Gosh, they all just went funny in different ways. I couldn't say that there were any two alike. It's just that they had almost opted out of reality and

11:30 escaped into a world of their own.

Could you liken it to any other mental illness that you'd seen or have come across since?

No, not particularly. At that time they were experimenting with insulin tolerance, shock treatment for them, and quite a lot of the troops

12:00 were used as guinea pigs testing it. Of course years later they were using it in the psychiatric hospitals in Sydney. I don't know whether you've ever heard of it, Chelmsford Hospital was notorious for it. But the troops who were used as guinea pigs, some of them sort of suffered to the end of their days from experiments that were

12:30 used on them to try and counteract this other problem that had been caused by the conditions that they were under.

Did that experimentation occur at the hospital?

No, we didn't do any experimenting at all, but we did get patients who were used as guinea pigs for the mustard gas.

13:00 They had blisters all over their body. Outside, which is now a lovely tourist resort called Mission Beach in Queensland, just outside Innisfail, in those days it was a big experimental on mustard gas. America had actually sent out tons and tons and tons of mustard gas and so had Britain for experiments out here, and we were not involved in the experimental side

13:30 testing what reactions would be in the tropics with the perspiring and what have you, but we did have victims who had been burnt with the mustard gas. After the war the troops were dumping all this excess mustard gas into the ocean all up the east coast of Australia, Queensland, New South Wales.

14:00 So it all ended up in the ocean. God knows what it did to the fish and what have you if it ever leaked out, but it's there. Even today it's all still there.

Before we continue talking about this period of time I'd just like to go back a little and clarify exactly how it was that you ended up in the VAD, and you'd

14:30 **had two years training already, were you not in a protected industry?**

No, no.

So as a nurse –

At the same time, in ’41 they were asking all us young women to join the VADs, which was voluntary and of course we used to have our sessions and training and what have you, and of course quite a few of them

15:00 had already been allocated and sent over to Palestine, so depending upon what they were well classified in, that was where they were sent and your commandant, she had the say as to what, that’s how I ended up being when MacArthur sent 130,000 troops, they were heading for the Philippines,

15:30 but he redirected to Brisbane and we got 120 or 100,000 of them up in Townsville and no nurses, until we got, it was April when we got the twenty out of Corregidore. Ten crashed on Mindanao and they were taken prisoners and the rest all left on Corregidore

16:00 were taken prisoners in Manila until 1944 when MacArthur went back and released them from being prisoners.

So you knew obviously that the war had been going for a while now and people were asking for the young nurses to step forward and volunteer?

Yep.

Do you remember the day that you joined the VAD?

Yes, I do.

16:30 As I said, when they came around and told every household that we either evacuated and came south or we were left behind, and sitting on the back steps with the family, my father, my mother and what have you, my sister, Betty never had anything to say, but I sort of said when Dad wasn’t allowed to evacuate because of his

17:00 job, Mum said, “I’m not going to leave my husband.” So I said, “To hell with this. I mean this is my home and my country and I’ve never runaway from a fight yet.” So that was then. I just happened to be irate to think they expected us to run like scared rabbits down south here behind the Brisbane Line, which did exist.

17:30 I went up to the 2nd Headquarters Command, which was MacArthur’s 2nd Headquarters Command and I said I was advised by my commandant to come up here and tell you that I’d been training for a medical missionary, nursing, and that I was prepared to join the army,

18:00 and the first thing they, it was the quickest thing that ever happened to me. I’d say within twenty minutes I’d taken the Oath of Allegiance, I had signed the Secrecy Act and they said, “That’s it, you’re in the US Army.” The first thing they said to me was, “Get your hair cut.” I had a lovely long blonde plait. “Get your hair

18:30 cut and ask your parents to sign this form for them,” and I walked in the back door at home and my mother looked up and she burst out crying. She said to me, “You’ve had your hair cut off.” I said, “Yes, I was ordered to,” and I said to her, “And as soon as you sign this piece of paper I’m in the army,” which she

19:00 did, and then –

Did they know that you’d had to lie about your age?

Oh yes. My Mum knew that, I told her. But I mean it didn’t matter. All they wanted was experience and that was it. So the quickest thing that ever happened, and the same thing happened when I had to go to Melbourne after the war,

19:30 or towards the end of the war to get discharged. I was in, signed some papers, shook hands with me and said, “Thank you very much,” and I was out of the army. It was all in, I’d say, twenty minutes.

So you’d now joined the United States Army, you’d sworn an Oath of Allegiance?

I’d already taken that as well with the Australian VADs to

20:00 my own country here and I had to do it to the Americans as well.

So how long were you with the Australian VADs?

From 1941 until I joined in April 1942. So about twelve months. That was voluntary part time while I was nursing.

What sort of duties were you doing during that period of time with the VADs, the Australians?

Just

20:30 learning to, because VADs were attached to military hospitals and all you were doing was all the menial work. I mean that was what VADs was about.

So you’ve got

21:00 **menial chores as a VAD in the Australian Army?**

Yeah, yeah. Our theory was we wore the veil of nun, the cape of a gentlewoman and the apron of a maid, and that was the category that we were in. So whatever chores came up we did it, and it was just familiarising ourselves with that sort of

21:30 work that we had to do. But of course, I had a funny, what would you say, interview with a journalist in Melbourne and she sort of said to me, did I

22:00 go into the war and join up just for the adventure of it, and I thought what an odd question. I don't know, but I said, "No, it was because my country needed help and I was just patriotic enough to say I'll do my bit. There was no adventure." Mind you, I'd been adventurous as a growing up child, but it was a totally

22:30 different feeling that my country needed me, and that's how I felt about. But this other person saying did I do it all for adventure. No, I didn't.

And you were willing to, quite literally, serve?

Yeah, because it was, as I said in my book, some of us were asked to do different things and you just did it.

23:00 You just got on and did it, yeah.

Had you been given any army type training or any specific types of army training when you joined the Australian?

In the VADs we had a little bit of discipline I suppose you could call it. Sort of PT [Physical Training] and exercise and drilling and

23:30 lectures on what we could and what we couldn't do, yeah, but as far as, we were a different category I suppose to most serving personnel who had to learn all about the war. We didn't have to do that. It was just having to get on with whatever came our way.

So you didn't have to

24:00 **carry arms ever or wear dog tags [identification tags] or anything like that?**

No, no, no. No, we were just issued with our uniforms and it wasn't that much different to doing my training in the hospital. It was the same sort of routine that we went on with. No, there was hardly any

24:30 difference I suppose.

What was your uniform like?

We had different categories. We had overalls, we had long slacks, we had short skirts, we had short sleeved shirts, short sleeved jackets. Like during the day time was all short sleeved but during the night time you had to put the long sleeves and long trousers on. That was because

25:00 of mosquitos because you had no winter clothes. It was just all tropical US khaki clothing.

Did you take some pride in your uniform?

Oh yeah. No, we always made sure we were smartly dressed and what have you.

25:30 When we were on duty ward we were usually in overalls, which was for hard work. It was, our uniforms were good actually. It was the polished gaberdine that the American, all uniforms were made of, you know,

26:00 which was a bit different to the Australian Army. We didn't, we had our own private night clothes. We didn't have regular army stuff for that.

So in the Australian VADs were you paid anything?

No. No, because we were volunteers at that stage.

26:30 I never had a pay. I never got a pay until I went in the US Army and then I was on £7 a week, £15 a fortnight, which was good money and I had no objections.

The Australian privates weren't earning anywhere near that much?

They were only about six shillings a day. That was why a lot of them volunteered to go

27:00 into the mustard gas experiments because the government offered them an extra two bob [shillings] a day, and to them two bob a day was a lot of money in those days, particularly if they were married, the Australians. They had to send back three shillings a day to their wives, so an extra two bob a day meant a lot to them. A lot of them suffered for it

27:30 afterwards, yeah.

What were you doing with your money at this point in time, were you saving?

I was saving and also friends who were Australian soldiers and Australian nurses and what have you, I'd shout them to the movies which

28:00 I didn't mind because I was, I suppose you could say looking at it from their, that I was loaded, and I'd say, "Come on, let's all go to the movies," which we'd do. It didn't worry me, but I did save, yeah. It took me a while after war to, there was a lost period from about '45 to about '51, I suppose I didn't know what I wanted to do, how I wanted

28:30 to carry on with my life.

In that first period with the Australian VADs were you seeing any men coming back from the front?

No, no. I never, I knew we had when Curtin was trying to get our 9th, our 7th and our 9th Division back from Palestine,

29:00 the Middle East, and Churchill sort of said, he and Curtin clashed because he said, "Let Australia go," because he was only interested in the war in Europe and he said, "Let Australia go, we'll get it back later." But Curtin wouldn't do it. He demanded that the 9th and the 7th Division

29:30 come back from Palestine here to help defend Australia. They went up to New Guinea. We had them in Townsville for quite a while readjusting from the Middle East to jungle warfare to be sent up to New Guinea.

What year was that?

That was '42.

'42.

As I say, it was a horrific year, it really was, but

30:00 Curtin would have none of it as far as he was concerned. No, he was not prepared to let Australia go, and of course we lost the 8th in Malaya. They were all incarcerated in Changi or on the Burma Railway.

What kind of condition were the 7th and 9th in when they came back?

They were quite healthy, even though they'd

30:30 been fighting in the Middle East. They were in good condition. It was just a matter of switching from desert warfare to jungle warfare.

So who were you patients with the Australian VADs?

I didn't have any.

You didn't have

No. We didn't have any. We were just in training as the VADs as what have you. No, we didn't have any patients.

31:00 I mean, my patients were the ones in the hospital where I was doing the training, but that was nothing to do with the VADs.

Sure. Why did your commandant tell you to join the Americans?

Because of the tropical medicine that I was experienced in which other people from the south had no idea what it was all about. It was a totally different field of

31:30 nursing to have malaria and dengue fever and typhus, sort of things that they didn't even know existed down south, or from the nurses who came out from America afterwards. But the twenty-one that we got, I only had nine of them, from the Philippines, they were quite clued up as to that same type of medicine.

32:00 **So you were handpicked for your expertise?**

Yeah, yeah, that's right. I just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, or the right place at the right time. I don't know how you put it, but it was definitely something that was meant to be.

So in '42 were you dealing more with infectious disease or

32:30 **wounds?**

Well, as I said, once the Japanese invaded New Guinea they landed at Buna and Gona and the Kokoda Trail took place. That was from July until January '43, July '42 to January '43, so that was the period when we had all these casualties that came in from New Guinea, and after that

33:00 it sort of settled down. Mind you, we did get local things that happened, car accidents by the troops, sort of things that happened, accidental things. As I say, 100,000 troops, you've got a lot of

33:30 things that took place with them. But our doctors always knew who, used to line up for who had a hang over. They didn't get passed to get out of duty sort of thing. They could pick it. You knew the genuine ones from the

34:00 others.

And from New Guinea were you getting Australians as well as Americans at your hospital?

No, no. They came back to the Australian nurses at, they had a big army camp out at Cape Pallarenda, which we did get some of them, but we only got them because we had a cyclone and they were in tents

34:30 out there and the tents all got blown down and blown away. So we did take some of the Australian ones into our hospital just for the time being until they got re-established after the cyclone.

What year was that?

'42.

'42 as well.

Yeah.

You were having a heck of a time?

Yes, it really was, yeah.

What were you having the most trouble dealing with during that period of

35:00 **time with the men coming back? What was the toughest part of the work for you?**

I think it was the long hours because so long as you had patients needing treatment you just did it. There was, we had no such thing as unions or what have you to stand up for us and sort of say, "All right, it's time you knocked off," and what have you. I can remember I think the longest

35:30 period I ever had was thirty-six hours, yeah, and we were zombies, believe me, by the time, you just had to keep going because they were there.

I'm sure there was variety from what you've been saying?

Yes, yeah.

Can you try and give me roughly what an average day would be like for you, Olive?

Well as I said, you had

36:00 your triage and of course that was where everybody was segregated out where they, those who had malaria went to the malaria wards, those who had casualties or wounds, bullet wounds, what have you, they went to, psychiatrics went to another one and so they were all segregated into their sectors. Then we got on with doing what we had to do

36:30 once we'd sorted them out because they just came in in all sorts of, by ship and by plane, any way the officials could get them out of New Guinea.

What time would your day normally start or did it depend on the arrival of vehicles bringing patients?

We used to do four hours on and four hours off. So we'd go for four hours. It didn't matter what time it was, but we'd get a break every four hours,

37:00 and then we'd go back to our tents in Armstrong Paddock and we'd wake the other shift up and they'd go on and carry on, and then we'd have our four hours rest and we had to go and have our rest, it was compulsory.

Did you have days off?

Yeah, when things sort of quietened down, but

37:30 you didn't get your days off while there was a commotion on getting everybody bedded down and things running systematically and smoothly, yeah. They didn't accumulate. As I say, we had no unions.

How were the troops treating you?

Very good

38:00 actually. Most of them I'd say were, they were probably either too sick or too disinterested to know that they had females caring for them, and apart from those who were on their death bed we lost,

38:30 we had 23,000 when we closed the register in 1944. We'd had 23,000 go through our hospital and of that we had lost 458 young lives, they had died. You know, sort of

39:00 on their death beds some of them would think they were talking to their mother or their wife or their fiancee or what have you, and you just sat there with them pretending to be that person because they couldn't differentiate the fact that you were a nurse. You'd just say, "Yes darling," whatever it was, and they'd talk away as though they were talking to that person until they

39:30 passed on, yeah. We buried them in Townsville. We had a special section at the Townsville Cemetery. After the war, the War Commission Graves in America sent out teams to exhume the bodies and

40:00 they went back to their own home towns and were buried in their own home towns back in America way after the war. So we didn't keep any of them here in Australia.

It must've been an extraordinary time to be spending with people, their last hours?

Yes. It was just part of our, I suppose our training in the civilian

40:30 hospital was that, I've lost my track now. You had to build a barrier. Under no circumstances, no matter what happened,

41:00 you were supposed to be able to keep that barrier and not let anything come through it.

We'll just stop there Olive, sorry, the tape's run out.

Right.

Tape 4

00:38 Refresh my mind where we ended up.

We were talking about the work that you were doing and the American hospital. Can you describe to me the set up, I mean you had mentioned it a bit before, but what was the routine within that hospital? I know it's hard to have a routine when you get an influx of a lot of people.

It is, yeah.

But who

01:00 **was issuing the orders, who listened to who, what was the daily set up?**

We had the commanding officer who was Colonel Chew, and then his next subordinate was Major Gray, Captain Connolly and Lieutenant Fitzgerald. So we had four doctors and of course we had nine American nurses out of Corregidor.

01:30 Of course it was just, you know, orders that you did this and you did that and you never questioned any of it. You just went ahead and did it to get back to some sort of normal order and what have you. As I said, the longest period we had was thirty-six hours until we got it

02:00 under control. That was our worst period.

What was that influx due to?

That was from Buna and Gona in the November and December of 1942 which was the height of the battle there to drive the Japanese off New Guinea. A lot of it was malaria and dengue fever,

02:30 and a lot of it was casualties, wounded. It was just a matter of sorting them out and getting them into their regimented what have you.

That was a particularly hard area where those battles were taking place?

That's right, yeah. That was the height of all of it. I mean none of the rest of the war compared to that period, to that six months or so.

03:00 **Did you notice a difference in the men, in the way they were coming to the hospital? Was there a difference in attitude that you hadn't noticed so much before?**

Well they were grateful. They were full of gratitude to be, I think to be fair that they were out of the battle. They knew that they were safe back in Townsville,

03:30 you know sort of. I just think the majority of them in their own minds were able to relax a bit and say, "We know we're safe here now," which was hard for them having been through what they had been through up in New Guinea. And of course we didn't get any of the typhus cases down from there,

04:00 although they did lose about 200 and something of typhus in New Guinea, but they died up there. We didn't get them. It's hard to sort of say what was routine and what wasn't routine back in that era, it was. You just did what you had to do and got on with it. There was no questioning of sort of saying,

04:30 "I don't do this," or, "I don't do that." You just did it.

Did you have a matron?

Not a matron, a senior sister, senior nurse, but no, we didn't have matrons.

So you were one of the few Australians working within that environment?

In that environment, yeah.

Did you notice any differences in the way the Americans ran their hospitals as to what you had experienced in the Australian hospitals?

05:00 Yes. I would say there was not as strict military regime as there was in the Australian and the British. They were more regimented, whereas the Americans were more

05:30 down to earth, practical I suppose. We didn't have a lot of army regulations to abide by. They were much more, even my brother-in-law who was a lieutenant-colonel in the British Army used to say to me, "Ollie, surely you lot didn't go on that like?" you know, when you see MASH [American television series set in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, Korean War]. I said, "Yes, we did." It was

06:00 just a safety valve of letting go when things quietened down. He was horrified because the British Army was a bit pukka [English colonial].

So what did you do on your down time when you had a chance to relax?

Me?

What did you get up to?

Water was very scarce. I used to slip off to where we had rivers, the

06:30 Cascade, and just sort of sit in the river and let the water run over my body. I'd go starkers [stark naked], skinny-dipping, what have you. I'd never let anybody know what I was doing, no. But I was always, it was so lovely to lay and relax in it. It would just go over your body and you always felt lovely and fresh afterwards.

Because you were only around eighteen at this time, weren't you?

That's right.

07:00 I was only going on twenty-eight or twenty-nine, I was one of those people, probably a bit ahead of my time, I don't know.

Because of the things you were seeing?

I think it was part of my childhood growing up and things like that. We faced a lot of things that the youth of that time had no idea what

07:30 it was all about sort of. As for today, it made you grow and of course the war just made you grow up completely. It just finished you right off.

Did the soldiers talk much to you about their experiences?

Not a lot because, and we didn't pressure them for it either. What they wanted

08:00 you to know, you knew, they'd tell you. But they didn't want, there was no way. But as I say, it was the ones in their last hours that I felt sorry for because the nuns had always taught us in the convent that nobody should die alone, that they should always have someone there to comfort them in their final demise.

08:30 **Is that what you found the most difficult?**

In a way, yes, because, I'll come back to that in a minute for you. I used to think that boy had a mother back home who was waiting

09:00 for her son to come back from the war. So you just pretended to be their mother if they thought in their delirium, if they thought that's who they were talking to. Just, "Yes dear, I understand." So they passed on relatively at peace, you know. Some of the things that they

09:30 sort of told me and confessed I'll take to my grave with me. But that would probably be one of the hardest parts of it, but having been schooled with the nuns in that area going into my training for nursing and missionary work and what have you, it helped

10:00 I suppose in some ways.

It's a big responsibility?

Never thought about it as a responsibility. Towards the end of the book when I started getting awful nightmares I'd wake up in the middle of the night and I'd have a vision, like Steven would walk in that door and all covered in

10:30 mud and blood and what have you like how we got some of the cases. When I'd wash the faces, this is my horrors, I'd wash the face and every face I washed was Steven's face. Whether subconsciously or what it was that I always thought of these young boys as part of my family or what have you, but

11:00 you know, the fact is I knew they had mothers back home waiting for them to come home, and having to face the fact that we buried them in Townsville.

American boys?

American boys, yes, lovely young boys.

That would have been hard for their families too, not to be able to bury them?

Yeah. After the war they sent the War Graves Commission out from the States [United States] and exhumed

11:30 every body that we had in our cemetery. We've still got the memorial on Kissing Point Hill. It used to be in the cemetery but they took it out of the cemetery and put it on the top of Kissing Point Hill, to all the boys who gave their lives, and as I say, the young generation doesn't know what

12:00 debt we do owe America that we can never repay, never ever. Doesn't matter how long we get. We can never repay those boys giving their lives for another country. It wasn't even theirs.

Did you have much connection with the nurses who were in the Australian hospitals and the British?

Yeah. We used to get together. As I said, they used to give me lists of stuff they wanted

12:30 me to buy for them out of the PX, the American PX. And of course the American nurses that we got out, we used to have not exactly drinking sessions, because I was warned by Colonel Chew not to get involved with them because they were experienced hard-drinking nurses. I got in the cups a couple of times with them, but

13:00 the things that they used to tell me which was probably a relieving thing for them to be able to talk about their experience in Bataan and Corregidor. So I used to make notes and I ended up I did write a book on their story and I've never had it published. It was interesting

13:30 to hear my niece that I had to send a note to at two o'clock yesterday, she typed it all up for me. I had it on bits and pieces, and she created the cover for me and it's all that took place with the nurses before they came to Australia. They had a tough life.

14:00 There's photographs there.

Getting back to your life as a nurse, the nurses in the Australian hospitals would have been receiving casualties from Kokoda by this time?

That's right. They were getting the Australian 7th and 39th Division which were in the thick of the battle at

14:30 Buna when they were driving the Japs back off the Kokoda Trail. As I said, we only got once some from Cape Pallarenda when the tents were all blown down in the cyclone. The serious cases were sent to the Townsville civilian hospital and we got quite a few of the wounded ones who were recovering

15:00 in the hospital. But it was only just a case of everybody getting together and helping each other.

So the cyclone smashed the Australian hospital, did it?

Yeah, but it was a tent hospital at Cape Pallarenda and it was all under flood. So we just had to take everyone we could sort of. It was a bit of a

15:30 chaos, shemozzle for a while but it sorted itself out in the end and they set up another Australian Army hospital and they went back.

How was it nursing Australian men again?

No different. No different darling. You didn't look at it from any nationality's point of view. You just looked it at from the fact some poor soul needed help and it didn't

16:00 matter who it was. There was no say, you know, he doesn't belong to us. They all did.

As the casualties are coming in from Kokoda, was that seen by the medical staff as being

quite a different kind of a battle? Were they coming back very different with very different injuries and

16:30 **in states of health?**

No, you either had them absolutely riddled with malaria, dengue fever or a casualty, a battle casualty like they'd been wounded or lost a limb or had to lose one after they got back because of gangrene and things like that. No, you didn't. They were all the same. Put it this way,

17:00 their bloods were all red, it didn't matter whether they were Australian, American or whatever.

You talked earlier about the psychiatric ward and some of the men had gone troppo. At this stage of things were you starting to see the effects of battle stress on the men?

No. We didn't actually associated the fact

17:30 that it was battle stress. We just accepted that they couldn't adjust or tolerate to the different climatic conditions of the tropics and the jungle and that sort of stuff. Traumatic stress [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] is something that never came until years later when they discovered then that it was.

18:00 There were those who actually just getting away from the battle environment up on the front lines in the thick of it, and being back in Australian soil, some of them recovered quicker than others. A bit of rest and relaxation away from

18:30 that battle environment, what have you, they recovered and were sent back to the front again. Others never ever recovered and as I say, were classified Section 8 and sent back to the States. Hopefully some of them never came out the rest hospitals. They stayed there for the rest of their lives sort of

19:00 incarcerated. To think that probably growing up in America, young boys, never knowing what was ahead of them, like when World War II came out. It was such a different lifestyle that they were forced into, you know.

19:30 **What was the mix like of the Americans? Were there many black Americans?**

We were told because those days we still had the White Australia Policy and Roosevelt and Curtin had issued instructions that there were to be no black Americans on Australian soil, but there were. We had

20:00 several divisions of them and they were brought in, there was one big battalion outside Townsville at Gooroo and they'd done all the hard work, because as I said we had seventeen airfields around Townsville and they were the ones who had to build the aerodromes and the runways, what have you, and how they did it was

20:30 in the north in those days we had enormous termite mounds. We've still got them up there, but we had lots and lots in those days, and they used to knock them down and make them into, and do the runways of the termite anthills. But they were the ones who did all the hard work and when that was all completed they moved on. It was supposed to be a big 'dark' secret

21:00 that there were no American Negroes, but we had them, and amongst their own, the white Americans, particularly the Southerners from down south America in the USA, they were the worst of all,

21:30 rejecting their own coloured Americans, they really were. But once they completed all the airfields they just moved on and moved out. We had some frictions I can assure you between them.

Can you give me an example of that?

Yeah. There was a truck load of them one day in Townsville. They'd been working and they stopped at the Rising

22:00 Sun Hotel, got off out of the truck and they came in to order some lunch at the hotel, and there were a group of Southern US Air Force men in there and they objected to the publican serving these coloured US Servicemen and protested. It ended up in a 'free for all'

22:30 and it spread out onto the road outside where the truck was and one of the American Negroes, he stabbed one of the white American pilots, a parachutist he was, in the neck and a couple of MPs [Military Police] came up on motorbikes beside the truck and one MP just drew his revolver and shot the driver dead.

23:00 He was black, but you know, it was, no issue of a fine or a lecture or what have you. It was just 'bang', that was it. We got the white American, we got him in. We didn't have any coloured Negroes in our hospital. They had their own.

They had a black hospital?

Yeah, they had their

23:30 own. We never treated any of them.

Who was treating them?

Their own black –

They had black nursing staff?

No, no, just a black hospital with medical men. No nurses. As soon as they finished the moved on, they were gone.

Were you witness to any circumstances like that? You dealt with

24:00 **the wounded from that particular one?**

That's right, yes.

Were you ever witness to any racism?

No, no, no. They were not supposed to be allowed into Townsville. It was one of those odd things. We had a couple of riots with the black Americans. I can't remember whether I put in the book or not.

24:30 They wanted to come into Townsville one time and they were cordoned off. They were not allowed to come in and I believe there was almost like a riot with them trying to break through the MPs' cordon, that had them sort of off in the bush, and I believe, and it was only hearsay,

25:00 that we heard at the hospital that several were shot because they wanted to come into town for some women and drink and what have you. But we were lucky, as I say, we were well protected at our lot.

Did you have, well you were in the American hospital and you were dealing with white soldiers, but were there indigenous

25:30 **Australians coming through the Australian hospitals?**

No. No, as I said, MacArthur had approximately 200 I think Australian Aboriginals who were employed by the US Army as I suppose you could call them coast watchers or just sort of, mind you they were still very primitive

26:00 a lot of them, but they were in the right place and to them it was their country. We had no Aboriginals. The only Aboriginals I ever had was in the Cairns Base in the isolation that had, they were lepers until we sent them out to the leper colonies. There was one at Palm Island and one up in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Mornington Island.

26:30 They were the only two leper colonies that we had, and they were the only Aboriginals that I ever had any dealings with, the ones that MacArthur had stayed in the bush. They never came anywhere near the city.

I would've thought there would be quite an Aboriginal population up in the north of Queensland?

Oh my gosh, yes.

But you didn't interact?

27:00 **It wasn't the norm?**

No. No way. I actually went to school with about five. I suppose, five girls at the convent. We had Aboriginals, so we didn't have any apartheid, segregation, what have you. If the nuns considered and the parents wanted their daughter

27:30 to be educated, they were accepted. So you know, there was no segregation about it all. Yeah, I'd say five. I never had any Aboriginal boys, but Aboriginal girls went to school with me.

So to see black American soldiers around must've been quite a change

28:00 **for a lot of people?**

Up there?

Yes.

Oh yeah, yeah. They didn't have the freedom that the white Americans had. They were restricted because they were not supposed to be here, and that was a condition with Curtin and Roosevelt that there were to be no coloured Americans, but we did have them.

28:30 **During this period of time had there been much of an Asian population living in Townsville? Had there been many Japanese people?**

Well yeah. We had Japanese. We used to have Japanese prior to the war and up until that happened then they were rounded up and they were interned, right, and they were mainly laundry. They did all the laundry

29:00 and stuff like that. You know, people who had been in Townsville and Cairns for decades all of a sudden were the enemy, and I can remember going down to the police station and they had this big compound all wired off and they had

29:30 Japanese and Italians, the cane farmers, the Italians. They were all rounded up and interned and put away in internment camps like the one at Cowra where the Japanese broke out. I don't know how many got killed in that episode.

30:00 They'd been friends and what you for decades and all of a sudden they were the enemy. We had a lot of, had to very careful in those days. We had a lot of 'fifth columnists'.

A lot of what?

Fifth columnists, you don't know what they are? They were sympathisers with the enemy and they used to

30:30 gather information as to what was going on and pass it on to the enemy. That's all in my book, I know that, when we got bombed in Townsville and all that Tokyo Rose was broadcasting the next night how the Japanese had bombed Townsville and cut the

31:00 supply line from Brisbane through to Townsville. It was all a real beat up. It was these fifth columnists who were sending all this information through, and then two or three days later the German propaganda in Germany came up with more stark things that had happened in Australia, how we'd been bombed by the enemy, the Japanese, what devastation had been done.

31:30 Nothing like any of it. It was all propaganda, but we had to be very careful with the fifth columnists.

You say had to be careful with them, or you had to be aware of them?

Well, passing information onto anybody. You never knew who they were. But you know, with it all being broadcast so quickly and how it was

32:00 beaten all out of context as to how much damage had been done and what have you, but yeah, it was very interesting.

Cloak and dagger stuff?

Absolutely.

Did you know of any that were ever caught?

I didn't know them but there were a couple, yeah. One was a bloke called Cousins. He was a

32:30 fifth columnist who was passing on information. That was quite a big scandal about him, but I never knew any of them. We were always warned, we never spoke about anything outside of our privacy in the hospital or what have you.

Were you privy to information that could have been damaging?

33:00 I wouldn't say, no, not intelligence or anything like that. We never had any of that. Just recently last winter when I was up in Townsville we had, I've got the article here, I brought it back with me, a young woman at that time who was in the headquarters office of the Australian Army, it was, and

33:30 the Z Force [Services Reconnaissance Department] had been brought to Townsville. They were stationed there and they did an exercise and they mined the ships out in the Townsville Harbour. They put dummy limpet mines on them. It caused a furore, and she was in the head office at the army and this is what she wrote in this article this last winter when I was up there. She

34:00 didn't know, she still didn't know whether she could reveal what she knew because having signed the Secrecy Act, and she said she was supposed to introduce everybody into the commanding officer's privacy, and introduced what have you, and she said these two MPs marched this bloke straight past her and she had no option, but they went straight on through.

34:30 She said after when it was time for knocking off she was asked to stay back and she was to bring her note pad and what have you, and she said she was quizzed by a couple of intelligence officers whom she'd never seen. She didn't know where they came from. She said they were just in the office upstairs with the typewriter and she had to take the

35:00 statement about this Z Force officer who had been arrested. She said, which was only just a few years ago they opened the memorial at the maritime thing in Townsville and this particular Z Force officer who had been marched past her was at this opening of this thing and she said,

35:30 "I told him I was the clerical woman who had to sign all the Secrecy Act," and what have you to type what she had to type and then she said sixty years later she still didn't know whether she could talk about it. She spoke to him and told him who she was and he thanked her very much and the next thing he sent her a bunch of flowers and what have you. Obviously she hadn't realised that

36:00 came off the Secrecy List thirty years after the war. There were other ones that came off the Secrecy List fifty years after the war, which we can talk about now but we couldn't before that. We've still got things on the Secrecy List for seventy-five years after the war. Now, none of us will be alive to question or

36:30 criticise yay or nay seventy-five years after the war. I mean we all have to be around our twenty year mark. Some were more, a couple of us were less, so none of us will be alive for it. I've been speculating and things. I'm not quite sure whether it was anything to do with the atomic bomb, I don't know. It had to be something

37:00 in that category for it to be a closed subject for that length of time.

You must've heard a few things on the wards with the soldiers?

We were privileged to, but what we heard was, just went in there and that was it, and it was never ever mentioned again.

37:30 Because once you sign the Secrecy Act you just don't repeat what you hear, and I can always remember my father when I was growing up saying to me, "Always remember you only believe half of what you see, nothing of what you hear," three things, see, hear and,

38:00 what's the three wise monkeys? Hear, see and?

Speak?

Speak, that's right. So it was associated with the three wise monkeys, but it was his way. What was in the newspaper, you never believed anything that was in the newspaper. Only believed half of what you see, because something you see is not always what is happening, which is true.

Especially in war time?

Yeah, yeah.

38:30 And of course you never repeat anything that you hear. That was instilled in me from a little one.

Did you hear compromising things from the soldiers?

Compromising?

Morally compromising?

No, no. I could only say the majority were appreciative

39:00 and thankful, as I said, that they were back on Australian soil and away from that traumatic part of their lives, but I would definitely say that there would have been some who never got over it.

They had a 'take no prisoners' policy?

That's right.

Which has all sorts of implications, doesn't it?

39:30 Yeah, that's what I say, I could never understand, even with the Japanese, the beheading of a little six year old boy. What sort of a threat was he, you know, to the Japanese? None.

And what did you know of the war in Europe? Were you getting any news?

No. We,

40:00 particularly up there, I mean they might've been more privileged down here in the south in Melbourne and Sydney. But no, we were totally cut off, isolated as to what was happening anywhere. All we knew was we were, what would you say, bait and just sort of left out there on our own.

40:30 For quite a while, some early years of the war, I suppose I was a bit bitter about it to think our own government wouldn't come to our aid if we got invaded, but as time went on I got to see the reasons for it. We just didn't have the equipment, we didn't have the troops, so we just had to stay out there

41:00 and it was our choice to stay out there. It wasn't that we were made to stay out there. It was our choice because they did come around and tell us, "Go south, get away out the other side of the Brisbane Line."

You had that option?

Yes, exactly.

Tape 5

00:41 **Olive, you were just mentioning before about water quality in Townsville. Could you just tell us a little bit about the water situation?**

Well as I said, when we got the large influx of troops come in,

01:00 it went from 14,000, 15,000 up to 100,000 odd to 120,000. It was a big demand on all aspects of everything. Baking of the bread, and as I said, the Americans had this big poultry farm, which we had all our eggs and poultry and chicken and stuff,

01:30 but there were restrictions on the water you could have, and in the tropics of course you perspire and body odour and what have you. It was hard to keep that sort of thing under control when you were restricted for water. That's why I used to sneak off up into the hills where I knew I could go and have a lovely old soak in the Cascade River.

02:00 It was nothing to be driving along and see a whole group of army men starkers – skinny-dipping in the rivers just to cool off. Yeah, it put a big demand on everything that we had, as much and all as the Americans tried

02:30 hard to keep us ahead with everything. The Australian Army were not as lucky as we were, but we shared.

Were the Americans all right to drink the water in Townsville as it came?

There was nothing wrong with the water, the drinking of it.

It was just the quantity?

Yeah, yeah. I mean they didn't get gastroenteritis or things like that.

03:00 In certain parts of the Cape, they used to have purification tablets because of suspect water, but it was always kept tested and kept under control for good drinking water, and of course whatever else they could get to drink, like beer and stuff, high demand.

03:30 No, we did all right I suppose in the end with a bit of adjusting to go on. But yeah, I've got no complaints now I suppose. Too late now, isn't it, sixty-two years later?

Can you tell me a little bit about the geography of Townsville as it was then?

It was

04:00 just a port. It had a railhead from Charters Towers to Townsville, from Cairns to Townsville, from Brisbane to Townsville was a railhead. It was a port that used to export everything out of Townsville from cattle out on Cape York and at the back of Mount Isa, out that area,

04:30 which are all cattle stations. It was primary producing. Sugar, we had the sugar cane farms. Sugar was shipped out of there. That was mainly what sort of a town both Cairns and Townsville were.

You were showing me on the map before what a small area of suburban Townsville existed,

It was.

05:00 **And it looked, at a rough guess, to be one-tenth or so of what there seems to be today?**

Oh yeah.

In fact the paddock that you were in now –

That's an enormous estate. It's all built up everywhere. Pimlico has got the Mater Misericordia Hospital is on that property there now, which we never had in those days. It was only the Townsville Hospital

05:30 and the army hospital we had scattered around. There's no spare land anywhere there now. It's all a built up estate.

And the war had actually changed the geography a little bit as well with the airbases and so o?

Well, as I said, the main airfield, which was Garbutt, which became the number one

06:00 particularly with the big B17 bombers, we had seventeen other airfields made and built around Townsville, Australian RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], American, wherever they could put planes and airfields they did. You went from one airfield

06:30 to eighteen around Townsville. That supplied even New Guinea, for the bombers going out of Townsville up there to bomb New Guinea, Port Moresby, when that was all, '42, '43.

So the sorties that were being flown from

07:00 **Townsville at that time, were they exclusively flown to New Guinea or were there other things**

that they were doing?

No, it was mainly New Guinea and Rabaul that they were, well, when the Coral Sea, the Battle of the Coral Sea was on there were B17 bombers flew out there. They were that high

07:30 the Japanese Zeros couldn't get up anywhere near them. They were way up and they were trying to drop bombs but they were way off target because they were so high up it was hard for them. They almost got the Australian warships in the Coral Sea, but they didn't as, but yeah. They went out

08:00 of Townsville and Charters Towers.

Did the airmen ever come to you? Did the airmen ever end up in your hospital?

Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, the 5th Air Force, in those days they were all one, it was all army. There was no such thing as a separate air force. It was all army under General MacArthur and it was only late

08:30 '44 that it was divided up and the air force was just known as the 5th Air Force and as I say, they were just all under army instructions. The navy was a bit different. The navy had their own naval hospital in Townsville. We didn't have anything

09:00 to do with them. We were strictly army.

So did you get different information from the flying boys, or was it similar sort of information on the battles that you were hearing about?

It was just general, what was happening. There was no giving away information, secrets, anything like

09:30 that. It was fairly tight restrictions on what was said and what wasn't said and who you could tell anything to, but it was better not to tell anything because you never knew.

So that sort of system of having time periods, say fifty years, seventy-five years, twenty years,

10:00 **in which you're not allowed to discuss things I suppose leaves people with an enormous amount of information that they can't pass on to other people at the time?**

At the time, yeah, as I said, this poor girl, sixty odd years when she wrote in the paper about Z Force with the dummy limpet mines. She said, "I don't know whether I

10:30 can still reveal it." So she obviously didn't know about the thirty year, fifty year and seventy-five year secrecy information that could be revealed. She was a country girl. She came from Ayr I think it was, Ayr, Ingham, something like that. She wasn't a Townsville girl. She

11:00 was from one of these other little outer places. Yeah, it was hard not to be able to, we never thought about passing on information. What you heard you just dismissed. As I said, I did because my father, always having taught us as little ones about believing only half of what you see and nothing of what you hear

11:30 and so forth.

The American system, do you know if that was more strict?

No, I think they were much more relaxed than, as I say, the British and the Australians.

About secrecy?

Oh yeah. Oh no, I'm sorry. It didn't occur to you to

12:00 repeat things. Do you know what I mean? If you heard something, particularly in the hospital if you heard something, like we had a couple of occasions where they reckoned, and they definitely did, Japanese did land on Australian soil. Up around the Gulf Country around the Gulf of Carpentaria and they had been

12:30 investigating, sussing it out for many years before the war started. They had maps of our coastline that even our own servicemen didn't have as good, as updated as the Japanese had. Now, an alarm came down that they had landed up on Cape York. There were several

13:00 planes flew out of Cairns up to Cape York. They were Catalinas. They landed, they found footprints where Japanese had been ashore. They didn't find them, so they said, but you see, you had intelligence and you had counter-intelligence, so whether they found them and disposed of them, what, we never knew. There was another one, it was

13:30 only hearsay and I've even heard it within the last two years I suppose. I was up at Port Macquarie and I was introduced to an Aboriginal man, a well-known Aboriginal family, and he was saying that his elders, ancestors, had on their

14:00 folklore, what have you, and said that they knew of Japanese who had been slaughtered up in the Gulf Country, and it had been passed down in Aboriginal folklore, and he was quite adamant. As a matter of fact he was a cousin to Aden Ridgeway, the senator. So he was a person, a very articulate Aboriginal,

14:30 believe me. He was a pleasure to talk to, but as he said they knew of it as children being passed down through folklore that they maintained on Rutland Station in the Gulf of Carpentaria that 500 Japanese were slaughtered and buried on Rutland Station. So there's lots of stuff that

15:00 you don't know.

It's quite astounding. Did you ever see any POWs [Prisoners of War]?

Yes, I saw some Japanese POWs that were picked up. As I said, they were sent down to Cowra. I believe it was Cowra where we had the Japanese concentration camp. Yeah, I saw some. They were very

15:30 submissive, they weren't particularly arrogant. They couldn't afford to be, could they? Being prisoners of war and knowing that they had to be for the rest of their days incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp, so those that were not able to commit hari-kari to keep their honour, which is all

16:00 part and parcel of their Shogun background.

Did you ever treat any POWs?

No, no, no. No, I didn't treat any. We had no dealings with any of them. We just happened to see them going through. I think they were treated a darn sight better than what they treated our boys.

16:30 As Nancy, when she was over here with me, I had her for a week, and she was saying about she went when she came out of France after the war and found that her brother had been a prisoner of war in Changi in Malaysia. She was horrified to see what they had done to them.

17:00 **Something you said before about the layout of the hospital has struck me, and I was just wondering if you had any more information on the psych [psychiatric] ward? Obviously there would have been the cases of going troppo that we discussed earlier. Were there any other reasons that people would end up in the psych ward?**

17:30 No, I think the majority of them were related to the conditions of having to live in the tropics and the war that had unbalanced their minds. I was on duty one afternoon I can remember, and the police rang and

18:00 said that they were bringing one of our boys out to the hospital. They sort of rounded him up. He was walking down the main street with a bullwhip, cracking a bullwhip, totally off in fairyland. He'd gone off, and they brought him out to us and he was assessed and sedated and he was

18:30 one who ended up a Section 8 back in the USA. There was nothing we could do with him at all. He was just way off in cuckoo land. Others would try and set fire to their beds and sit and tear up paper, you know, didn't matter what you said to them, nothing related.

19:00 You just couldn't get through their barrier they had put up. I felt so sorry for them because it was a totally foreign world to them to come out, particularly those that came out from the cold parts of the USA, up along the Canadian border where they used to have

19:30 the cold winters with snow and all that sort of thing.

It sounds like in the face of these challenges of people going troppo you were trying a few different things to see if you could break through their barrier?

Well yeah. As I said, because we knew nothing of post-traumatic stress or what have you

20:00 that created them going off into that void of their own. I suppose you could call it escaping out of the reality of what was happening around them. As I say, some of them came out of it better than others.

Was there shame associated with that for the men who had gone troppo?

No,

20:30 no. There was no, they were just treated as a patient who was in some ways crying for help and you just tried to give it to them. Some, as I say, you got through, others you didn't.

21:00 The young minds were just destroyed by the horrors and the violence and what they had to see and put up with.

Were any of the campaigns or events that you recall, did a lot of men come back at once from one particular place having gone troppo? Did a lot of men suffer

21:30 **in one particular battle over another?**

No. I'd say it was fairly, no, it was fairly even across the board. I can't say that there was one particular field or area. No, it was a general, those who were just not strong enough to withstand

22:00 the culture shock or whatever it is that they went through, and others could. So I think it depends upon their make up, their background and their lifestyle that they'd been used to. Like we had one doctor, Captain Connolly, he came out of New York out of Fifth Avenue and he let us always know it.

22:30 You know, that he could have been back in New York making a million dollars and he was trapped in the army and what have you. He would be the, one of the exceptions I'd say that let us know his background. The others were nice. They were just good honest doctors who just got on with the job, but he was a bit of a

23:00 snob.

What was the relationship between the doctors and nurses?

Courtesy. As I said, they treated us very well. No, there was the respect that

23:30 we were given, and there was nothing more expected of us. It was straight out, we did our duty, we went off duty and that was it sort of thing until the next shift came on and what have you. No, we got on very well, but as I say, we only had the one who was a snob and I always felt sorry for the last

24:00 lieutenant. He copped all the paperwork and what have you. Everything was passed down, passed on, which was a bad habit, but if you happened to be on the bottom end of the rung you copped the lot.

You'd been trying to improvise with your psych ward, trying to snap some of these guys out of their troppo.

24:30 **Did you have any other need to improvise medically or were your supplies always sufficient?**

No, we were lucky. We were never ever short of anything. I'll give that to MacArthur. He made sure that we abundance, and that's why when I found the Australian nurses with, like sterilising, come on, I just

25:00 get them out of the quartermaster's and hand them over because it was, to me it was all for the one cause. But no, no, we were never short of anything, nothing. It was, everything we wanted we could get so it got spread around, shared and shared equally. But that's how we were brought up as children,

25:30 sharing amongst all our neighbours with food when things were short in the Depression years. It was just part and parcel of the background make up of having survived through the Depression.

What medicines were you using for the tropical diseases?

Mainly quinine. We were never short of any of that. Like when the nurses

26:00 were in Bataan and Corregidor they were absolutely desperate. They ran out of all that sort of stuff because they couldn't get the shipping into the Philippines because of the Japs. We had our supply line to America and we were getting stuff. It was stacked up in warehouses everywhere.

26:30 So it was plentiful of everything. I can't say that there was anything that we were ever short of, not in the US Army. That's why I thought what we've got an abundance of we can share it, pass it around.

What were the Australians lacking other than hypodermics?

27:00 Instruments, surgical instruments. As I say, sterilisers, clothing. As I said with the Australian, and of course their diets were different to ours. They had bully beef and all that sort of stuff, whereas we had

27:30 really good food.

What were you eating?

Steak, poultry, which is different to what the Australians were getting. They were just getting tinned bully beef and stuff like that done in all sorts of fashions to try and very it, but they knew what they were eating. We were very lucky.

28:00 As I say, we actually wanted for nothing.

During that time you were looking after people with lots of tropical illnesses and people with trauma from wounds, how was your health? How was the health of the nursing staff?

Well, towards 1944, because I copped malaria

28:30 and dengue fever when I had to go to New Guinea. I was only there for two weeks and I knew I was history. Sort of, but anyhow I ended up I came back to Australia on the Charon which was the sister ship, there were seven Australian nurses and myself on the Charon,

29:00 which was a sister ship to the Centaur, the hospital ship that got sunk off Brisbane. It was a sister ship to that. We had a Polish doctor belonging to the shipping company that was the shipping line that had it, and we came back to Sydney. We got off the ship at Sydney. I had to report

29:30 down to, by this I was on extended health leave and I had to go to report to Melbourne to Victoria

Barracks there to get discharged. But it took me, I had dengue, malaria and I also had anaemia, I was anaemic, and it took me about three years I suppose to get over it and get back to top health. I

30:00 went back to Queensland when I got discharged out of Melbourne, Victoria Barracks, and I went to Lady Cilento, Diane Cilento's mother, who was a medical officer, medical doctor. Her father was a medical doctor, but Lady Cilento, she was my doctor and she made me eat raw minced liver. I used to put pepper and salt on it, anything to

30:30 make it tasty. Revolting.

Was this for your anaemia?

Yeah. It took me a couple of years to get the malaria out of my system, but I finally did.

So you would've had a greater appreciation for how the men were feeling?

That's right, yeah. But up until then, even though I'd been reared in the far north it was only, as I say, the association of the people

31:00 who came out of New Guinea and that that brought the malaria back with them and the dengue fever back with them, and of course the misquotes passed it on, but up until then we were free of it. We never had it as children or anything like that. We were free of it. We used to have to take quinine. It was revolting.

Why would people not take quinine? You said

31:30 **that they had to, that there were consequences for not taking it. Why would people not?**

It was revolting. It used to give you shocking indigestion and it repeated and repeated and repeated on you afterwards. Some would say, "To hell with it. I'm not taking this," you know. But you got to the stage where you either

32:00 abided by the rules and regulations or you disobeyed them, and you disobeyed them until Atebrin came in. That was easier to take. As I said, we all ended up as though we had hepatitis. We were all yellow now. It was the only side effect that we had with that. I could appreciate then, and particularly when you had to work and you were feeling

32:30 one hundred per cent under the weather, and having to try to carry on particularly when you had rigours and what have you that sort of went with your malaria, but you did.

Is this when you returned to Australia after?

Yeah. I had it before I went. I knew I had it before I went up there. I was trying to keep the lid on it. Trying

33:00 to cover it up and what have you, but yeah.

Did you not think that you would be found out eventually?

Oh yes, I knew I would. But until then I just thought I'd carry on sort of.

Did you come into contact with leprosy?

Yes, I had. Not in the army. We didn't have any cases of lepers in the army. The cases that

33:30 I had were prior to the war with the Aboriginals who were brought into the isolation ward in the Cairns Base. As I said, once they were diagnose as lepers some were sent to the Palm Island, some were sent to the Gulf of Carpentaria to a leper colony we had off Mornington Island. We only had the two.

34:00 What we were told was it was the Chinese who brought the leprosy into Australia during the gold rush days in Cooktown and what have you, and then it got passed on into the Aboriginal tribespeople and what have you.

What was the treatment for leprosy at that time before they were sent off to colonies?

It was

34:30 just total isolation. Asepsis had to be absolutely spot on. You washed your hands when you went in and you washed your hands when you came out so that you didn't pass it on to anyone else. You never touched the Aboriginal lepers. You just did everything, you put it down for them and they touched it themselves, but you didn't do it. I felt sorry

35:00 for some of them, they were just like ordinary human beings. They'd follow you around and they'd want to do things and say, "Can I do this?" "No, you don't touch anything." They were like lost souls

35:30 sort of wandering around after you saying, "Can I do this or can I help you do that?" Outwardly they looked perfectly healthy. We never had any cases of American servicemen with leprosy. There were plenty with shall we say

36:00 social diseases. Plenty of that.

Where were they getting them from?

The prostitutes.

In Australia?

Oh yeah, in Townsville. We had special brothels set up in Townsville for the troops. We used to have to have, it was almost like that

36:30 they were public servants. We used to have to have them come and have examinations once a week to see if they had venereal disease and then they were taken out of the brothels until they were cured, and they were not allowed to practise their trade. I mean a lot of it was the picked it up

37:00 elsewhere as well besides in the brothels. We had on one occasion one of the Australian servicemen. The prices went up. I can remember this, in about 1943 or somewhere, the prices went up in the brothels and the Australian servicemen were very annoyed about it because they didn't have the extra money like the Americans had, and one of them set fire to one of the brothels

37:30 in Townsville out of spite. The Australian boys knew who did it, but they never ever revealed who it was, but it was an Australian because they objected to the prices being increased.

Did you have to examine prostitutes for sexually transmitted diseases?

No, the doctors did that. We assisted sort of to

38:00 take a sample of their vaginas, to have them tested if they had social disease. But that was all we did, just a female backup.

What was the most common of those at the time?

Gonorrhoea.

Gonorrhoea?

Yeah. Not a lot of syphilis, but an awful lot of gonorrhoea.

38:30 **Were the troops reprimanded for catching these diseases?**

Were they?

Reprimanded? Was there any punishment?

No. It was just unfortunate that they went skinny-dipping in the wrong places. What will I say about that?

39:00 No, the only thing that we ever had during that time was homosexuality was not tolerated. If males were caught it was instant dismissal. That was about the only one I would say, yeah, that was as harsh as that and was not tolerated.

So they had

39:30 **to be caught in a sexual relationship?**

Yes, yes.

Not just suspicion?

No, no, had to be caught. If they were caught it was instant dismissal. That was in the Australian Army and the American army. There was no difference. It was just not tolerated.

But it was OK to catch gonorrhoea from a prostitute?

Well that was –

Overlooked?

– the risk that they took. Depends on where they went skinny-dipping.

40:00 **Were they issued with condoms? Were they readily available to the men if they wanted them?**

I wouldn't say they were readily available. They did have them. Every so often they used to have what they called an FFI [Free From Infection], which was a surprise kit inspection and they always put everything out on their bunks and what have you, and they

40:30 were inspected to see if they had 'French letters' [condoms] and what have you. I can remember one, he was an officer, one afternoon about five o'clock he came dashing into the emergency outpatients part of the hospital and he was in a horrible panic

41:00 and he wanted prophylactic treatment. He'd been somewhere. It must've been something horrifying because he was absolutely terror struck, you know. It took a bit of calming him down and what have you to find out what, but yeah. I can't

Tape 6

00:44 **Just finishing off the last story you were telling us about the social diseases and things, I was just wondering who were the women? What kinds of women were they?**

01:00 There were camp followers who came up from Brisbane and places like that with the Americans. As I say, there were the prostitutes in the brothels, there were enthusiastic amateurs. I don't know how to put it. Yes, so it was fairly prevalent at the height of

01:30 the transformation of Townsville. Up until then it was always a very closed subject. People didn't talk about these things.

I imagine there would've been a bit of poverty around and for some women it was a means of keeping their heads above water?

That's right, yeah, yeah, particularly those whose husbands were over in the Middle East and what have you. They had their needs the same as anybody else.

02:00 When it came it came, and that was one of the main obstacles, I suppose, with pleasure was the risks people took.

Is that one of the reasons you were so careful or not particularly interested?

I couldn't say it was because of afraid of catching,

02:30 I was never afraid of catching anything actually. After the war I went though polio epidemics and what have you. We were all volunteers, but I'd never had concerns that I was going to catch anything. It just never entered the equation in my mind that I could. Even when I was training I had

03:00 one of our nurses, she died of meningitis, and in school we had polio in the '30s. We had a polio epidemic, one of our school classmates, he died and his sister had it. So we were all immunised against it. This is before Salk vaccine came in. I never ever had a fear of catching

03:30 anything like that.

On the standard though, you're a good-looking, intelligent young women and there would've been all these quite good looking men around. Weren't you ever tempted?

No, it's funny. I think it was the Catholic upbringing with the nuns. I was totally disinterested in the opposite sex. I had

04:00 no interest in even dating and going out with, I was too bloody tired. All I wanted to do when I got off duty was go and hop in my bed and go and have a sleep, but yeah. No, I wasn't interested and I was never a social butterfly and I didn't like dancing.

04:30 I still, even, I never did and some people are crazy of going to dances. I never was. So I put the onus, I suppose, on the nuns for that sort of disinterest in my life. But I had a couple of occasions where I had to ward off a few amorous admirers, but they

05:00 soon got swift cheese [stiff cheese – knew they were out of luck] with me. I didn't mess about.

It probably made your job a lot easier when the lines were clearly drawn?

That's right. I had no hang-ups about having to get off duty to go and meet a date and all this sort of stuff. But you see, I mean when that carried on

05:30 into my after life after the war. I never married until 1953. So ten years after the war started before I met somebody who, how do I say it? Triggered something in me that, well, he proposed to me three different times from three different parts of the world. The first time he proposed to me I thought he was

06:00 crazy, I thought he was nuts. The second time I thought oh well, he's rather nice, I liked him, he was well mannered. And the third time he was back in London and I got a letter and he proposed a third time and I thought this chap really means it. So I said, "We'll consider ourselves engaged." So we were engaged for two years before I went over. I met him on a cruise out in the Pacific.

06:30 He was a ship's radio officer then, and he finally as I say, the third letter, I wasn't any chicken [spring chicken – young], you know, I was twenty-seven years old by this, and I thought well, he really means it. Yeah, I think he really likes me, so we'll get engaged. So we were engaged for two years and he kept

saying, “I can’t get a ship going back to Australia, you come over to England.”

07:00 So I went over there and we married in Wales.

Was he English?

Yes, oh yes, very much so. We had twenty-nine years of marriage when he died, so we had a happy twenty-nine years. But neither of us were chickens. I think he was thirty-three or thirty-four I think when we got married.

07:30 **You’d both seen quite a bit of the world at that stage?**

I’d been to every country in the world, you could name it. I thought, to start with my father and mother had always sort of told us, told me, “Be wary of sailors,” and what have you. So I was very cautious of him to start with. I thought he was off his tree, but the best thing that could’ve ever happened to me was marrying him.

08:00 We had a happy marriage.

So it was good you kept away from those American soldiers then?

Exactly. I didn’t want them. Not that they weren’t, how can I say it? Well, I mean apart from the patients, they were too sick to worry about wanting to date a girl, but the medics and all those,

08:30 you had to put up with them. They soon knew who they could invite out to a night out and those who couldn’t, those who wouldn’t.

You were on the ‘wouldn’t’ list?

I was on the ‘wouldn’t’ list, yeah. As I say, I really did put it down to the strict upbringing of the nuns. I know a couple of other

09:00 convent girls who went the opposite. When they got loose, they went loose, sort of like Diane Cilento [Australian actress]. She was a rebel and what have you. She really, she went the opposite to me when she was out of the control of the nuns.

She got Sean Connery for a while though?

Yes, she did. I rather like him, yeah.

Were you still going home through these years

09:30 **of nursing? Were you popping back home and seeing your parents?**

Oh yes, from time to time, yeah. So often I used to get a couple of days leave. On one occasion I was AWOL [AWL – Absent Without Leave] for twenty-four hours. I couldn’t get back to Mareeba. [UNCLEAR] Mareeba, yeah. It was after we had one of the big air crashes and all the whole crew got all

10:00 burnt to death and it was a bit horrific and I had a couple of days leave and I hopped on one of the courier planes and went down to Townsville with my aunt and then I went up to MacArthur’s headquarters in Townsville to get a courier plane back and the plane was full and I couldn’t get a seat on it.

10:30 So I had to then go to the railway and get on the midnight rattler. That took me back to Cairns, and we quite often had ambulances down from Mareeba and there was one there and I went back up to Mareeba in the US Army ambulance and I got back. I was twenty-four hours late, and of course the other girls had covered for me, for my shift, and

11:00 I was on the mat with the colonel and he was very understanding. He just more or less read the usual and said, “Ollie, I understand. I know why you just had to get away from what was happening.” So I was just confined to my barracks for a week. I was not allowed out, only if I had to go on duty and back to the barracks for a week.

11:30 So that was my punishment for being AWOL.

It sounds like you wouldn’t have been too worried by that punishment?

Oh I was, terribly. It upset me terribly. No, I thought how lucky I was just to be confined and not allowed to go out to socialise, not that I did because it didn’t worry me. I didn’t socialise that much as it was.

And what was it about that incident

12:00 **that disturbed you, because you would have seen a lot of disturbing things?**

Well actually, that was the first one that we’d actually lost the whole crew, everyone. They were all burnt to death and we got them in at the morgue at the hospital in at Mareeba. I think it was just a

12:30 culmination of all sorts of things and I just, I’d had enough by that, and it was 1943 that happened, and yeah, it was, I think of the funny side of it, of

13:00 being charged with being absent without leave, you know, which was really no fault of my own, it was just circumstances prevented me from getting back up there to go on duty when my shift was on, but that's how good they were. They made allowances for things like that.

Were you having to dress the bodies, were you, were you having to prepare?

Oh yeah, in the

13:30 morgue. We had to do everything for them. The conditions of some of them, as I said, I used to think there's some poor mother back in the United States waiting for her son to come home, didn't quite make it. But as I said

14:00 to you there after the war, we just got our discharge and were just put back into circulation, and we just had to get on with life and that was it.

There weren't any choices really, were there?

There wasn't no, and as I said, it wasn't until after the Vietnam veterans, particularly those who were committing

14:30 suicide and their whole family were being affected by their traumatic stress that they were going through, it affected the whole family. I mean there were break-ups all over Australia with the Vietnam one, that they started to realise that Post Traumatic Stress was a medical complaint and started looking at it. But as I say, we were just cast

15:00 back into the community. 'Good luck, bye. Nice to have known you'.

There would have been quite a few people though, who would've had a common experience at that time after that was because it was a very all-encompassing war, wasn't it?

Right, yeah, yeah, and of course I personally, I never did

15:30 agree with Vietnam. I thought the Vietnam War, both my husband and I agreed on that, that it was immoral. It really was, and should not have taken place, but it did. The poor soldiers who came back from that, yeah, but at least they got help eventually.

16:00 **And eventually recognition as well?**

Was it twenty-five years or nearly thirty years before they got recognition, wasn't it? Which was shameful.

Just going back in time a bit, how did you come to leave the hospital that you were at in Townsville? You went from there to?

You got transferred. Wherever there was a shortage we were just

16:30 allocated, just pulled into the office and said, "You're going up to Mareeba to the 11th Portable Field Hospital," or, "You're going to the 60th Station Hospital in Gordonvale." I was only there about, that one, I was just towards the end of the war. We had a big paratrooper regiment that were

17:00 practising and jumping out of planes and what have you. We had one whose parachute didn't open, just went straight down like a stone. He was dead when they brought him in, and MacArthur and Blamey were witnessing that parachute jump. MacArthur was very upset, but his aids and what have you said it was a dummy. It wasn't. It was one of his boys, and

17:30 he was no man's fool. He knew it was. When they [UNCLEAR] just to keep the rest of them on their toes that it could happen to them.

You met him a few times, didn't you?

Yes, yeah. I found him a gentleman. For all his decisions that he had to make,

18:00 people thought he was arrogant and what have you. I didn't find him that way. I just found him to be a man who had an awful lot of responsibility and he did, he was always concerned about his men, his troops, and for any of them to get killed and what have you it did affect him quite a lot and I thought to myself people didn't understand it. But he was a lonely man at the top

18:30 who had to make these decisions that other people didn't have to. That's why he came over sort of at times aloof or arrogant, but he wasn't. He was always a thorough gentleman to us nurses, yeah.

Did you ever get any visits from the Australian Prime Minister?

No, never. No, everybody kept way away from our territory up there. Apart from Blamey and MacArthur,

19:00 no, as far as they were concerned we were beyond the safety line for the majority of people. No, no, a politician, no way, nor prime ministers.

It's almost like being annexed, isn't it?

Well we were really. That was one of the things that I did harbour in the beginning against my own government, when Curtin

19:30 had said whether we liked it or not everyone belonged to the government and we had to get in and do what we could, and then to be told the Japanese could walk straight in and capture us, do anything they want to with us and our own government would not come to our aid. But of course I came to realise it after a while when, I realised the reason was we had no support

20:00 troops. We had no equipment or anything like that until MacArthur, and that was why he set up the headquarters up there where it was on the front line of Australia, the same as Darwin, the front line of Australia.

So in that respect the Australian people would have been glad to see the Americans?

We were, absolutely. To me they were our saviours

20:30 and sort of a lot of people thought they were wonderful. They used them and made a great thing about it, but we just got on with it. When they required our help we just gave it, that was it.

Was there any different kind of set up at Mareeba?

Yeah. Well see, in Townsville,

21:00 Chapman Street, that was the 12th Station Hospital, it was a whole street of thirty houses, fifteen on either side, which were all linked up. Mareeba was the state school. MacArthur commandeered the state school and all the classrooms were set up as a hospital. Gordonvale was different again. At Gordonvale MacArthur commandeered two hotels,

21:30 the Central and the Commercial. One was in the middle of the street and the other one was on the corner. So these two hotels we turned into the 60th Station Hospital to accommodate these paratroopers who were there before they went off back to the war. Whatever MacArthur wanted MacArthur got.

22:00 **Where were the Americans going, where were they being sent to?**

New Guinea. And then in '44 when MacArthur decided he was going to return to the Philippines, "I shall return," that particular day as I said, there were 261 ships in Townsville Harbour loading all the troops off that

22:30 he was taking back on. They pushed back through. He left Townsville with 261 ships. By the time he got to Aitape in New Guinea where he picked up more troops that were still in New Guinea, and more ships, I think he had something like, when he left there he had 500 and something ships. I don't know, when he left Townsville he had 100,000 troops but I don't know how many troops he picked up there. And from there

23:00 he went through the islands until they got to Leyte in the Philippines where he landed and fought back to take the Philippines back from the Japanese. When he got to there, to Leyte in the Philippines, he had over 900 ships and I don't know how many troops because he just collected them as he went. It will just give

23:30 you an idea, as I say, to me the sight of these 261 ships loading all the troops in Townsville to start off is a sight I can never forget. It was something really I never witnessed again in my life.

Can you describe it?

Well, I stood up on the top of Kissing Point where the army barracks are now and they were scattered

24:00 everywhere and these little ships were all taking troops out and putting them on board. As I say, they went from there to New Guinea. By the time he had 500 and something ships and I don't know how many servicemen he collected, by the time he got to the Philippines he had over 900 ships.

So you were watching all this? You were up at Kissing Point watching all of this?

Yeah.

24:30 **And the harbour would've been filled?**

Absolutely. It was just a sight you couldn't forget. It's a beautiful harbour, Cleveland Bay, and you've got Magnetic Island out from it, and all these ships were all around it and just anchored everywhere. Well, the little boats were taking the troops out and putting them on board and then they up-anchored and away they went.

25:00 **What was your feeling as they were heading out?**

It was almost like a turning point that we knew MacArthur was doing what he always promised, "I shall return," and we knew that that was what he was aiming for, was to go back and recapture the

Philippines, which he did.

25:30 We never had any casualties from any of that. What happened then they were all sent back to the States. We didn't get any of those at all.

Why was that change? Was it because the war was coming to a close?

Yes, I think so. Instead of them being brought back to Australia they were just being, as

26:00 they were being wounded, particularly in the fighting in the Philippines, they went straight back to the States. By the end of '44 we had nothing. It was all over as far as the Americans. They'd all gone. They came in April '42 and they'd gone by the end of '44

26:30 and he recaptured the Philippines by beginning of 1945.

Were people feeling a bit insecure when they watched the Americans sail away?

No, I think we were more, that a turning point had turned in the war and we knew that we were on top and that we were defeating the Japanese and making them retreat

27:00 back to Japan which is what he'd done, pushed them right back into Japan. And of course the horrific bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Enola Gay who dropped the atomic bomb, I think it was three or four of the crew from that committed suicide. They couldn't

27:30 handle what they had done. It gives you an idea of what post-traumatic stress can do.

Or a conscience?

Yes, I'd say conscious, yeah. But you know, those poor boys were just following orders and they couldn't face it and committed suicide.

It's a terrible order

28:00 **to have to have carried out, but that's the horror, isn't it, of war?**

Yeah, that's what I'm saying with MacArthur, the decisions he had to make and he knew the consequences of some of his decisions, what affect it was going to have on the troops. So he carried an awful burden. He really did.

How did that affect

28:30 **Townsville? They'd been hosting thousands of troops for a couple of years and then all of a sudden it's all over?**

It was all over.

What was that like?

It was funny how quickly things disperse. In other words they were not needed any more, and then the people who had evacuated down south started coming back,

29:00 and of course their homes were totally different to what they'd left and walked out of fully furnished. Everything was different and stuff was taken from one house and into another. It was a real shemozzle after the war. So were people were then trying to get compensation for stuff that was missing and all this.

29:30 And yet they just ran away saving their own necks.

I was going to ask you actually, was there an attitude towards the people who had gone south during the war years?

Not particularly. It was just accepted that it was something they didn't want to face, and those who stayed

30:00 were a little bit miffed when these people came back and started demanding this and demanding that and wanting. That would I'd say probably be about the only altercations between those who stayed and those you left. You know, "You've got a bit of a cheek coming back here and demanding this, and you walked out."

Did you get any criticism for having been working or looking

30:30 **after the Americans?**

No, never. No, it was just an accepted thing. As I said, some of us were just asked to do different things in different ways to other people, and just did it, got on with it, accepted it for what it was. Life has a lot of ups and downs as the past seventy years,

31:00 sixty years has proven to me. It's not all roses. But I do feel for the younger generation now. I think

they're in a totally different world to my world as a child. They've got more things than we ever had

31:30 to worry us, and I'm glad in lots of ways I don't have any grandchildren to worry about their future because God knows where it's all heading. I don't know, I really don't.

Your parents must have wondered that sometimes as well?

Well possibly they did, and there again I suppose my grandparents in their era when the war came along

32:00 for them, it was a totally different thing again because they would've been through World War I, but not on our own soil here.

You were saying when MacArthur took off with the troops there was a feeling that things had turned around?

Yeah.

What news were you getting through the media or stories from the soldiers? What was the news that indicated to you that was the case?

We were getting radio reports. We were getting

32:30 headlines in the newspapers and what have you then, whereas in the beginning when our troops were over in the Middle East we got very little of what was happening. We were totally isolated up there for that lot, until as I say, until the Japanese got as far as

33:00 Singapore and Burma and Port Moresby and bombed Darwin. Then of course it was on and we knew it, and of course there was nowhere else for them to go but Australia and that was where they were heading for. So they weren't heading for the Antarctic, I can assure you.

Were you ever worried, were you ever scared?

No,

33:30 I can't say I was ever scared. I think it was too much in our lives was going on to even stop to think that we were frightened. The only thing, as I say, was that I was sort of disgusted and annoyed that my own government had sort of cast us out

34:00 until I came to my senses and realised it was the thing to do because we were superfluous up there, whereas until the Japanese submarine ran amok in Sydney Harbour, the people down south didn't know what was going on. They were on another world down here, Melbourne and Sydney, and that was all

34:30 Australia was concerned about, was the local population of Sydney and Melbourne. Not even Brisbane was considered as part of protecting because that was on the border of the Brisbane Line. When 1995, which was the fiftieth anniversary of

35:00 World War II, I went to Brisbane for the big celebrations there. We marched down the main streets in Brisbane and we were up to our knees in paper, shredded paper and what have you. God, it was hard trying to get through it. There was like a whole sea of paper that we were trying to march through. That was 1995 which was the fiftieth anniversary.

Where were you when you found out that the war had ended?

35:30 I was in Sydney because I'd been discharged in Melbourne and I'd come back to Sydney and it was about eleven o'clock in the morning. We knew something was up. We sort of got vibes that something was going to happen and it was about half past eleven, twelve o'clock when they announced that the war was over, that we were free

36:00 and a girlfriend and I hoped on a tram and we went into Sydney. We got off at the Town Hall in the underground and we tried to get from the underground station at the Town Hall up the steps and into George Street, and of course it was absolutely a sardine tin. It was packed everywhere.

36:30 Everybody had gone berserk, you know. That was where I was the day the war was declared over, finished.

It must've been such a fantastic atmosphere?

It was. We got home about five o'clock the next morning because all transport had stopped everywhere, and about three o'clock in the morning we were walking along the tram lines to go back out to Allendale where I was

37:00 staying with an aunt and that was our only way home because we knew if we followed the tram line we'd get home, there was no transport anywhere, it just stopped.

I bet a lot of babies were conceived that night?

I bet, yeah. Yeah, nine months later was the baby boom.

37:30 That gets up my nose a little bit. Everything in the government today is all for 'baby boomers' [the post-war generation] and what have you. Forget us, we don't exist. It's all the baby boomers, going for them, because they've never known anything. They were spoilt from the day they opened their eyes because having, their parents having been through the

38:00 Depression and the war and what have you, and when they had their babies they gave them absolutely everything. Then they grew up as a generation of wanting everything because it had been how they were treated by their parents, and never done anything for it. Not that it was their fault, it wasn't. But that's where a lot of the

38:30 greed and, what else is there? With that generation of young people, came out of that era. Do you know what I mean? All these corporate cowboys that did all the wrong things because that's how they were brought up, to expect everything was given to them on a platter.

So even in peacetime we don't get it right?

39:00 No, no. No, I'm sorry, but I really feel we're heading for a very sad world. That's my opinion. We've always been such an open country, a multicultural country now, and all these other nationalities can come in with their own religions, set up everything, do what they like, what have you, but when you've

39:30 got an era like it is now with the Islamic Muslims against Christianity and what have you, why can't they just follow their own and let the others follow their own? Why, it's all so wrong this religious war that's going on and terrorism and what have you.

But religious wars are

40:00 **some of the oldest wars, aren't they?**

They are, yeah, but you know, what's it all boil down to, where's it all going to end? I mean what did they accomplish with going into Iraq? It hasn't accomplished anything, but

40:30 as I say, the powers that be think OK, but I'm glad I don't have any grandchildren so I don't have to worry about them. My dynasty is finished.

Tape 7

00:45 **Olive, it would be great, we've just briefly touched on the end of the war. It would be good if you could do a similar thing that I asked you to do at the beginning of our interview today for the**

01:00 **post-war part of your life. Could you give us a quick summary of that and then we'll go back in more detail?**

How far back, or how far in the post-war do you want me?

Straight away after the war.

Well, as I said, the day war was over was such an hilarious, wonderful day. To be able to just stop and think it's finished, it's over,

01:30 we're now back to civilian life. It was strange how fast it all disappeared compared to the years from '42 to '44 and '45. It disappeared very quickly back into normal lifestyle. I went through a period then from '45 to

02:00 '51, '52 which I term as my lost period, and that was readjusting to civilian life, trying to settle into some sort of a lifestyle, and even when I went to England in 1952, got married in 1953, I had five years in

02:30 England and my husband was then with the Ministry of Civil Aviation. As I said, he'd been in the Royal Air Force, walked out of Burma over the old Burma Road with the retreating Chinese army. They got mixed up, 130 of the Royal Air Force got mixed up with them, posted nine months missing, finally

03:00 got back into India. He ended up in Ceylon in SEAC [South-East Asia Command] signals under General Montgomery, was his boss in Ceylon. When the war finished he was repat [repatriated], he joined in 1939 and he was demobbed [demobilised] in England in February 1948.

03:30 That's how long it took him to get out of the Royal Air Force, and then he went into the Ministry of Civil Aviation in England.

So he joined in '39?

Hey?

’39?

’39.

1939, yeah.

Most of them came out in 1945 at the end of the war but he didn’t get out until 1948. As I say, he joined the Ministry of Civil Aviation and when

04:00 we came back to Australia after Steven was born in England, we came back to Australia in 1956 and he was with the Department of Civil Aviation in Mascot in Sydney until he was discharged physically unfit and retired early because of his heart condition as well.

04:30 We retired up in Port Macquarie where, as I say, I was associated with Nancy Wake [French Resistance operative], and he had to live up there because he couldn’t take the humidity and the doctors told me to bring him to a dry climate, to bring him to Adelaide which I did in 1980 and he lived until 1982 when he had his final, he had five heart attacks. I had him five times in intensive care.

05:00 The final one of course, he didn’t get over it. He was only 62 when he died. So that’s that. I’ve been a widow for twenty-two years.

And you’ve done some other things?

I’ve done some other things. Yes, I have. I’ve upset a few politicians. I enjoyed

05:30 that. I’ve always just tried to do the best thing I can. I mean when I found there was nothing here for people like Steven who were moderately, mildly intellectually disabled, I decided then that it was time we upset the system and started rocking a few

06:00 boats, which I did, enjoyed it. Set up our own community living project for intellectually disabled young adults because Minda had them until they were twenty I think it was, and then they were just cast back into the community and left to vegetate, stagnate, you name it, and nothing for them. So that’s how we ended up by

06:30 setting up our own [UNCLEAR] foundation member for that. So now we have something like thirty-five of them living in their homes or their own units with just a little bit of support to keep them on track.

And you ran for an election?

I went for both. Previously I had stood for the state election

07:00 here in South Australia in the seat of Wright where Trish White is now, and I stood, we set up a party called the Australia Party, I can’t remember. There was a brigadier at Keswick Barracks who asked me, he said, “Join and stand,” which I did, but

07:30 we never got a seat in anywhere. And then when the federal election came I stood as an independent for the seat of Kingston here and I rather enjoyed that. I knew I wasn’t going to get anywhere but I was quite happy. At least I got out and had my say. I got on my high horse on the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] on two or three

08:00 occasions, particularly I was very anti-GST [Goods and Services Tax]. I kept saying to people on the ABC, you know, think carefully about it because you’re going to be in for some horrible shocks further down the track if you say yes to the GST, which has been proven right. But at least I had my say. I mean I object to these people who complain about things and never do anything.

08:30 That’s where we were.

Let’s go back to the ending stages of the war. You were in New Guinea for two weeks and you already knew you were sick before you left?

I knew I was before I went there.

What were those two weeks spent doing?

I was in the army hospital. We had a US Army hospital

09:00 on the road just outside of Port Moresby, between Port Moresby and the airfield we had a US Army, and they were just mainly tropical, malaria, dengue fever, gastroenteritis, things like that, that we were looking after that had been left behind when MacArthur did his push back to the Philippines. But I

09:30 was told I had to go back to Australia. I had to sign some papers for the US Army there. My blood was in such a state that they were horrified and they wanted samples to send back to the United States, which I had to release on slides to go back, and they just said, “You board the Charon

10:00 and go back to Sydney and then report to,” I had about six weeks sick leave to try and get back, and then I had to get to Melbourne and report to Melbourne to Victoria Barracks to get my discharge, and that’s how it was.

And you were discharged in twenty minutes?

Yes. It was just as quick to get out as it was to get in.

And it took you three years to

10:30 **really recover from that?**

It was ’51, ’52. Yeah, I suppose three to four years. It would’ve been the worst part of it by 1950. I had sort of come to terms with back in the land of the living by that.

You said you

11:00 **went through a period of time in which you couldn’t settle down in civilian life?**

I couldn’t do anything.

Why do you think that was?

I think it was like, almost like being left an orphan, you know sort of. I didn’t know where I was going what I was going to do. I’d lost everything

11:30 that had been my life, had been part of my life. It’s hard to explain it. Yeah, it was, you know, trying to readjust yourself to something that wasn’t foreign, but it just wasn’t what I wanted to do. It was,

12:00 yeah, just like being a baby orphan being abandoned and what you, and that’s how I felt trying to cope with going into another civilian life again. It was hard.

So nursing didn’t bring you any comfort?

No, no. I tried. I went to a, we had a big epidemic of polio in Brisbane. I volunteered

12:30 for that and well, until it was over. You had to volunteer, and we had about sixty patients from six month old baby up to people in their sixties, and the children that we had in the ward, they were all in one big ward, and the children we had were,

13:00 they copped an epidemic of chicken pox at the same time. So here we were trying to treat them for polio because we didn’t have the Salk vaccine then. That didn’t come in until later. I went back and I did my obstetrics in Sydney, which was only nine months, and I rather like obstetrics because it was like

13:30 every time you had a baby it was a new life, and that period I didn’t mind. Then I tried doing some geriatric nursing and what have you. Nursing, I didn’t want any more to do with it. It was part of my life I was trying to break my contacts with,

14:00 trying to get away from it. That was why I decided I’d travel overseas and try and get out of the mould that I was in here, and so I was five years in England. That brought me back to my senses, and then getting married and having Steven and coming back to Australia I was a different person then. I had settled down.

14:30 **So you then decided to go to England and did you have family there?**

Actually my great grandmother was in the south of England in Paignton Torquay in Devon and she was 102 and I knew the address and what

15:00 have you. Some friends of mine said we’ll take you down in their car, down to Paignton and I got down there and I went into this house and I knocked and there was no answer and the postman came up to the front fence and I said to him was this where Mrs Harris lived and he said, “Yes,” he said, “The dear old darling, she’s been gone the last two years,”

15:30 and I said, “She’s dead now?” And he said, “Yes, ma’am. So he said, “Her daughter lives just around the corner. I’ll take you around.” So he took me around there and I knocked on the door and I said, because my grandfather had left England when he was only sixteen years old. He got on the ship and came to Australia. That’s probably where I got my

Adventurous spirit?

Yes, from, yeah, and so this lady came to the door and I said, “Look my dear,

16:00 you don’t know me,” but I said, “I’m your brother’s youngest Australian grand-daughter,” and she looked at me really blank and I said, “You had a brother called Alfred.” She said, “Yes.” I said, “I am his youngest grand-daughter from Australia.” “Oh,” she went off, she was absolutely, she hadn’t seen her brother since he was sixteen, you know, because he

16:30 was dead by that, and so she had to ring, her name was Aunty Olga, my mother’s name was Olga, and then she said, “I’ve got to ring Ettie.” Aunt Ettie was up in Nottingham, and so she said, “You’ll never guess who I’ve got here,” and the penny struck me that my aunty and my mother were named after his two sisters, Olga and Ettie.

17:00 I loved England in the summer time but I hated in the winter. I didn't like it, it was too cold for me. I am not a cold climate person. I like my tropics.

Now you met your husband on the way over?

On a ship, yeah, he was the radio operator on a ship.

To England?

No, here on the coast of Australia.

17:30 We had a, we didn't even have a romance. There's love letters in the book that I found in a writing companion when I was writing the book. I came across, I thought I had destroyed all my love letters. There must've been about 250 of them in a big chocolate tin and I burnt and destroyed them probably about six or seven years ago, and I

18:00 thought I got rid of all of them and then I found about half a dozen in this writing companion thing and my author said, "Oh Ollie, I'll put them in the book," just to show how much of a romantic man my husband was. He was a romantic. So as I say, he proposed to me from three different parts of the world and I just thought he was out of his tree to start with, but he was one of

18:30 those typical thorough English gentlemen. He was brought up and reared in India in the British Raj. His father was the manager, Court of Wards of India. When the Maharaja died in those days his father was the magistrate. He set up a court. If the eldest son was, the next ruling prince was not of age to rule, his father set a court up and did it. So that was his

19:00 upbringing and of course educated with the Jesuit Priests which was really the highest education you could ever get was with Jesuit Priests. But we had a happy happy married life even though it was cut short a bit. But that's life.

But it was a good marriage?

It was a good marriage, yes.

A good match?

19:30 Yep, and of course neither of us were chickens. He was thirty-four or thirty-five and I was twenty-six, twenty-seven, so neither of us were young people with stars in our eyes or what have you. It was being practical of what we did, but I have no regrets.

20:00 I find life has its ups and downs. It has its good time and it has its hard time. You just get on with it, but I must admit I have no regrets of what I've done.

Your husband, Frank, had quite an extraordinary time during his wartime experiences with the RAF [Royal Air Force]?

Well as I say, when Burma,

20:30 when the Japanese went into Burma they were at Lashio, which is up in northern Burma. They were protecting oil fields in the RAF and there was a mass exodus out of Burma and they got into queues and when they got to Mitchener the left hand road went off into India and the right hand went off with the

21:00 retreating Chinese army of General Chiang Kai-Shek into China, and they got mixed up with that lot and they ended up in China missing for the nine months until they were able to identified and sent back to India where he ended up on Lord Louis Mountbatten's head staff at Colombo and they walked out over

21:30 this old Burma Road which just zigzagged like a snake and he went first to Chungking, and there were two Chinese places he went to anyway, and then when it was discovered that they were these 130 odd RAF men missing, General Chennault's

22:00 'Flying Tigers' flew them back over the hump back into India where they resumed back in the air force again. They only had the clothes they walked out in, out of Burma. They had to leave everything. They couldn't take anything with them. As they drove off in a little ute they pulled the aerials down with them. The Chinese ended up by

22:30 giving them Chinese clothes, the Chinese uniform, everything, and feeding them for the nine months, looking after them. So that was his experience. As I said, he didn't get out of the Royal Air Force until 1948.

You were saying before there was an incident on that road?

Yes. The whole Chinese column was held up by one old Chinese

23:00 merchant of some sort who had a horse and cart and was across the Burma Road and the officers at the head of the thing had to, he wouldn't shift or get out of their road so they just pulled their revolver out and shot him and threw him and his horse and cart over the side so that the column could move through and not get trapped by Japanese

23:30 planes that strafed them. As I say, eliminating the one obstacle for the whole of the Chinese column. Some ruthless things took place in World War II. They didn't know whether he was an enemy sympathiser or what, whether it was a deliberate thing or whether he was just

24:00 that he was an ignorant peasant, but he was eliminated very quickly.

So what year were you and your husband married?

1953, 23rd of January 1953.

And then you had a son?

Yeah, Steven was born in January of 1955,

24:30 7th of January. It was snowing everywhere, cold, horrible. I didn't like it, but I had to put up with it. By that time we were down outside Bournemouth in the south of England, which was supposed to be the warmest place in England. I was still up to my knees in snow. I didn't think very much of that, I didn't like it.

25:00 I had never seen snow in my life until I was in England, or in Wales really when we were married.

Having cared for people so much of your life, how was motherhood?

I enjoyed it. I mean, until we found out, he was about three before we actually

25:30 found out that he had brain damage. Up until then he was just a little on the slow side, but that was part and parcel, didn't worry me. But we had encephalograms on him and found out he did have brain damage. I had to change tack and go on a different way with him then and make sure that he had the best that we could give him to

26:00 put him up in his own lifestyle which I'm happy with. He owns his own home, he's quite independent of me. I can go off to Townsville for the winter, every winter. He used to come up and have a couple of weeks with me but now he just says, "No Mum, you go on your own. I like the cold down here," he says. I don't, no. So that's how it was, and

26:30 when I had my triple heart bypass I lost my sister in the same year. She died the day of the elections for the federal government which put a big turmoil on what I was doing that day because I knew she was in the hospital over at Yorktown in Eyre Peninsula

27:00 and I'd been over for two days and two nights prior to that and the Saturday morning of the election I got the phone call saying that she had passed away that morning. So I just had to ring our solicitor and get him to organise the burial and bringing her body back from over there, back to Adelaide here where I had her cremated, and then I took her ashes up to Laurieton where our mother was in a grave up there

27:30 and I put her ashes with Mum. I was caring then for this woman who had this shocking psoriasis and when I had my heart attack, well, I didn't actually have a heart attack. I woke up at two, half past two in the morning, I knew I was in trouble. I just rang the ambulance and ended up in Wakefield Street Hospital and they said, "You'll have to have a bypass." If that's the case so be it. I said to the surgeon, "You make

28:00 sure I come through this because I'm not finished yet. I've still got a lot of work to do yet." Then I decided after I recuperated, I was two months recuperating, and I decided then I'm just going to look after me now. At seventy odd years of age, I thought I'm going to do what I just want to do instead of looking after everybody else, and that's how I said it, and in my book as I said there, I showed Sharon there,

28:30 Karen [interviewer], that the nuns always taught me John Wesley's little piece of poetry was, "I pass this way but once, what good I can do let me do it now for I shall not pass this way again," and I have always stood by that, and the Ten Commandments. If everybody lived by the Ten Commandments, wouldn't it be a much better world? Because it's all those commandments that are being broken that's creating all the

29:00 havoc that we have in the world today. But sometimes I wonder whether it was all worth it. We haven't learnt.

You're not sure if the war was worth it?

No, I'm not, because we haven't learnt, something we haven't learnt from it all. I think we're in a bigger mess

29:30 today than what we were in 1940.

Did you feel in 1940 that this would be what would change the world?

No, no, never, never in my, when 1945 came and the war was over it was all euphoria and just absolutely, we thought it was wonderful. The times they do a change, and they have changed very

dramatically.

30:00 I mean in those days it was lovely after the war. We had an era where travelling on ocean liners was a wonderful experience, and of course they're trying so hard to bring it back a bit. It was the only way, we didn't travel by plane

30:30 as they do today. Everybody used to go on these cruises on these ocean liners and I don't know that I'd like to go on the big new Queen Mary II. To me it would be like going to London or New York or somewhere with enormous people. I hate enormous big places like that. I'm a country girl, always will be.

31:00 That's how I feel.

What images stay with you from the war? What are the key images that have stayed with you?

Most of all of that was what I tried to bury in the cobwebs at the bottom of my mind. As I said, it was hard to write that book,

31:30 reliving a whole lot of those things that did happen. As I said, at times I think about was it all worthwhile? Did we do the right thing or did we do the wrong thing? But at the time we thought we were doing our best.

Can you tell me about writing the book?

Well, as

32:00 I said, it took me twelve months. I must admit Peter Fenton, my author, was very good. He could understand when I was disturbed and he'd say, "That's all right Ollie, we'll go onto something else." With doing it on the computer he could jump from

32:30 one chapter of my life to another chapter of my life and what have you, and as I said, the nightmares I started having washing all these mud-stained, blood-stained faces and what have you, every face I'd wash was Steven's face coming up in my horrors. But I'm glad I've done it and I just hope the school curriculums

33:00 put it in the school libraries for the younger generation to read, particularly with drugs and what have you because it's a different world altogether.

What do you feel the book has done for you?

To me I'm glad I've done it because it has surfaced

33:30 and got rid of a lot of ghosts, as I said, that I was harbouring. When it was finished I felt a lot better for having been able to tell things that happened that I'd kept a secret all those years. It was like a load that had been lifted off my shoulders or my brain

34:00 or what have you. Yeah, it did me good.

What do you mean by secrets?

The mustard gas and the insulin tolerance things that, and as I said, when they wanted compensation which was in the latter years, of course it was all denied that it ever happened, but it did happen. As I

34:30 said, they were used by the government, the same with the service personnel at Maralinga who were used for radiation for the atomic bomb over there. I mean they had to fight for years for compensation, the same with the sailors and that off the Voyager and the Melbourne,

35:00 they had to fight for, I mean most of them were all dead before one case of compensation was granted. To me, when people put their lives on the line for their country, their country should honour what they have done to them.

So were you able to help

35:30 **those people with the knowledge that you had?**

Well, I've backed up their stories. I mean I've got it all off computers here. They can't deny it, and of course the biggest ploy of the government was the procrastination. The longer they could put a thing off,

36:00 the more of these people would pass on and die and was off the books, which is sad. That's how I feel about it. I just sort of see red when I think about, I can't remember who it was, it was a politician in Canberra

36:30 was riding a bicycle on government property at Parliament House in Canberra, fell off his bike and he went for compensation. I think he got something like 40,000 because he fell off his bike on government, parliament land, and you have all these other service people who are out there trying to get compensation for being used, and in some way I suppose you could say abused,

37:00 and being denied. That was where my Australian rebel background comes out in my. My husband always called me his 'bloody Australian rebel'. It's a good title. I accepted it.

Bloody Australian rebel, not bad.

That's right.

Get a T-shirt.

And I said to him

37:30 the first time that we, we were only married about three months when we had our first discussion and that's when he called me his 'bloody Australian rebel'. I said, "Good, you remember that, and you remember that you only married me, you don't own me." So we had a good marriage, but he was put in his place.

He probably married you because you were a bloody Australian rebel.

Well, but we enjoyed

38:00 it. But if I saw anything that was wrong and injustice or what have you, I had to have my say. I was not a silent person.

Not a wallflower?

No, dear, no. Even though some people might have thought I was, as I say, I think it was the way the nuns had more or less brought me up and I could give as

38:30 good as I got, yeah.

Can you tell me about your association with the White Mouse [Nancy Wake]?

Oh, Nancy. Yeah, when I was working in Sydney and I bought our retirement house up in Dunbogan which is about twenty-five miles south of Port Macquarie, and I first met her up there on Anzac Day, and

39:00 because we used to frequent together, and when I was trying to honour Vivian Bullwinkel, our only nursing sister who survived the massacre of Bangka Island while she was alive in Perth, I decided that, her birthplace was Kapunda, so I decided then that we would do a memorial thing

39:30 for her while she, but she died ten days before that happened. Then they took me down and showed me the war memorial gardens, which was a burnt patch and that was it, with one stone stuck in the middle of World War I, 1914-1918, and I looked and I thought you've got to be joking. You call this a war memorial gardens? So I got a committee together and raised funds and turned it into a magnificent

40:00 garden, which I've got a beautiful photograph of. It's up there on the top. And I invited Nancy over to the opening of it and I had her for a week and we had a ball. She's now in a nursing home in London, in Surrey actually, and

40:30 I rang her on Christmas Eve and she said to me, "Ollie, I want to come home," because she's ninety-two now. So I said, "We'll see what we can do," because she went back there thinking she was going back to the London that she left, and of course it was just totally strange, and she said to me on Christmas Eve, "Ollie, don't get me wrong," she said, "I'm

41:00 not a racist, I've never been a racist." She's still got her marbles, and she said, "But I'm surrounded here by coloured, black people." She said, "It's all so foreign to me, I want to come home."

We'll just stop there.

Tape 8

00:44 **Olive, you were just telling us about Nancy in London and that the London she left isn't the London she's in now?**

No, no. I mean the whole world has changed. It doesn't matter where you go

01:00 today, it's not the same world that we fought hard to keep. It's gone off on its own tangent somewhere, and as I said, when she left Australia she said, "I know you all love me, but it's goodbye." But now as I say Christmas Eve was, "Olive, I want to come home." So I've had this beautiful portrait

01:30 of Nancy painted by Robert Hannaford and we're going to have it auctioned at Sotherby's or Christie's to raise funds because the nursing home that she's in, she's accumulating a debt of £65 a week and so we're hoping to get enough money to say that she never died in debt. She's ninety-two.

02:00 No, I respect her for what she did and she doesn't deserve to end her days in that sort of circumstances. But the portrait that I've got that you saw in the Sydney Morning Herald, it is beautiful. So hopefully we get enough money to cover all

02:30 her debts and her wishes are that she is cremated and her ashes are scattered over Arion in France where she fought as a French Resistance fighter. Me, they can cremate me and they can toss my ashes off the end of the Port Noarlunga Jetty, that's where Frank is, so put me with him. It was his wish when he passed on that I cremate him and put his ashes in the ocean.

03:00 So that's where Olive's going. It doesn't worry me. I'm quite happy and quite prepared to say I have lived. I've had a darn good life, with its good and its bad. And I don't want to do anything more. I think I've completed my cycle

03:30 and my dynasty is finished, there's no carry on, but that's it. I can't think of doing any more than that.

Is there anything else you'd like to say for the record? Anything else you'd like to say for the record, Ollie?

For the record, well,

04:00 if everybody just did their very best whatever they come against, come against and do, they've got no regrets, put it that way. I think when people haven't accomplished something they've always got those little regrets there, I should have done this or I should have done that, what have you. I don't have any, if

04:30 I wanted to do something I did it.

No regrets? No regrets?

No regrets, none whatsoever, no, no. So that is how I'd like to be remembered, for doing something for other people, but as I said after my, I thought, "Olive, it's time you looked after yourself," which I did. That's how I'm ending my

05:00 days up, enjoying myself.

It's been a pleasure to interview you today.

Thank you, dear. It's been a pleasure. I was quite surprised and I was pleased that I had two ladies to do it with. As I said, men have a tendency at times, some of them, not all, to intimidate a female. You know, they've got something that's

05:30 inbuilt in them. I just feel as though you can talk to, women can talk to women sometimes better than you can male to female.

It's worked out all right today.

Good, I'm quite pleased, and as I say, I wasn't nervous or upset with having to go.

INTERVIEW ENDS