Australians at War Film Archive

Patricia Rawlings (PVM) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Thank you very much for doing this today before we start.**

Pleasure.

The archive wouldn't exist without your generous support and giving your time to us.

Thank you.

To begin with we need a summary so without any detail can you tell me where you were born and where you went to school and go through your life like that.

Sure. I was born in Malta, George Cross,

01:00 to an army family. My father was in the army and my mother met him there. She was an army governess and I had two brothers. I was born seven years later than the boys and just in time for us to more off to Singapore. My father was in the garrison artillery so we were in the artillery and we were on an island called Blakang-Mati

01:30 which is now called Sentosa. We then moved from there to Hong Kong where in both places I went to military schools and then my father got a posting back to England. He was to be OC [Officer Commanding] troops and he wanted to deposit us in England so my mother's family, because my mother was English and my father was part-French and we would

02:00 be able to have a stable upbringing and education so my two brothers went to the Duke of York Military School, I went to a normal school. In Hampshire we were in Fort Farham, which is right down on south of England, Portsmouth and Fort Farham, and from there I went to an ordinary primary school and from there my father decided we would move to London. So we moved to London and it was at this stage that I was assessed as to

02:30 my future and education because they realised, I didn't realise of course, neither did my family, that by the one-on-one education you get in British Army schools, most children are ahead of their time. So I was ahead of my time and I sat for a scholarship to go to big school and I passed and I got a scholarship to the

03:00 Frances Mary Buss School from which I graduated at 16 years and seven months as an matriculant student.

And that was not long before the outbreak of the war.

No. A little bit before the outbreak of the war yes and I had been, I was a very keen mixer in people. I'm a people person. I love people and I was,

03:30 sang with the choir, I was a brownie, I was a Girl Guide but having graduated obviously I was very mature by virtue of friends graduating and they were all older than me, 18 and some 19. But I said to my father, "I would like to join the Territorial Army," and he said, "You're too young," and I said, "I would still like to join." He said,

04:00 after a big of cogitation he said, "All right, as long as you join the regiment." So I joined the regiment, which was the Regiment of Royal Artillery, and went to camp and it was lovely. I mean it was a very advanced Girl Guides and Boy Scouts and so. So that was fine and I was thoroughly enjoying that and the war broke out. I was not mobilised early because they were mobilising all the regular forces

04:30 and then they mobilised the Territorial Army forces and of course, I was still underage. My father said, "You won't get in," and I said, "Will you let me go if I do?" and he said, "Yes, I will. Your mother's not pleased but nevertheless she'll agree." So when I went for the interview there was this very, very short haircut, tough,

05:00 female regimental sergeant major with all the trimmings on and she looked as me and she said, “Name.” So I told her, which was not Rawlings, it was Jacombs. She said, “Age. Where’s your birth certificate?” So I gave her my birth certificate which was that long because of Malta and everybody including the village idiot and this one and that one were all on my birth certificate.

05:30 She couldn’t make head nor tail of it. “How old are you?” “18, ma’am.” “Go.” And in actual fact I wasn’t even 17. So that’s how I started my career and I was drafted into the gunners because I had been a gunner in the Territorial Army but I said I don’t want to be in administration, I want to fight. So they made me a heavy ack-ack [anti-aircraft] gunner

06:00 on a predictor [instrument for finding target and bearing]. The women served on predictors and height-finders and in fact did all the technical stuff and the guys used to just pop it in the breach and pull the lanyard so all of the ack-ack batteries were all integrated male/female so we were integrated at that stage. We all wore the same types of uniform even though we had skirts for going out purposes.

06:30 Boots, belts and gaiters. Sheepskin over-bodices, sheepskin mitts [mittens] for the winter and we lived in the same lines and after my training I was sent to Wormwood Scrubs which is the most notorious prison in London. That was where our gun site was set up. We only used the prison for the showers, nothing else, otherwise we all lived in the lines at Wormwood Scrubs.

07:00 **We’ll come back and talk about the ack-ack job in a lot more detail. What did you after that?**

After that I was remustered into signals because they were very, very short of people who had clerical abilities. Able to type, use teleprinters, etc., etc., so they mustered me into signals, which I very quickly elevated both in

07:30 rank and knowledge and I became a communicator and I achieved the rank of warrant officer class two in a matter of less than 18 months and I was in charge of all of East Anglia and my modus operandi of transport was a 250 BSA [motorcycle] and the way I used to go around all my various units and one day I was back in my

08:00 base in Luton and I got a phone call to say that I was required to be in London for an interview tomorrow morning at 10 o’clock. No more and no less than that so I went and I walked in to this large room and there were quite a few people, females, and they said “You will be called in alphabetical order.” I walked into this room and there was this gaggle of red tabs [British soldiers], males,

08:30 females etc and I was interviewed and asked about my ambitions and about my background and about my education standards and they said, “Thank you very much. We are seeking some particular people for a special unit and we will advise you if you are successful.” A week later I was successful and I was trained as an intercept wireless operator because even though I had done Morse

09:00 code and I’d done all forms of communication as a master of signals I had not actually been specifically trained in intercept wireless work. So that was that and it was three weeks later they phoned me and said, “You will march into a particular barracks in Chelsea,” and I marched in and they said, “You have been selected to be the warrant officer for No. 4 ATS [Auxiliary Territorial Services]

09:30 Wing and you are in holding now and you will be allowed out, all of you people, two hourly, but you have to come back and sign on and when the time comes you will told your destination and not before.”

What was the destination when you found out?

Middle East.

Where were you camped in the Middle East eventually?

Well after we had been in holding for about five weeks we suddenly went out one

10:00 day, came home and bang, the doors were closed. We were issued with pith helmets and we obviously knew we weren’t going into the snow and all of our extra gear, we were shipped to Liverpool onto the Highland Brigade and we set of for a two-month trip via the Cape because the previous detachments had all been torpedoed and a great number of them had gone down in

10:30 the Med [Mediterranean]. Men and women and we were all reinforcement detachments for the impending defence of Egypt culminating in the Battle of El Alamein.

Again we will come back to talk about your time in El Alamein. What happened after that?

Well after we won at El Alamein and we kicked their bottoms out, my group were brought back to

11:00 Cairo and in Cairo we were established as 516 ATS Signals Regiment and we were working in Kasre-Nil Barracks on the next step of the procedures which of course, was Greece and Crete. And I worked with my detachment there for some while and after

11:30 coming back from the desert it was unreal because you lived like a Bedouin and you were living like a lady and suddenly, I thought all of your fighting senses have been looked after but what about your mental senses. So I joined the Anglo-Egyptian Union and I used to borrow books from there and I did

play reading from there and New Years Party, Christmas/New

12:00 Years party we put on three one-act plays on the roof of the Anglo-Egyptian Union and I had all this goo all over my face taking all the makeup face. Knock on the door and they said, “Is Warrant Officer Rawlings there please?” Because by this time I was married and I said, “Yes, give me a minute,” and I went out and two gentlemen standing there, one was Tyron Thatcher and one was Bernard Lee, two prominent British actors, and they said, “We are very impressed with your

12:30 work. Are you a professional?” and I said, “In no way. I get nothing from acting and I get nothing for being a madam except my army pay.” And they laughed and said, “You’ve got a sense of humour.” And they said, “We are, we have been given approval to organise a military entertainment unit to cover western desert up to Tripoli also to cover Egypt and Crete and

13:00 down as far as Sudan and you must be military because you can’t go in wartime into places unless you are military. So they can’t bring civilian people out here.” So I went for my interview and I got accepted because I should have been, nearly been coming back to England because I had done my three years. I had a further two years out there in theatre with some of the well known names of British Theatre. Tommy Cooper

13:30 who was Command Performance, Terry Thomas with the split in the teeth, and I didn’t get back to England until six months after my husband had got home. I married in the Middle East.

Okay, we will talk about that time with the theatre troop again. When did you arrive back in England and what was the situation then?

I didn’t arrive back in England until ’47 and they still had a dearth of professional actors to cover their particular

14:00 theatres so I did a lot of, I did my acting there and then as soon as enough people came back the next year, in ‘48 I was back into the classification of reorganising the military from Territorial Army back to Regular Army and to the Women’s Royal Army Corps and then in

14:30 ’49 I came out here.

Were you still in the army at that stage?

Oh yes.

You never were discharged after the war?

No, no. We didn’t demobilise there. Only demobilised in the colonies. We didn’t demobilise in Britain.

Okay.

But we went back from Territorial status to Regular Army status or from Regular Army status, Territorial Service, we couldn’t be demobilised.

15:00 **One point that we just skipped over, where were you when the war came to a close? Were you in Cairo or what was the day of the war ending?**

Yes, I was somewhere in the Western Desert probably.

All right. That is a fantastic summary of your war service.

I did five years over there instead of three.

It’s all completely varied as well. There are a lot of different jobs involved. We will come back and talk about all those in the main part of the interview. Briefly now I would like to know a little bit

15:30 **about what you did after the war. You came to Australia in ’49.**

In ’49 under the auspices of the military exchange and the Department of Education. We came to Australia. Three of us, my CQMS [Company Quartermaster Sergeant], my orderly room sergeant and myself and we landed in Sydney. We all went to work for the girls training school in Parramatta in our respective strains. I was physical education and

16:00 drama and one was domestic service, whatever they called it in those days, and we worked there for, I worked there from ’49 until early ’51, and in ’51 I happened to be having lunch at the Australia Hotel with two of my friends that I came with and looked down and say this big tent and it said, “Your country once again needs you!”

16:30 So by this time we were quite happy, having a nice lunch and so we went down and put our names down because we said we were interested. Two weeks later at school I got a call and they said, “Mrs Rawlings, a Captain Jackson wishes to speak with you.” And I said, “Who’s he?” and they said, “It’s not a he, it’s a she.” So I was one of the first five recruited for the Women’s Royal Australian Corps to get started again

17:00 because of the Korean War and I was its first instructor up here and I enlisted in February ’51.

And how long did that career last with the Royal Australian?

From ’51 to ’72.

And what were the highlights for you of that lengthy period?

Well. The highlights were to me I trained the first 11 recruits

17:30 companies. I trained three lots of officer cadets and then I was given a direct commission because the director wanted me to come in as a commissioned officer but the assistant Director of WRAC [Women’s Royal Australian Corps] said, “We need her to get and build a business-type training and train our people to continue when she goes,” and from then I was used much as a guinea pig in the

18:00 Australian Army because of my background and my integration with male units equally. Certainly not individual women’s units on their own. I mean, it was integrated, the whole war. In Britain it was all different male types, in the Middle East there were Australian, New Zealanders, Poles, Free French, Ghurkhas and we all lived and worked together so they

18:30 decided as the corps was finally was not just a territorial organisation not a WRAC, it got Royal assenting and we were admitted as permanent members of the force so they decided that they would use me to see how we, women, integrated with the men.

19:00 So I was got, I mean the first job I got was as training officer, GSO3 [General Staff Officer Grade 3] Training in Adelaide and I was training National Serviceman at 16 National Service Brigade. I had them running up and down Anzac Parade and stop watching and all this sort of thing and writing operational orders and things of that type and so they decided that women would be very good on the staff because that’s what was

19:30 a staff appointment. I was also appointed as the Queen’s Equerry for her ’54 tour of that year and then they posted me to the Royal Australian Army Service Corps, which was a very large transportation corps, as their administrative officer and they found that I could do that very well. And part of the thing that was very interesting with all of that was that I got sent to

20:00 England on a short-term expedition to try and get a better deal for our people in Australia with postings and administration because my argument was I thought that was terrible because we had so much problems and marital problems with the guys because they would be shoved around hither and yon and round and about and the money they got wasn’t too good then

20:30 and I said, “Why, in England, can they get six to nine months notice of a posting with an army 20 times the size?” So I was sent over there by army headquarters to check on their electronic data processing and also to come up with a full report to be discussed at defence and then they posted me to the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers as an administrative officer and one

21:00 of my jobs was, the guys who were at university training, once a week they had to report to me in the office boots, belts and gaiters, all dressed up, not brothel-creepers [sandshoes] and long hair, excuse me, and bring them up to date to be soldiers. And from the success there they sent me to the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers on army headquarters staff, and my job was to

21:30 introduce the new field force establishments in which the army was to change because we were under the old wartime establishments and this was to be field force establishments. And I would have to work one and a half blokes to every vehicle he had to fix and in the those two corps. I coordinated all of the relief at the Antarctic every year with ducks and troops and

22:00 training. And then from there they sent me to Tasmania as the Assistant Director WRAC and of 6 WRAC Company because recruiting on the island had been very poor. So I was virtually back into a female environment where I had been in a male environment all that time. Oh sorry, that’s all right, it’s only water.

Should we get a towel for it or something?

22:30 If you would like to, a tea towel in the kitchen. And I had a wonderful time. I went to all the corporate places and all the big organisations so say, “We need to build the Citizens’ Military Force very, very urgently.” So I did and then I enlisted too many people and got wrapped over the knuckles. But the first company that I took down into camp for the first time at Bridgewater just over the

23:00 Brighton Barracks. You got from Hobart over the Bridgewater Bridge and there’s Brighton, and I had a full compliment and it was in that Brighton area which is relevant to the situation I had a signal organisation that was putting up new communications to make Tasmania more effective. I had the Department of Housing who were painting and electrifying everything. Making everything electric

23:30 instead of the old wooden stoves and I had married quarters. So anyway we got everything set up and one funny little anecdote, my warrant officer said to me, “Ma’am, don’t forget the beer order.” She said, “Now you’ve got that brand new Kombi van.” So I said, “I’ll fix it,” and I gave her an order and she said, “That’s all right but what are you going to drink? That’s not enough ma’am, you don’t know these people.” So I said “Okay,”

24:00 so we went and doubled the order and we were the last vehicle out of the brewery before it blew up because that was the bushfires. I was in barracks in Brighton and I got a call from headquarters to say that one of my women had taken an overdose and could I come back to Hobart immediately. So I went back and fixed her up and put her in the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] and advised her family and all that, and then I

24:30 said to my driver, "Now while I'm here you go down to the ordnance depot and fill up with your truck with jerry cans of petrol and I'll pick you up there." So I picked her up in my ute and we were driving along and I thought, a lot people burning off around here, and I look up and the sun was red. Get down to Bridgewater and this great big copper and I said,

25:00 "What's going on?" and he said, "Can't you smell?" and I said, "Yeah, I can smell a lot of burning off." He said, "That's not burning off madam, the whole of southern Tasmania is on fire. Where do you think you're going?" And I said, "To Brighton camp," and he said, "You can't," and I said, "Look I've got 70 troops there, I've got married quarters with young married women with babies I've got a signals detachment and I've got a civvie [civilian] detachment of painters." I said,

25:30 "I'll sign a waiver and you see me through," so he gave me an outrider. Little did he know that behind me in my truck, which was well covered, was hundreds of jerry cans of petrol, but away we went and as went, up blew the service station on either side of the road and we get down to Brighton camp and I said, "Thanks guys. Jonesy, drive in, I'm just going to this

26:00 little shop here to commandeer some candles." There was a little brick, you know sandstone shop opposite Brighton camp and I went in and I said to this guy, "Do you sell candles?" and he said, "Yeah, how many do you want?" and I said, "How many have you got?" and it was one of those ladders that you climb up the top and dragged all the candles out and I said, "I'm writing you a requisition. The Department of Defence will pay for these," and there we were for five weeks and I set up the

26:30 first refugee centre in southern Tasmania and I used to get on the wireless because that was the only communication we had and we had drops from the mainland of bedding and blankets. Had 500 in the refugee centre and I said, "I need hospital staff," because our boys were cut off between north and south. They were on manoeuvres in northern Tasmania and until they could

27:00 come back we didn't have any defence and then they came back and had to kill off the animals and take away the dead bodies. But five weeks of that.

When were those bushfires?

'67.

'67. So it was towards the end of your WRAC career?

Yeah. Then I got a phone call from eastern command about a month later, "Captain Rawlings, commander here, would like to see you this weekend. I've got some

27:30 important things to discuss with you." So I went and he said, "We are setting up a cell here, a military cell, because having the civilian members of the defence dealing with our latest war," which was Vietnam, "it's so impersonal and it's a disgrace. It's such a controversial war and half the Australian population are against it anyway so I want you to be here in a

28:00 week and set up a cell, you can write your own establishment and what you want and start looking after the Vietnam War widows, injured soldiers and be the administrative officer of the whole of NSW [New South Wales] and Australian Capital Territory," and I did that until I left.

If we have time at the end of the interview, I would love to come back and talk about that because again it falls into our domain of Australians at war so I mean…

28:30 Well I'm the one that did all of their wills for them, interviewed them and told them what the army would give them in the way of compensation, fought for mothers who, their son had been their sole provider to get her money. Used to look after all the pay and conditions, lecture in pay and conditions for NSW right down

29:00 to the establishments down on the border of Victoria and that's how I finished up working about 60 hours a week and flying everywhere. No using cars. Flying to all these outposts like a little place called Werris Creek and all sorts of strange places within NSW where I couldn't get a commercial airline and the boys from Air Opip [Air Observation Post pilots – reconnaissance pilots] from Holsworthy used to fly me

29:30 to keep their hours up and that's how I finished there.

All right, at that point we'll stop right there before we have to go back. I might just close your window.

All of my early years, for instance, when we were in Malta my mother as I say was a governess for somebody in my father's regiment and

30:00 being a little baby there she used to take me out swimming because I loved the water. I'm a Cancerian and I love water. Mad about boats. Mad about fishing. Had a powerboat for 14 years. Did a lot of sailing. So anyway I learnt to swim before I could walk. By the time I got to Singapore

30:30 they have an enclosure there called the Pagga and they have a walkway all the way around there and my father used to be me in a sort of a hoop and hold it up here and I used to paddle all the way around the Pagga and by the time I left Singapore and I was only three years old I could swim and all my

31:00 friends were all non-British so I sort of assimilated very, very well with people of all races and ages and since they were mainly boys when we got to Hong Kong they used to play an awful lot of soccer and I used to say to my brothers, "I want to play," and the little Hong Kong boys said, "We can't have a female," and my brother said,

31:30 "I don't know about that. Let's put her in goal." So they put me in goal and the first bloke that bore down on me I grabbed the ball and tackled him and they said, "No put her out on the field so we got a fair go," and all of my life my brothers and I were like that. We were so close and we

32:00 had so much in common that is where I believe that I was far more at home with boys than females. The only people I would feel slightly ill at ease with were girls. I couldn't understand girls. I could understand boys. I mean, we used to go off into the cane fields and pinch the cane and be chased by the big fat bloke that was running the cane place and we did everything together. Everything.

32:30 **Can you describe your memories of Hong Kong? What was Hong Kong like when you were there as a child?**

I loved it. I've back and looked at where the married quarters were. I've back to Hong Kong four–five times since. And I had an amah [housemaid] to look after me, and my mother said to me, "Why she loved you I don't know because you were an absolutely mischievous little girl." She said,

33:00 "She used to take her sandals off and put them where you had two storey and a big veranda all the way around, she used to put her little shoes out there and I used to pick them up and throw them over the veranda so she wouldn't know where they were. But I was used to being looked after and I was ruined, absolutely ruined. And I went to school, as I say I thoroughly enjoyed school because we were virtually on a one-to-one basis for lots of things. We

33:30 had lots of sport and we had some very torrid times because we had a big typhoon while we were there and we lived up the peak and I've got photographs where all of the graves, cemetery up the top, all of the graves were being washed past our house and uplifting mats and taking blinds off everywhere. So I was a bit rugged but it did

34:00 give me a wonderful education of knowing people, understanding people. It turned me into a reasonable sort of linguist because everywhere I went I was learning something so I could interact with the people that I was with. I also toured China extensively, talking of the difference, toured China extensively at the invitation of the Chinese government

34:30 with my softball team. They sent three sports up just after they opened the area up because they wanted to get into world sports but they didn't want to demean themselves by not being good enough so I did a six weeks tour with my softball teams. Ran seminars, toured extensively with a retinue. I had a doctor, I had a dresser, I had a

35:00 head of delegation, I had a, you know, dogsbody. All our baggage carriers but they were terribly different from the Hong Kong people because being Hong Kong is one of the reasons when they tried to post me to Canberra, I said I couldn't stand that, because I said, I lived in a [British] Raj environment where everybody has a pecking order oblivious

35:30 of their ability and that's what Canberra was to me. I couldn't stand it so I wouldn't go. And I went up two or three times when I was still Hong Kong and I was there in fact the day the governor cried, when it was all over and done with, and I've been back twice since then and there is a difference. But I believe now since SARS [severe acute respiratory syndrome] it has stabilised and they have become a little more

36:00 Hong Kong type.

What was the Hong Kong raj like as a child? What was the mix of cultures? Can you describe a bit more about what it was like?

I mean it was the same as any country that was run by its civil servants. You had to be particular type of civil servant before you were accepted into the various clubs. It was the same in Egypt,

36:30 I might tell you, and the similar equivalent in the services. I mean you just couldn't be accepted for what you were. You were only accepted for the level that you stood in the pecking order of society but it was enjoyable and terrific culture and I mean

37:00 there was no reason in the world why you couldn't be a well rounded, as I was, a very well-rounded

student. That's where you could shine as a student and if you were a good student you made to feel like you were a good student. Not the fact that your father was only a major instead of colonel or vice admiral or whatever the case may be. But it was a wonderful.

37:30 I was so well rounded when I arrived in England it was a complete mystery to me and when we pulled up in the boat in winter and it was snowing I said to my father, "What are they throwing confetti for?" I'd never seen snow.

As part of the British colonial community, how much contact did you have with the local Hong Kong people and what was the…?

Oh, the upper echelon. Oh yes but I had a

38:00 lot of interaction because of my brothers and they used to play with anybody. We used to mix together and we used to go around together and we used to get into mischief together and we used to go swimming together so I mean I didn't get a mismanaged balance and it didn't make me a snob. Sometimes I think it had a tendency to because it was such a cloistered,

38:30 wonderful, wonderful existence. We were never short of anything.

What were the best things for you about that existence?

The fact that I was getting the best education in the world and it was going to stand me in wonderful stead for the future and it did.

Well, we'll stop that because the tape has run out so we might change that over. We might keep going if its all right with you.

That's how I lasted so well in

Tape 2

00:33 **Can you tell me a little bit about your mother and father? What were they like?**

My mother is the reason I am like I am. My mother at 19 years of age had had a foot operation and she was laying on the chaise longue in her garden at Sussex, my grandfather was the Provost [Head of Police] of Sussex

01:00 and my mother was reading the paper and she said to my grandfather, "I've seen two jobs I'm interested in," and he said, "Oh yes what are they?" and she said, "Governess in South Africa and Gibraltar." And he said, "Well, why don't you write away?" He looked just like George Bernard Shaw, my grandfather. So she did and she got a reply from Gibraltar so my grandfather said, "I'm very pleased for you."

01:30 Now at 19, and she would have been 100 in April, so you can imagine at that time how adjusted her family background was. My father has French derivation. That's where the Jacombs comes from, and he was brought up partly

02:00 in the Midlands and he joined the army and if there were ever a contrast of personalities my father was the sweetest, softest gentlemen you ever met in your life. There he is, my mother and father. She was the go-getter and stood no nonsense before you could say you weren't that kind of a girl, you got a smack behind. My father, who'd always wanted a daughter,

02:30 and he waited all those years and I appeared, and when I arrived with the brown eyes and the olive skin as he did and all the others as you can see, my mother, they are all blue eyed and blonde hair, he said, "That's it." He taught me tenderness and kindness and care for other people. My mother taught me to look after myself in life

03:00 and go for everything.

It's not the stereotype you would expect from a British military man, a tender kind father.

He was far more French. He was so softly spoken. He was a fine upstanding gentlemen. I think he'd had quite a well ordered sort of life. I mean, he'd never fought.

03:30 He had been in the service. I think he joined the service as some form of career path and he was very good at it. But he was an absolute sweetheart and I say, absolutely ruined me which my mother was harder on me because of that. But my two brothers and I have always been, I lost both of them last month would you believe.

I'm sorry to hear that.

One in England and one in Melbourne.

04:00 But they, you know, we were a threesome. They taught me everything I knew, they taught me how to

drink without getting drunk. They taught me to dance, so I had the social graces. We used to swim together. My younger brother was an olympian. I was in the olympic squad at the age of nine, swimming. My elder brother was a British rugby player and hockey player.

04:30 And as I say my mother ruled the roost with a rod of iron. Quite often I had arguments with her because she expected so much from my brothers. My two brothers, one was a go-getter like me and the other one was soft like my father. My older brother. Absolute gentlemen to his bootstraps and they both finished up in the army when they left the Royal Military College. One finished up as a major

05:00 and one finished up as a RSM [Resident Sergeant Major] and can you imagine, I was the first one sent to war and they were never so angry in all of their lives. We had a tiff, "Why should you go?" and I said, "Because they need people like you to train people. So I'll see you over there," and they both came eventually, but the only girl, the first to be sent on active service. But it was a great upbringing and

05:30 I'm glad I've got part from my Mum and part from my Dad.

How was the discipline metered out?

My mother? Whack. No questions asked and she was, because when I won a scholarship I came screaming home I was so excited and she was polishing some brassware and she looked up and she said,

06:00 "Nothing less than I expected." But I mean without my mother we wouldn't have had a life. My father couldn't handle money, he was so laid back. He used to put up with all sorts of things that other people. I mean he metered out discipline with the army but with his family, no, it was my mother that did that.

06:30 **What did you do with your parents as a girl growing up?**

Not a great deal I think because they were both very actively tied up when I was growing up. My father was with the service and kept popping off and coming back. My mother had been a governess but she was now looking after three kids.

07:00 We didn't have a lot of interaction until we came to England where we lived as a family unit.

You mentioned before the story of you thought snow was confetti. You must have been a bit at sea when that happened. How did you cope with that change in your life?

Well, my father always quotes this silly story. Luckily he was posted to Fort Farham,

07:30 which was in the country, Middlesex, Sussex I mean, not Middlesex, and the first time my two brothers and I were parted and I was heartbroken, absolutely heartbroken because they left to go to school, military college. And there was just my mother, my father and myself and my dog and I had a reasonably

08:00 lonely existence originally because I didn't interact with English kids. We had nothing in common. Absolutely nothing in common. We couldn't talk about the Pagga and about sugar cane and the places we'd been and the places we'd seen and all that sort of and how to use chopsticks and little bits of Chinese we could talk about and it was the most lonely,

08:30 frustrating period in my life until I gradually accustomed myself. I was lucky it was in Sussex because then my father was sent to London and he demobbed [demobilized] in London and got a job and when he said, "We're going to move to London," and I was horrified and I said, he always quotes this, "There she was, the

09:00 hide of it, 11 years old, 'That's the city of sin, Father.'" He said, "My daughter being a prude, where did she get that from?" But I really adapted to being in London. I loved it. We were in Wembley, actually.

What did you love about London? How did you come out of that difficult time?

Oh I loved everything about London. Walk around every corner there was always

09:30 something new, something exciting happened, happening and to see all these white people after living with all these coloured people and there was so much sport and I again, you know thoroughly enjoyed the Brownies and the Girl Guides and the interaction and that's where I got to know and got to appreciate my own English people and when I got into the army even territorial part before I was

10:00 mobilised, I met so many interesting people with so many different interesting stories. And I was on a learning curve for some years in England because it was so different from anything that I was used to and I realised that I liked the English way of life. I liked their sense of fair play. I liked their, to me sometimes they are a bit stuffy but not

10:30 all of them and I love the history. I absolutely soaked up every bit of history. I used to go to Buckingham Palace and I used to go to the trooping of the colour and I was obviously an integral part of military business because being in the service. I turned on a parade of female soldiers with no words of command on November

11:00 11th at Albert Hall and that was one of my great loves and because I had the sense of the dramatic.

Always. I always liked drama and I always liked history and I was an avid reader and still am. I've got books coming out of my ears. The history was just something I just absolutely adored and steeped myself in. I'd go to the Tower of London

11:30 and Westminster Abbey and all the cathedrals and that sort of thing and so that's what I enjoyed about England and its countryside and there I was standing on the very ground where the Battle of Hastings was and all that sort of thing.

What sort of holidays would your family take? Would you travel around the countryside in England for

12:00 **instance?**

No. No, I don't remember that because my father was working. We'd visit relatives and that sort of thing but I don't, that's one part I don't remember. I don't remember if we went on holidays together. I guess we did. We'd probably go to the seaside at some stage, go to Brighton or something but that's never left an indelible mark on my memory.

What

12:30 **about where you lived in Middlesex? Can you describe the house or the place you lived in?**

Yeah. We lived in a semi-detached double storey house with a beautiful garden and very nice area, near to South Kenton Station. We used to go to Wembley. I used to go ice skating there and I played ice hockey in fact there. But I loved ice skating.

13:00 My mother used to take me to the speedway. I'm not a rev-head any more but I loved the speedway and I remember Bluey Wilkinson and Lionel Van Prague and when I came to Australia I met some members of the Van Prague family. But I was madly in love with Bluey Wilkinson. You can imagine why he was called Bluey with the red hair and I thought, "That's my ideal," but Lionel Van Prague, his family were very, very well known

13:30 motoring family here. But they were the first Australians I ever met.

What was the scene like at the speedway? Can you describe that for us?

Magnificent. Because Wembley Stadium has been updated since then and I went to the '48 Olympics there by the way. Been to four Olympics. But it was wonderful. Enormous crows and the atmosphere and the noise and the revving up of the bikes. I could feel my pulse going bing, bing, bing,

14:00 bing, bing. As I say, I'm not a rev-head now but I certainly was back then. That was the sort of school girl thing and I had very soon found out about boys particularly in the army. And I had one or two romances.

How old were you when you first started to find out about boys?

The first time they

14:30 interested me at all was when I joined the army. Didn't interest me at school. I was determined to take advantage of my education. I enjoyed the sport and used to play lacrosse and hockey and netball and those sorts of things and as I say, I ice skated. I was also a champion cyclist trained by a British olympian. Originally I was road racing and then he put me on the

15:00 track and when I went to Egypt I challenged the Egyptian female champion and won. I loved cycling. I've still got a bike there. I used to ride 100 kms every weekend.

Were you still a bit of tomboy in the sense that you preferred men's company to women's, girls to boys?

15:30 I guess I would be a bit of tomboy because I related to brothers. I never felt at a disadvantage to my brothers and as I've said, they've said this to me before, they were scared to death of you. And when my two brothers died very quickly and I said to my family when I was in Melbourne, "That now makes me the matriarch of the family," and they said, "Aunty Pat, you've always been the matriarch of the family."

When, during this period while you were

16:00 **in London, England was going into the Depression. Were there any images of that that stick in your mind?**

Yes, it was very, very tough, very tough and that's why I say I was grateful to my mother because without her and her efficiency and her support we would never have been fed or watered. My father had quite an

16:30 ordinary sort of job considering he had been in the service for so long. He then elevated in due course with the Smiths Clock Company but we never went without, never, and that's one thing that I sort of, you know. And when I was being educated, part of my education, we used to go each year with my school to France where we had

17:00 x number of weeks of our holiday over there so we would get a sort of French upbringing as well as the English and all of those things my parents scrimped and saved for me to go because they had no support from my brothers who were in the army and they were away it was just Mum and Dad and me.

What was

17:30 **the school that you got the scholarship to? Could you tell us a little bit more about that?**

Very exclusive ladies school called Frances Mary Buss School and their motto is Onward and Upward and due to the marks that I got when you sit for a scholarship, you are graded. I guess it is the same here, I don't know too much about the Australian system. Graded to the school which fits your mark

18:00 and it was typically, typically well rounded like a private school and the type of education there is the type of education I found here when I coached at Kambala and I coached at Ravenswood and I coached at Roseville and I used to run the independent school softball competition and just typically reminded me of my upbringing.

18:30 **What were your favourite parts of that education? What did you enjoy about school?**

I enjoyed history and I enjoyed geography and I enjoyed English and I liked the arts and mathematics was a chore with me as it is with an awful lot of girls I guess. Something I've learnt in latter years but I enjoyed all of those types of courses and I

19:00 started to become a linguist then at school.

What ambitions did you have as a girl?

Going into the army.

When was the first time that that ambition took hold or where did it?

I think it was inborn into me because I saw it as an opportunity and equal opportunity to get somewhere on ability rather then gender. I didn't want to be a,

19:30 go to a sort of secretarial college or anything like that. That didn't interest me at all. I wanted travel, I wanted adventure and I wanted an opportunity to prove yourself.

In this respect you took after your mother in many ways.

More my mother than your father.

We you upset

20:00 **by the role that women were being given in the world at that time? Was there anything..?**

No because I never found in the British Army any problems whatsoever. You got everywhere on your ability and it wasn't like the Australian Army because these people in the Australian Army, the women have never, ever

20:30 been given the opportunities that we had in Britain to prove that we are as good as and sometimes better than therefore the opportunities here were very, very limited whereas there if you could prove yourself and we didn't have the sexual harassment thing, that became very evident here where in '85

21:00 they joined the forces. They thought it was something again and I said, "Pfh." We worked that way the whole way in my British Army life. Particularly in wartime, and in peacetime things sort of evened out a little and for instance, the women did their own training even though they could go to Sanders to do a higher education but

21:30 they had their own training place in Guildford – 99.9 per cent of jobs there were female. They had their own band, they had their everything and most of the roles the male played were very ordinary. General duty men. So they are a very self contained unit and always have been. But in the war

22:00 there were my lines, three lines of women, three lines of men and at the end of each of the lines was your own area and then we all used the same mess facilities and as I was saying at Wormwood Scrubs, we had our own showers and toilets there the same as the men but we interacted a great deal together and I

22:30 went out with so many soldiers that it just wasn't funny and we always seem to not have, there didn't seem to be time for a romantic encounter. We just loved each other's company because we had so much in common, going to the pub together. We would go to London together, we go to the clubs, we go the football, we got to wherever. And it was far

23:00 more a sort of controlled male–female relationship.

Later on in the army you had obviously as you were saying a great deal of opportunity to mix with men.

Yep.

I imagine that wouldn't have been the case at Frances Mary Buss.

Oh, no, no, no.

How did you respond to that cloistered ladylike education?

It wasn't cloistered. It wasn't cloistered.

What was it like?

It gave one the opportunity to be

23:30 with one's peers. Assess oneself with one's peers. Not be coloured by any gender. See what you would be up against in your life as a female and they all came from different walks of life as you can imagine. In fact I won a scholarship, a lot of them were there not scholarship-wise so I met an enormous group of different people

24:00 and I found always in some ways I had something common and I might say that they were very interested in my own particular case having had a different, a different lifestyle to theirs and they'd said, "What about so-and-so and so-and-so?" and so it goes on. So it was wonderful, wonderful.

Who did you talk to

24:30 **about your ambitions to join the army?**

Nobody.

When was the first time you discussed it with your father?

When I asked him if I could join the Territorial Army, when I was still at school. He said, "No," and I said, "Come on, tired of the Girl Guides and Brownies." "I'll think about it," and that's when he said, "You can join the regiment," and I knew from that day forth that was going to be my whole life.

What about the

25:00 **Girl Guides and Brownies, are they a stepping stone towards an army career? They were for you what about most of the girls?**

They were an opportunity for me to interact with my peers there again, get to know more of the English way of life, feel accepted as part of the society I know found myself and would be for some time. Just so I could assess my standards, where I might be falling down.

25:30 Where I had to settle down a bit to change my approach to people because it's very different having an approach to Chinese and Malaysians and Maltese and Gibraltarians and you've got to realise that you may not think that you are being brusque or abrupt but they think you are and you learn not to be critical. You

26:00 learn not to compare because comparisons erroneous. I looked at my life, that was that phase of my life that's made me what I am there and not its here and we go on there.

What did the Girl Guides do? What did you do in the main?

I got to be practically a Queen's Guide because I used to love all that and I continued, I loved the outdoor life. I loved camping

26:30 and I liked patrolling and that's why I adapted to the fact when I was an officer cadet, I used to, officer cadet instructor going out into the field, planning their various exercises with their map reading and everything else. I loved that.

That's what I'm asking.

I'm not, I was never, ever a closeted socialite.

That's why I'm asking about the Girl Guides, because

27:00 **today they are probably a little different to what they were then, how much was outdoor? Did you do camps? What did you do?**

Oh we learnt first aid, we learnt tracking, we used to kayak, we used to go bushwalking. We used to learn to cook, we used to learn to erect tents and bring down tents. We used to learn the historical background of the Scout and Guide movement and all that sort of thing. It was virtually

27:30 like being a recruit in the army only you learned about the customs of the service and shunning and unshunning and how to march but we had a wonderful time and we would go away to great big camps and meet people of every nationality under the sun at jamborees. Great fun.

What about the Territorial Army? What did you do, why were you keen to join them? What was the set-up there?

28:00 Well, because I couldn't get in anywhere else.

So the Territorial Army is a bit like the…

The reserves.

A bit like the reserves.

And that was my opportunity to learn if I would like the army and as I say I was still not 17 and I loved it and I went down to Buick in North Cornwall where I used my clerical ability

28:30 and I was an administrative person and it was camp situation there for two weeks and I absolutely adored it. When I came back to London I used to go the hall two/three times a week and learn all I could. I was a glutton. I was like a piece of blotting paper, and that, I'm quite sure that is the only reason I got

29:00 into the Regular Army and got away with it, because when I went to the Middle East of the 140 people I had in my command the nearest one in age to me was three years my senior, the nearest one.

You talked about getting in on your

29:30 **Maltese birth certificate, that story you told about before.**

Yes

Was that for the artillery regiment?

That was for the regular army, when they called up the territorial component because we didn't have to show any age service thing in the Territorial Army, but when they were starting to mobilise early in 1940 you had to go

30:00 and be medicaled, do an aptitude test, show proof of age, etcetera, etcetera.

Okay we'll come back to the regular army, I just want to talk about the territorial experience first?

It wasn't very long.

It was for about a year or six,

Just over a year.

During that time the politics in Europe were getting much more serious, I don't know how much…

Very serious.

30:30 **the people in England were feeling that. What was the atmosphere like?**

Well they thought the bloke who said, "Peace in our time," was a bloody idiot, they were feeling very insecure because we were not taking things seriously. "We're not taking things seriously, we're mobilising early enough, we didn't have enough support, or ammunition, or vehicles, or planes, or whatever," and of course it all proved true.

31:00 **In the territorials, how serious was that experience at that time?**

They all felt the same way because, they were all in the Territorial Army because they all had good jobs outside, but they were there for one reason, when the what name hits the fan we fight. And they were all dedicated, absolutely dedicated, same as our CMF [Citizens' Military Force] and reserve here are dedicated, and they loved the opportunity to

31:30 go overseas, to go on peacekeeping and things like that, I mean, that's what they're there for, that's what they trained for.

What was the hardest part of that training?

Hardest part of the training was the physical training. Running with heavy loads, having to be able to do so many yards in a certain amount of time. No trouble with me with the swimming. We had jump in fully

32:00 clothed and all that sort of thing but you really had to be fit, very, very fit and carrying your pack and when you're only a little person and there's no differentiation between the fact that you might be 60 kgs or 90, you carried the same amount of clobber [weight]. I never forget getting up the gangplank

32:30 with this damn great thing on my shoulder with the gas mask here and the pith helmet there and a seal helmet there and having to climb up the gangplank with it swaying from side to side and I thought, "Oh my God." That's why I have always been fit all my life because people look at me now and say, "You're fit," and I said, "I never stopped training in

33:00 my life, ever." Because I had a war wound and fractured my spine in the army and it's haunted me all

my life and it's the only one thing that I have a problem with. I've just actually a month ago got over another slight collapse that I had. That's why I have to do exercises every day.

What changed when war was declared?

The excitement. The absolute

33:30 excitement of it all. People say, "Weren't you scared?" and I say, "Listen, if you cast your mind, no juvenile is scared of anything. They think they're bombproof," and I did to until I got blown up with one but apart from that it's just an adventure. Excitement. I mean this happened in the you know, Crimea and the Boer War here. The cooees and those people. It was all a big joke to them. They didn't

34:00 think that they would be absolutely mown down in Gallipoli like stuffed animals. You don't think about it. If you did think about it and anybody whose got any doubts about it I've seen the results of those with the number of males, no, females I might say, and I'm not being unkind when I say this, suffered problems in the war because they couldn't

34:30 handle certain parts of it and it just affected them. That maybe something to do of course with the fact that males sort of the protector of their wives and their kids or whatever it may be, but I did an exercise on Vietnam and prior to that on Korea and there was not one nursing sister, because I trained the nursing sisters to be

35:00 soldiers when they came back from Korea, and not one of them had a mental problem at all, not one, but the number of males that did that had to go to counselling and were shell shocked and all that sort of thing. That's why when someone said to me, Munro I think it was, do I believe in women in combat? So I said,

35:30 "Well, that's a catch 22 question. Do I think women could handle combat? My answer is, certain women could like certain men can, but you don't get gung-ho in combat. You've got to have God knows how many support people for one soldier to fight, a fighting soldier," so I said, "You can't ever bundle it all in together. It depends what you call combat." But I've

36:00 seen women in combat and when I saw the Israeli women in my battalion fighting in the kibbutz for their lives and protecting their kibbutz like any man, yes, some women in combat will handle things. When I saw them fight in Israel and some of them will falter, the same as I've seen men fight and men falter.

36:30 **We'll come back to some of these issues again. Getting back to the outbreak of war what was that occasion like? What do you recall of the day war was declared?**

Hearing the declaration to say that we were at war. It was a very sobering thought, very sobering because I thought of my two brothers. I didn't think of me so much but I thought of my two

37:00 brothers and I thought of my cousin who was an air force Spitfire [fighter] pilot and also my mother's brothers, some of them who were in the navy and marines and I just thought about how well prepared are we and how well prepared we are not and I was supposed to be going to France originally

37:30 but when they gave me my inoculations they found I was allergic to inoculations, not to the serum but to the needles and I was down at Dover when our friend said, "We will fight on the beaches, we will fight here and we will fight there," and I thought, "Yeah, we will, too." When my commanding officer said to me, she said,

38:00 "I've got a pistol in my drawer. I'm going to shoot you first and then myself because I will never surrender." And that was the attitude and when you saw the bombing that we were involved in in the war and the guts and determination of the people and living like rats in the undergrounds, little signs in the shops the next morning. People with the primus saved saying,

38:30 "Open for business as usual, making brekkie [breakfast]," and the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who died and when you're bombed for 43 days and 43 nights, it gets a little tiring.

That didn't start right away, there's a period that's called 'the phoney war' when the war crept up. What was that period like?

I think it was apprehension because we were kept on being told

39:00 that we were safe, there was nothing to worry about. Because we had been lead along a string from 1938 onwards, you know that by this stupid man saying he's had words with Hitler and he's not going to attack us and he's not going to do this and he's not going to do that but that didn't happen and we know and then all of a sudden we are at war. So there is all this hurried organisation. My mother was an ARP [Air Raid Precautions] warden,

39:30 air warden and people were all being lectured on what to expect and how to deal with situations. So I think people were a bit busy and a bit dedicated and they said, "We've got a stiff upper lip," and, "This is never going to happen to us," and then of course, all of a sudden, bingo. We had time to be trained on the gun

40:00 and get organised as a group of well oiled troops formed into batteries and trained how to shoot, how to work the height finders and the predictors and the first up, I nearly. The plane was going along, the training plane and there's a long, long thing hanging off the end and a target at the end and you're supposed to go for that and he nearly got

40:30 his bum shot off so he said, "Bloody women." No, we had enough time to get trained and enough time to get mobilised and I felt excited about mobilisation and they moved us to Wormwood Scrubs. We were outfitted.

Well we'll talk about this mobilisation and training but we have to change the tape so we might leave that until the start of the next tape.

Tape 3

00:31 **Um, just before the last tape finished you mentioned your mother became an air warden. What did she tell you about what she had to do?**

Well, I knew what they had to do because I was in England at that time but all the women had to work in the munition factories or be ARP wardens and I said to the local council, "My mother would be a good ARP

01:00 warden because she's 5ft 10 and a half and she's as straight as a die," and I said, "My friends always used to call her the duchess," and I said, "Only one look from my mother and they will do as they're told." And they used to have to around and make sure the blackout blinds were down and that there were no lights being shown anywhere and also report and make sure people went down into the bomb shelters when the sirens sounded and all that sort of thing. But one thing made me laugh when I was overseas,

01:30 my mother wrote to me and said, "I am furious." She said, "We have just had a nasty buzz bomb [German V-1 surface-to-surface pilotless flying bomb] raid and all my beautiful fruit trees in the garden have gone. The only lucky piece was the piece of shrapnel came through your bedroom window and you weren't there. Ha ha ha."

02:00 So that was it and she was a very staunch lady. Very staunch. I think I get absolutely no fear from my mother. No fear. She's got no fear for anybody and I guess that was instilled in me because I haven't.

And what was your father doing at the outbreak of war, when war was declared?

He was working with the, he had left the army

02:30 and he was working with the WH Smith Clocks, not the newsagents, the clock company in London. That's why we were living in London then.

He didn't choose to stay on in the army even though.

He had spent his whole life in the army. My father, my two brothers and myself would have contributed 132 years to the regiment. To the Royal Artillery.

03:00 Our photos were splashed all over the English newspapers because my two brothers and I were all three warrant officers together which was absolutely unknown. A whole family of warrant officers.

Its quite unusual.

Yeah. Indeed.

Well going back to Wormwood Scrubs.

03:30 **Can you describe what that camp was like or?**

Well, you can imagine it was in the grounds of the prison. There were no prisoners there then of course. It was in the grounds of the prison. We had our heavy ack-ack guns set up there. The whole batteries of them and all our living lines were just very big tents with straw palliasses

04:00 to sleep on and your blankets that you had to fold over, etc. And we were on shifts, stand to or stand off as the case may be. It was pretty mundane sort of living but when we got a stand down we were permitted to leave the base and of course, that was a bit wild and woolly because we used to go shooting up to London and pray there would be an air raid

04:30 so we didn't have any curfew to get back to. So those were the little funny things. We'd say, so instead of having to abide by curfew, we couldn't because all the trains and everything stopped and we'd be sitting down half the night in an underground shelter. But it was very, very, very stressful in many ways because as a gunner you are right out in the open and we were

05:00 firing at enemy planes and you were vulnerable and you just prayed to God that you'd get off the thing.

There was a platform and once you'd done your measuring of height finding and predicting then you used to nick back and the boys would do the rest and work on the instructions that we had given them and then just hope and pray. But there was really

05:30 very little protection because sort of ditches were not very much protection from something that was coming screaming down from above and the amount of shrapnel and things like that. We were in tin hats but we were very fortunate. All I got was a piece of shrapnel ripped my leg apart there and I didn't realise there was

06:00 anything wrong until I went to undress and there was all this blood was in my shoe. But you know how thin your skin is, well it turned out like that, like the size of a half an orange. But I enjoyed it and as I said, the good thing was that we were able to have hot showers in a hard standing instead of going in and going to the toilet instead of going in a hole. We had those sort of

06:30 nice amenities I think. The ladies appreciated it very much and we could have good hot showers when we came off duty. But no, it was a very interesting period for me. After a while I think you got immune to it. A couple of times you would be quaking in your shoes and think, "Dear God I hope we can get him and he doesn't come down and hit us."

Well, to begin with I mean, you were quite clear that you

07:00 **wanted to go into the artillery, what was your training like? Can you tell us?**

Very interesting because my eldest brother, who was very anti-women being in the regiment, and then when he was one of the people selected to train them, that's when they made the batteries up of so many women and so many men and there are always so many more women to a man, to men in the battery. Because the men's job

07:30 was, apart from the fact that they used to have to do all the maintenance and everything on them, put the shell in and pulling it and then the women would work the necessary things to get the predictor area and get the height of the plane and impart it and set it and the blokes just fired. So it was, you know, just like monotonous in many way because, "No. 1, no. 2, no.

08:00 3, yes." This ready, that ready, something else ready and then everybody was ready that they were in place to fire and then they would say, "Fire!" And then we'd start all over again according to the information we were getting of where the enemy was coming from.

And what guns were you trained on?

Heavy ack-ack.

Can you describe?

Bloody great guns my dear.

08:30 The heaviest anti-aircraft guns in captivity. Very large. Because they had a light one that was quite mobile that they could move around but this heavy ack-ack one she was there to stay. It was just enormous and this great big length and this platforms, metal platforms where all these instruments were kept as part of it

09:00 and then the breach in the middle and bingo. So you did your bits and pieces and you hopped off and away they went, shot because the recall was enormous.

And how many did it need to operate one of these heavy ack-ack guns?

Well, the battery compromised approximately, if my memory serves me

09:30 about 50 women to about 30 men, the battery. Say about 80 a battery. It depended and this would be turned over a number of times because you weren't on duty 24 hours a day. So quite a lot of people involved and as I say, there were quite a number of other things that had to be done with the cleaning and the oiling and the

10:00 maintenance of ammunition and the bringing up of the ammunition. So pretty busy little lots. No time for idling. But it was very, very well organised and well drilled training because everybody depended upon everybody else. You couldn't depend upon anybody, you all had to depend upon each other.

And what does the predictor do? Can you tell me about that?

The predictor

10:30 predicts the trajectory they are coming in from. From where. And the height finder assesses the height of them. So one predicts where they are coming from and the other one gives them the height because obviously you have to turn the muzzle around to get the right trajectory. No use shooting there

11:00 and they are coming in here and its no good going 30,000 feet when they are 18,000 feet. So those are the two things that are absolutely essential and the rest is up to the boys to look lively and point the muzzle in the right direction and fire. Get them out just like that.

And how long

11:30 **did your, roughly did your training last before you were promoted or…?**

The training to be a gunner? That went on for about six weeks which was quite a long time.

And were you trained in any other weapons or…?

Rifles. Annie Oakley [legendary markswoman]. We had

12:00 rifles like anybody else. Did you ever go out to those horses, you know the beautiful horses out in the suburbs. You know those prancing horses. They have a very, very big games room in there and they had a series of birds and animals all around to be shot at.

12:30 Like a shooting gallery just for fun. So I said to one of the girls, "I think I might have a go at this." I wasn't with a military crowd. So I went pop, pop, pop, pop and a bloke came on and said, "Is your name Annie Oakley?" and I said, "No, but I'm her sister though." I was a good shot. Very good shot and continued doing a lot of shooting out here with friends of mine whose father had an abattoirs

13:00 up in the hills of Victoria and when we drove around Australia we both took rifles with us. We used to shoot the tin cans.

What was the most difficult thing do you think getting used to the artillery? I mean, you say you were a good shot but I'm wondering if there was anything you found difficult.

No, I didn't find any difficulty because I was fit. Firstly you had to be fit

13:30 and we were well trained to be fit. Secondly, women have a more delicate touch than men, that's why they are better in signals, on the machinery in signals and that's why they are better on such things as guns. I mean the instruments of guns because they are sensitive to and I think if you have that sort of hand-eye

14:00 coordination which I've got because of sport or because of hand-eye coordination I was good at sport, and I think those are the things you have. The same thing you have to go through a test because I knew a lass who was killing to be a driver but she would never have been a driver in a million years because she just didn't have the right coordinates. So they always give you a very strong test before you apply. They do for the men.

14:30 Whether you are an infanteer, engineer or ordnance or supply and transport you've got to have the aptitudes that are required for that job and I guess I was just lucky. I wanted to be a gunner and maybe that was it.

And what was your uniform like? What clothes were you wearing?

Exactly the same as the men. We wore boots, gaiters, khaki trousers,

15:00 battle jackets and in the winter we had sheepskin liberty bodices. Sheepskin with no arms and sheepskin mittens because touching metal, as they found in Korea. The number of our soldiers whose, their fingers became adhered to the metal of their rifles

15:30 and they'd take the fingers away and there would lumps of human flesh on them so we had to wear these mittens which were only three-quarter fingers and then you could close them afterwards, and tin hats. That's when we were on duty. When we went out we went out like ladies, in skirts.

16:00 but we had exactly the same as the men on the (UNCLEAR).

And I guess that's an interesting point, like I'm wondering if you felt a great need to or if some of the other women felt a need to maintain some kind of femininity whilst…

They enjoyed the change. I mean it would have been quite ludicrous to be wearing skirts, collars and ties and dear little hats and things like that but when we went out

16:30 on the town we used to like looking like ATS and the men went out looking like soldiers with, you know, slightly more upmarket uniforms. I think you have to have a balanced life or else the trouble at the moment with the organisation here that happened, started in '85, they have become too masculine.

17:00 I don't know whether you, you wouldn't see revelry I think, but there's a photograph of a Lieutenant Colonel Galash, a lass that I trained assisting the matron, former matron at the war memorial that they were putting up in Hyde Park. She belongs to the Special Guard, well she's in a slouch hat.

17:30 Exactly the same as a male uniform and I think it takes something away because we had both. I mean, they have to have male uniforms at times because a lot of them were on active duty and they wear the same casual things and all the camouflages and everything else but I think they should also be more in skirts.

18:00 **And what colour was your uniform the British?**

Khaki. Khaki.

And you had also a khaki skirt as well as?

Yes. Khaki skirt and jacket with a belt and khaki shirt and tie or light thing and a tie and our own hats. But they now wear male hats but we always maintained

18:30 our own head gear except when we were wearing tin helmets which was a large part of the time. But otherwise when we went out we just looked like female soldiers but today I think they have gone a bit over the odds and they now practically live in male uniform and trousers. I think maybe it's making

19:00 a little too masculine.

Well how much pressure do you think you felt to, I guess be competitive and...

I'm competitive in everything I do. I can't help it. It's inherent in me. I was forced to learn to play bowls because I had to go to the, we took over a bowling club and I had to go over there and resurrect all their constitution,

19:30 by-laws, run their annual general meetings and sit in all their meetings and I used to sit there and watch them play bowls and I thought, "Blow this," so I started to play bowls. So I said to the coach, "How long will it take me?" and he said, "I wouldn't hazard a guess with you," and I said, "What do you mean am I that bad?" and he said, "No, you're too good." Five lessons and that's it. I'm now a pennant player and I haven't been playing five years yet. Every game I want to win. I can't help being competitive.

20:00 I learnt that in the Olympic Squad when I was a breast-stroker, also when I ran for Middlesex County at the White City and all of the sports I was involved with. Came to Australia and mixed up with sport. District, college, university, Australia.

And how do you think being competitive helped when you were in the army? Particularly

20:30 **in the early days I guess.**

It made be set standards that I expected other people to follow and normally they would. A lot of people have a joke today and say, "I bet you were a terror in the army," and I say, "I guess I was, but firm, but fair," and I'd say, "See that," and there would be a bevy of people sitting there. And I'd say, "I trained most of those in 1950–51 and none of

21:00 them attained officer cadet standard or above. They are other ranks that I used to ball out day in and day out and they are still with me. Still with my association. I think if you are competitive and you are firm but fair you set the standard. Defeat, I don't believe in that. I lay down very simple rules as I did for the teams,"

21:30 you know 15 times overseas and you've got people under 16 or under 19 or all the old heads. You say to them, "These are my rules. Very simple." Because I never make rules that I can't police and if you think I'm spending the rest of my life policing you, self discipline. If you make one mistake we will discuss it but make the same mistake twice and you're gone. You will be on the next plane home.

22:00 **Well when you finished your training which unit were you posted to and perhaps can you tell us about your first operation.**

I can't remember the name of the battery that I was attached to at that stage. It's one of the things that's gone out of my head because that was sort of the early part and I don't think it sunk in so much. I didn't have that sort of unit

22:30 identification but it was only when I went to signals because it became very pertinent because what I did and where I went and the units that I served with in the Middle East all were indelible in my mind but I'm not quite sure which heavy ack-ack battery it was but it was in the London District anyway. London District heavy ack-ack.

Were you were talking earlier

23:00 **about going out on manoeuvres and operations under fire did you have to go out in London?**

No, not under fire. When I was talking about manoeuvres wasn't that when we were talking about teaching Officer cadets? That was at school. That was teaching officer cadets.

So when you are with the heavy ack-ack were there any

23:30 **operations that you.**

Our operation was right there. We were in a complete ring, ringing around London and our job was to stop them bombing the city and that was our role. Very simple. Do whatever you have to do and that's it. So that's what I did. As I say for a limited amount of time before they whirled me away into signals.

I'm just wondering if you can tell us briefly about

24:00 **those days in ack-ack operation. What was a typical day or?**

A typical day was frustration, boring because there was a big ring of heavy ack-ack around, ack-ack purse around London and it was only eventually

24:30 when they started to bomb us. I mean we were there in a protective role originally and then when they started to come over and bomb us, I said 43 days and 43 nights we were bombed in London, they did Coventry over and when they did all the other places over, that was realism. And that's where we tried to do our job and tried to shoot them down.

And where were you living?

25:00 **Were you living in barracks at this stage?**

No, I was living in Wormwood Scrubs in the lines. On a little palliasse bed.

And how did the other women in your battery cope? Were they up to?

Great crowd. Great crowd. Loved them to death.

Did you form any friendships at this point?

Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean

25:30 we, as I say, depended upon each other and they were my whole life because I didn't know any other life. I mean I had no connection with civilian people because my whole life was getting up in the morning going to shower, going to breakfast, standing to, standing down, having a day off or whatever the case may be. They were my friends and my family. Same as the blokes.

26:00 As I say we used to go out together. The batteries were standing down, "Were are we going? Out to Leicester Square or how about we do this or do that?" And groups of us would go out and spend the day. We'd go dancing, go to the pub, go have a meal together. Go to the canteen and sing our heads off. It was just, they were our family. You didn't even look anywhere else.

26:30 You didn't even mix with other corps. They were your friends, family and Alma Maters. The lot and we just looked out for each other and if we got in a blew in the city we would stick together. Take on whoever was causing the problem.

What sort of blues [arguments] would you get into?

There was an awful lot of in-service friendly fighting when they'd had

27:00 a few drinks. I mean, the navy would knock the lights out of the air force or the air force would try and knock the lights out of the army and you would all be in a pub and everybody's having a good time and somebody spills a glass over you and that would start something. It would be on for young and old. But it was all friendly. It all finished up with them a bit sick and sorry but we were all good friends because

27:30 the camaraderie between the services is very, very strong. Very strong. It goes on for ever. I say in our occasional raising of glasses to the corps, "We belong to the most elite club in the world and all the money in the world won't get you membership like City Tatts [Tattersall], the RAC [Royal Automobile Club of Australia] club or whatever. You can't join unless you've been there and done that and then you are a member of a very elite club

28:00 and you should be proud of it." It's true. I mean the number of friends that I have still. The lass that I went down to see in Melbourne she was conscripted into the British Army at 17. She was a wee Scot and I met her when I had come back from overseas and it was the middle of winter and I was waiting to

28:30 go off on leave and we were put into a large depot in Greenford, a big ordnance depot and we had very little fuel. We had one little donkey fire in the middle of our hut and I said to the kids, "I'm going to the canteen to get a cup of coffee would anyone like one?" "Oh yeah." "I'll see if I can see any wood on the way back." Anyway I've got two cups of coffee and I'm coming along and I suddenly skated on the ice and down I went.

29:00 Dislocated this thumb. People say you've got whatever you've got and I say, "No, its dislocation," and I went and knocked on the door of the RAP and a girl came, a little Scottish girl and she says, "Yesm ma'am," and I said, "Where's the RAP sergeant?" and she said, "In the bath, ma'am." And I said, "Well, get her out," and she said, "What's wrong?" and I said, "I've dislocated my thumb." And they had a beautiful fire burning and everything and out came Anne Douglas

29:30 as she was then. And I said, "Sergeant Douglas, I've got a dislocated thumb," and, "Do something about it now." I know how to do it with my own troops. I put my finger through there and you put you're finger through there and pull it back. So I said, "Don't pussyfoot around, pull it hard," but she didn't pull it hard enough because it still sticks out. "Lovely and warm in here." And she said, "Like a cup of coffee, ma'am?" And I said, "No,

30:00 go to the medicine cupboard. I'll have a brandy." And we started to be firm friends and eventually we were stationed together and eventually she came to Australia with me. She married, we were at Mildura

and she, at the WRAAC [Women's Royal Australian Army Corps] school and she married the pilot. Because Mildura Aerodrome and our area had the same fence and John was the

30:30 test pilot there, and she married him and we're still friends and that's 60-odd, 70-odd years ago. And those are the friendships that you make and I've got at least three others that I see regularly that I've known for 40–50 years. You just have something in common. Make its very different from civilians who don't get that sort of

31:00 bonding that we get.

Well can you tell me how your transfer from ack-ack into signals came about.

Yeah, I was called up one day and they said, "You've had some clerical training," and I said, "Yes I have," and they said, "Can you type?" and I said, "Yes, 70 words per minute," and they said, "Good. We are looking for people to go in as communicators

31:30 in the Royal Corps of Signals." "I don't feel like leaving the regiment." And they said, "Well, you have been gung-ho in the regiment you can start being gung-ho in the signals." So I joined the signals and made a very quick elevation in the communications side with wireless, with teleprinter, with Morse code and all that sort of thing and eventually I was made a sergeant and then a warrant officer. And I was given

32:00 an area to cover this was within 18 months.

And why didn't you want to leave the regiment?

Because it was just my family unit. I loved it. Mind you I was very glad eventually that I did leave after what happened and then I was duly selected. I had a BSA 250. I used to drive all around East Anglia. That was my area and

32:30 I went back to my headquarters one day in Luton, a well known girls school and my boss said, "You're wanted in town tomorrow, in London, 10:00 hours for an interview," and I said, "What for?" She said, "I don't know." So I went and that's when I was selected or I was faced with this massive group of people who were analysing me and psychologists and talking about your

33:00 past history and this and this and that and they said, "We'll let you know later," and I got a phone call when I was playing netball and my boss said, "You've been selected." I said, "What for?" and she said, "Go back to London and find out." And that's when they made me an intercept wireless operator. There was a lot of us that were selected. We learned to be an intercept wireless operator and we formed this company and we were part of reinforcement

33:30 for the forthcoming defence of Egypt and because the people who had gone through the Suez had been torpedoed. So once we graduated we were advised by MI5 [British security and counterintelligence service] as part of a very secure intelligence unit what we could and couldn't do. What we couldn't do and what we could do

34:00 and we were generally briefed and then we went into a holding company in Chelsea in this beautiful block of apartments, well used to be but we took them over. They were a beautiful block of apartments but very central and there we stayed and two hourly going out and coming back. Going out and coming back and I was out one day and my mother, I was guard of honour at a film

34:30 made about women's services and I was in one part of it with my motorbike so I was in the guard of honour and I brought my mother up to see the film and then I said, "I'll take you to our favourite Chinese restaurant, the Hong Kong in Soho." She said "Right." So I went, I said, "I've got to go in and sign in first and then I'll come straight out." But as I went in they closed the doors. Big oaken

35:00 doors. Bingo and I said, "What's going on?" and they said, "D Day." I don't mean D Day France they said, "Your D Day. You're moving out tonight." I said, "God." I raced up the stairs, I was on the third floor and I put my head out the window and my mother was standing across the road and as I said, she was a straight as a dice. You can take one look there and she is as straight as a dice. And I went

35:30 (Motion of blowing kiss) and she went (Motion of waving goodbye and winking). And that was it. And that night we were all kitted and talked to and talked at and assembled. We were taken off in these 3 ton lorries to a railway station and we knew then where we were going because we were given pith helmets. You don't wear pith helmets in the snow in Europe and

36:00 we were put into trains that were blackened windows and we pulled up somewhere along the way and we were allowed out and there was the good old Salvos [Salvation Army representatives] there with a hot cup of coffee and tea and sandwiches and we were thrown in the train again and away we went and when we disembarked this time I could smell the sea so I knew we were at a port,

36:30 I could smell it clearly. Because the train pulls up right alongside the Liva Building in Liverpool and that's where we disembarked.

Well, we'll come back to talking a bit about that but before we go on perhaps we could just back track a little bit and just if you could tell me a bit about, you mentioned that you were trained with MI5.

No, no we were lectured.

37:00 We were trained by a civil company, sort of like PMG [Post Master General's Department], post office or whatever in the art of familiarity with Morse code. The ability to send it and the ability to receive it and we are sitting and we have the earphones on and you are given a little area to cover and you get dah, dit, dah, dah and all you do is write down the code that you and then people come around. You don't see anybody

37:30 and they come around and they tap you on the shoulder and they take your, what you've put in your little bin and away they go and there you sit. And it's funny I was reading in the Revelry about a girl who was in the Australian Intercept Wireless Operator in Australia but she didn't know she was part of a big intelligence group and she didn't find out until after the war that she was in intelligence because she didn't know anybody,

38:00 she didn't meet anybody. She was like a little lone waif so I know exactly what she means but I knew exactly who I was and what I was doing.

How many other women were in signals with you?

In the whole corps you mean?

Or in your unit?

The unit that I was assigned to No 480SY Wing, Y being the unknown factor of intelligence, 140.

38:30 so we…

Okay, we might stop there because our tape is about to run out so

Tape 4

00:35 **Pat can you just tell us a bit, before we move onto the Middle East and hear the Middle East story, can you just tell me about the teleprinter, the kind of equipment you were using to do your signal work.**

Well, we had various types of communication. We have teleprinter, we have Morse code

01:00 and we use flags. Not so much in the army but more the navy but we communicate with each other electronically. You know what a teleprinter is don't you?

Perhaps you could just describe it for the record.

Well because you can type you can use a teleprinter and you have, of course, this is phone, teleprinter, phone, wireless. And in a teleprinter room you have a whole series

01:30 of teleprinter modules and you are connected all of the place. My cousin used to contact me from Canada at one stage and then I could, he would contact me from where he was stationed in southern England and I was in Luton and we could talk to each other. Particularly early in the morning and late at night when there was no trouble with the traffic. It was just like sending an e-mail

02:00 electronically and that's the way we communicated with each other. And with Morse code mostly it is used in the field same as field telephones where you have backpacks and things like that but also we have switchboards where we also have, they are controlled so we don't get, I mean they are scrambled so you can talk clearly without

02:30 being found out. And you learn all about those things to become a master of signals and then you go around to your various little outposts which are all over, my were all over East Anglia and checking to see if there were any problems from the headquarters point of view. If anyone wasn't coping, if anyone was good and you could elevate them and promote them. So I worked very, very closely with the whole thing in signal communication and

03:00 learning all of the technicalities of the corps. How to lay cables in the field, how to use field phones, how to use the write terminology, how to learn how to send messages to the approved staff duties in the field. Everything was military from woe to go so you used nothing else but army terminology

03:30 and what they say is, "only ever work on a need to know basis," so when people said to me, "What used you to do?" and I would say, in my limited abilities to say what I used to do, "I would sit in front of a wireless, monitor and I would be given a dial like any wireless and I

04:00 would do so much degrees here and so much degrees there. And there would be eight of us all sitting at our particular modulars and by the side of us we had a little in and out tray and you'd just sit with the earphones on and you'd pick enemy communications on your particular wavelength." As I was saying the interesting thing was you could tell the difference between the Germans and the Italians.

04:30 The Italians were very light, light touchers. The Germans were. I mean you don't know what they hell they were saying because it was in dah, di, dah, dah, dah and obviously it's in German and Italian but it doesn't make any difference. It goes out and then it is put in a process for decoding and enciphering and that's what we did all day and every day.

05:00 So people said, "How far were you from so and so?" and I was trying to hazard a guess. I don't honestly know because you never really knew. We only knew what we picked up because we had our own group of people with us. We were an all British unit. The girls were the intercept wireless operators, the blokes were the encoders and decoders and they were the intelligence people who would read the various communications

05:30 and let everybody know what was going on and then they were able to transmit what they learned that we'd picked up to our armies. So I mean that's the situation. I mean the various commanders of the various three particular divisions, corps in El Alamein when you know, it all started and when they'd been pushed back

06:00 and pushed back and of course, there was a great deal of worry because the first battle of El Alamein was a flop and they were frightened they were going to overrun Egypt and get into Cairo. In fact so did the Egyptians and in fact a lot of them were very hopeful they would because Croppiers Restaurant in Cairo were making chocolates with swastikas on them and they had Germans flags ready to welcome the marauding German conquerors.

06:30 Well it didn't happen. Because after the what the allies had achieved in Tobruk which was absolutely exceptional to have to set up again and be pushed back until the final thing with Wavel and people who said this is what we will do and Orkinlech and also the other commanders from New Zealand and Australia and

07:00 South Africa and there were Polish and Free French and all sorts of people. So you really wouldn't know who was who and what was that except that we were the only intelligence unit transmitting to all and sundry. Everything was under British control. Lastly the big one, with dear old Bernard Rommel,

07:30 not Rommel, Bernard Montgomery against Rommel. Rommel was a magnificent general and it was a terribly sad thing when what happened to him. But anyway that was the basis of the thing, but after learning what we had to do the same as when I went to China, they made me laugh because they said, "Have you ever been interviewed by Foreign Affairs before?" and I said "Yes." Because we were interviewed because we were going as

08:00 guests of the Chinese government. First ever. The only three Australian sports selected. Softball, swimming and table tennis and we were all guests of the Chinese government for six weeks when they first opened up. And our team were all interviewed by the Department of Foreign Affairs. "You mustn't touch people and you look at them, you look at them in the eye,

08:30 you must never humiliate them publicly and this and this and this and this and you do or you don't." Dos and don'ts. Half of them didn't work out anyway but that was the sort of thing that MI5 alerted us that we would only be told what we needed to know because the more you disseminate knowledge to people the more everyone else's life is in danger. But our job were to part of an intelligence unit

09:00 to support El Alamein. And the dos and don'ts and what have you and the fact is you can not disclose any of this before 30 years.

And given that you were working with such high intelligence I wonder if there were any code names that you had or any kind of ?

I don't know what our code name was. We obviously had one.

09:30 I mean all I know is that we were in No 480SY Wing part of whatever terminology, this big intelligence unit because we were quite a large organisation and it was all the little pieces, the integral pieces that made the intelligence group.

And how did you react, I mean you progressed quite quickly through the ranks, how did you react to that fairly fast progression?

10:00 I liked it because I felt that I was so well trained that it was my natural advancing passage. I was a good leader, not a follower. Strict but fair, resonate and resolute in what I was doing and I couldn't be bought

10:30 one way or the other. Not weak in any shape or. That's what they were ascertaining at this great big interview we had any sign of weakness or any sign of perversity in character or any worry about fear or all this sort of thing and I think when you get the job and you get sent there you know you are the one and I knew I was the one.

It is quite common,

11:00 **particularly in World War 11 for people to be elevated quite quickly and often you might be dealing with people who are older than you.**

I got a commendation in the field from General Wavell in 1946 for my dedication and bravery to service

over the period of time I'd been there.

I'm wondering if you had any difficulties commanding women who might have been older than you.

No

11:30 because I felt, I mean they would never know, nobody ever knew that they were older than me because that would have been the end of it. I would have been shipped home because you had to be 21 before you went overseas. Same in with Australian nurses you must be 21. So anyway I felt that they had all led sheltered lives and the thing is they respect

12:00 rank. Now the fact that when they met me I was the sergeant major. I had a captain whose name was also Pat, Captain Patricia Hamilton Jordon. You can imagine what she was like. A real little society lady but great bird and I said, "Well, you're Patricia, ma'am, I'm Pat." "Fair comment," she said. That's it. But they respected

12:30 me because they knew that they could depended upon me and that they had faith and the reason they had faith is because of what happened on the voyage out where I proved to them that they could depend upon me for life.

And what happened on that voyage?

Well, when we got ourselves organised we found that we had detachments of King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, we had

13:00 detachments of Armoured Corps and we had some naughty sailors who were being shipped out to South Africa for penal service. Navy guys who had broken all the rules and we were made, we were given jobs. After we got ourselves in our cabins and got

13:30 organised we got the girls on parade they were addressed by the captain and the first officer who an interpreter to understand him. He was Scottish with a big read beard. He says, "You are guests of the Highland Brigade. We are normally a freighter between Buenos Aires and London. However, you are still guests but nothing to do with trade. You will be employed.

14:00 Regrettably we can't treat you as passengers. You will have to be used as spotters and I will get you ser [sergeant] major to draw up a roster and forward the ships aft, three, six every four hour shift during the day." And we were trained how to give bearings,

14:30 how to keep our eyes open, we'd use our thingoes [equipment] and report up to the bridge if we say anything strange and that was our life on board ship. However, it was all quite social as well and we had a lot of fun and we were very well fed and very well looked after. But we had a big party one day and the OC troops was invited and on his way up the stairs he

15:00 dropped dead. That was a nice start. The first funeral I had been to at school. They closed in the thingy, he'd had a heart attack and popped him over the side, well, they popped him over the side and we all had to stand there and sing and carry on and the next thing that happened was these naughty sailors that were on board, they took them up for exercise every now and again

15:30 and they mutinied and they were running all over the ship and it was my job to get all these 140 females into their cabins. "Get in and I said stay there," and they brought down the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and positioned them all down our corridors and as a sailor popped his head around the corner a soldier hit on the head with the butt of his rifle. They had them fixed in no time and back and they were in their

16:00 cells for the rest of the voyage. The next thing that happened was we were approaching Freetown and the convoy was torpedoed, part of and parts of the ships were floating. We weren't. We weren't torpedoed but those people who weren't, who were able to manoeuvre had to go into Freetown Port and for three days we were there with

16:30 no air conditioning, only tiny little lights before we could get out and make sure we were not subject to another attack. So when we got down to Durban I said to the girls, "Well we'll be right. We'll have a nice little break when we get to South Africa. Go ashore and get over all this. Don't let all these things worry you. This is just getting you ready for what you expect. How tough you are.

17:00 So I don't want any semantics, no mucking about and I don't want any female outbursts. You're soldiers." So we get down to Durban and we get everybody lined up and everybody anticipated a very nice little few short days shore leave and we are told that there will be no shore leave for the women's services. So up I marched to speak to the first

17:30 officer and I said, "Excuse me. We have had one mutiny on this ship. You haven't seen a mutiny until we get loose and all you need to do is lay down your rules. We are an intelligence company not intelligent, intelligence. We have been warned, we probably know more about Durban and South Africa and its problems than you could ever think about now please do something about

18:00 changing that order or I will not be responsible." So the CO was standing there with her eyes whopping

and I said, “Sorry about that, ma’am, but I’m closer to the girls than you are. We would have had a mutiny and they wouldn’t have known what hit them. 140 females, angry female. The female of the species is more angry than the male.” So they let us ashore. I mean we were

18:30 really, really harangued about all the spies there were, the number of ships that had been torpedoed off South Africa so we would have to watch ourselves but we had a wonderful few days’ leave and when we got to Ghazi we were quite happy. And we disembarked in Ghazi and went into the compound called Katie’s Birdcage which is applicable. I will tell you later. Moved the girls

19:00 in and we had Basuto troops looking after us and I said, “We’ll be shacking down here for a few days to get acclimatised and also to meet some of the people we will be moving up the desert with and I’m quite sure the rest and relaxation and somewhere to move your legs is going to be very gratifying.”

Well that’s fairly I guess in a way very gutsy of you to stand your ground and request that the order be changed.

I’m gutsy.

19:30 That’s why people respect me.

I’m just wondering was there any flak at all from doing that?

No. They reconsidered that it was a knee-jerk reaction to protect the ladies and I said, “The reason I challenged you, I have told these girls they are not ladies, they are soldiers, and there is a big difference and you would undermine what they

20:00 are likely to encounter for the rest of this war.” And I said, “We can’t have ladies. We only had female soldiers who were going to fight if needs be and they have to be part of an organisation that can trust them.”

And do you think the powers that be [superiors] understood that at the time or when you..?

No, it was only that, I think my CO was weak because she was a darling thing

20:30 because I said to her afterwards, “I’m sorry I didn’t mention this before because I didn’t want you to spill the beans but I was going to challenge you just the same,” and she said, “Pat, they were only trying to be protective of the females.” And I said, “I understand that, ma’am, but we are not ladies, we are female soldiers and we’ve got to accept the same responsibility as the male soldiers. So let’s get that straight from now

21:00 otherwise we will never, ever last in the desert.” And we discussed that many times afterwards and I used to meet her in London occasionally and she’d say, “You should have trained me Pat,” and I’d say, “Well I don’t know how you escaped. You went to Sandhurst I suppose. Very weak it was.” And she laughed. That immediately made them, if I said, “Jump,” they would say, “How high?” and you only

21:30 have to establish yourself as the leader, as the boss. Don’t listen to them because they are all mumbling and grumbling and I said, “Excuse me, just settle down. I will fix this for you,” and I did. And from then on whatever I said was fact not fiction. And they didn’t know many times how close we were to difficulties because we didn’t want them to know. It was a need to know basis.

22:00 **Well given that you stood your ground and won that shore leave I wondering if you can remember what you did on that shore leave?**

Certainly do. We dashed down to the beach and had a swim. Went and had a beautiful meal. Spoke to people in their bathers and would say what a lovely day it was and what a lovely city Durban was and we just relaxed. Completely,

22:30 completely getting away from all the problems. We used to go back on board every night but we just had all this wonderful time and feeding our face on fruit and as I say, good restaurants, plenty of swimming, plenty of sunbaking and relaxing and getting a little acclimatised to what we knew was coming up. But that’s my way of establishing things. We have a fight, my ex-servicewomen

23:00 have been having a fight with the club about the denigration of ex-service people and I’m the one that stands up at the meetings and tells them exactly what I think. They don’t. I do and they respect me for that. So there we are. With responsibility comes rights but with rights come responsibility.

And sometimes I guess when you do

23:30 **stand your ground like that it can be a bit lonely.**

Yes. It’s lonely at the top but if you are such a complete disciplinarian and completely confident you can relax with those people and I did that in the Australian Army as I did in the British Army I’d relax with them. I

24:00 go and have a swim, go and have a drink, go and have a meal. They would never call me, “Pat,” but I would call them Mary, or whoever, “How’s the boyfriend? How’s the news? Got any news?” There is a line you don’t cross but there is, if they have faith in you and you exude the fact that you faith in them you can establish a friendship

24:30 but not overstep the mark of familiarity. Familiarity breeds contempt but friendship breeds support.

Well and then you landed in Ghazi.

We landed in Ghazi at the ridge and we were put into this compound, great big high ceilings, high barbed-

25:00 wire fence and I said, “What is this joint?” and they said, “Katie’s Birdcage,” and I said, “That’s a funny name,” “Oh, they said it was named after some bird that was here.” I found out years later my director, my first director, Kathleen Annie Louise Best was the matron who evacuated the people from Greece and Crete and they built that compound for her and they called it Katie’s Birdcage.

25:30 So she said, “Lieutenant Rawlings, where did you disembark?” and I said “Ghazi, ma’am.” She said, “They put you into a compound,” and I said, “Yeah, Katie’s Birdcage.” She started to laugh and I went red and I suddenly realised and I said, “Sorry, ma’am,” and she said, “No, that’s a terrible trick to play on you because I knew that’s where you’d been and I knew you’d say ‘Katie’s Birdcage’ but you’d never

26:00 reconcile it with me,” because everybody called her Katie even though her name was Kathleen. And we were there for some time so we could get our sea legs and get all the documentation and get the various other people who were there, Australian, New Zealanders, South Africans. All of the relieving, well not relieving I mean, extra troops,

26:30 reinforcements is the word I wanted, reinforcements before we all moved up to Alexandria where we were all trained into our own. We had to start our own virtual desert training there and all the others, the coolies [labourers] were there to be part of the 51st Highland Division, the armoured blokes were there to reinforce the 50th London

27:00 Division and the Australians and New Zealanders were forming their new divisions after, together with the guys that had come out of Tobruk so everybody was getting in battle order, for want of a better word. So we trained and trained and trained and I thoroughly enjoyed Alexandria and I used to go swimming in the

27:30 Ghazi Pool and had a lovely time and the girls had a certain amount of freedom and we lived in quite nice barracks, quarters and that’s where we got our desert training.

And how, I mean the desert conditions would have been quite different to what you were used to in England.

You can say that again. Hot in the day and freezing at night. It’s

28:00 quite an interesting. Mind you Alexandria is the biggest town. It’s a lovely town. Very modern. Nice swimming and nice food and nice quarters and there’s obviously a very large military camp there the same as when we went to Cairo we had a very nice large barracks to be in and that sort of thing. Then we got the word to

28:30 move and we moved up the desert. Where exactly we landed I don’t know. I only remember one place we went I could name was Sidibish but we popped somewhere up behind the lines. Of course, there at El Alamein they had got the lines all set up and Monty [Montgomery] was just waiting for the reinforcements he wanted before he’d attack. We kept on thinking when he's, nobody knew when he was going to attack and that’s because

29:00 he didn’t have the number of people that he wanted and before he moved he’d worked out what he was going to do and he came and met us and welcomed us. He was a real showman. Welcomed us as part of his army that was going to get the freedom of Egypt and we would get Mr Rommel out of

29:30 Tripoli very smartly and just retribution for Tobruk and the battle they didn’t win of El Alamein. So he said, “Some people think I’m tough and stubborn because they thing we don’t want to sit here, we want to attack. When I get what I want, when I’ve 2,000 guns and I’ve got 1,000, 500 tanks or

30:00 whatever I want, I’ll have. Now you’re job is to make sure that you’re information, intelligence that you’re part that you play in it is above reproach and that’s all I ask of you and welcome to the 8th Army.” That was it. Well that was a nasty shock after very nice quarters in Alexandria to be setting up in a desert surrounding with a

30:30 litre of water a day to live on, working in sand hootches [shelters] and every time a bloody gun fired fall down on your head and very, very, very poor accommodation and food and quite a lot of people were fighting sickness because we didn’t get any fresh fruit and as I say, a litre of water and we were.

How did

31:00 **you personally react to the desert?**

I didn’t mind it. I didn’t mind it really. Again it was, I get fascinated in the strangest of things and I was fascinated in the desert and the people of the desert and the various types of the Egyptians and the Bedouins in the cities and then to see them in the desert. I mean, it was just so different

31:30 and whereas I knew that somewhere up there there was all this massing of things that were happening and Montgomery would advise down to the lowest soldier. He would stand in the back of his jeep and drive around and say, “Right-o guys, we are nearly up to strength. We’ve nearly got this, we’ve nearly got that and at this time on this day we will start,” and he was

32:00 true to his word and it’s a wonder. Funny, we always have a laugh about women being stronger than men. My two brothers and my father being the artillery suffered deafness. Well, I’ve never heard so many guns fire in whole of my life. When you get 2,000 25-pounders all popping off the same time, a barrage for 20 minutes then you know

32:30 there’s a lot of noise. But our life just went on very slowly every day and we all felt we were doing all right. My one fear was how our stamina was going to last being sitting there with earphones on for 4 hours at a time not speaking, which is very hard for women. Putting your hand up

33:00 if you wanted to go to the toilet. People would come along and tap you on the shoulder to make sure the right people were picking up your information and then you’d be relieved and you’d go outside and the next shift would come on and this just went on, on and on, on and on, on and on. But we knew that the information we were being given, a lot of it we didn’t know until later,

33:30 after we had been left the desert fighting and we went down to Cairo to form 516 Signals, be part of 516 Signals unit which again was back to teleprinters and, none of the wireless but teleprinters and sending out Morse code. Sending not receiving it necessarily, well you do both but I mean we used to do all these things and we used to

34:00 put the tapes through the teleprinters and slow the tapes down and produce the stuff and give it to the cipher people. But Churchill had been out there. He went out to see what was going on so not until we got down to Cairo we knew and had been told that our intelligence had been absolutely brilliant and we had contributed to the success of

34:30 the war.

That must have been a good feeling.

Wonderful. Absolutely wonderful and then I got myself a very interesting job when we each of us was put in charge of a Palestinian Battalion of women. Now these women were the Jewish people that Hitler kicked out in ‘32. You know moved the families out. We had Russians, we had Germans, we had Italians, we had

35:00 Bulgarians, Romanians all part of our battalions and they were our workforce because we took over a house. There is a funny little, your friend wants a funny little anecdote he can have one, we took over a house in Cairo. We worked in barracks and there was a river and a bridge and on the other side of the bridge this magnificent home.

35:30 Absolutely brilliant home. All very, very high fenced and you walked in with this big staircase and you go up on the floor there were rooms all leading off the verandas. Magnificent gardens with Adonis and various other statues all out in the garden and it was my job to commandeer it, take it over so we had a place to live rather than just living in the barrack blocks. And they wanted us to have a separate organisation

36:00 there so I was taking inventory and walking around with my clipboard and doing all this with a couple of other girls and somebody came and said, “Excuse me, ma’am, there’s a Madam Bardier wishing to see you.” And I said, “Who?” and she said, “Madame Bardier.” And I said, “Bring her in.” She was a little lady, obviously a lot of French in her as well as Egyptian. And she said, “Does anybody speak French here?” and I said

36:30 “I do.” We conversed in French. So I said, “May I ask your enquiry?” and she said, “I’m the owner of this house and it has been commandeered by your government and I just want to make sure that its going to be well looked after,” and I said, “Well, I can assure you because only ladies are going to live in here.” “Oh well, that’s marvellous.” I said, “How about showing me around

37:00 and I can show you what we’re doing with what is here and all these girls work in Kasre-Nil Barracks,” and she said, “That’s very nice, da-di-da and welcome to Egypt and what is your name?” and I told her and she said, “Well, you might like to come and visit me in my business,” and I said, “Oh yes, where’s that?” and she said, “I have a very, very nice casino

37:30 in Cairo on the city and you would be very welcome to come and have a meal,” and I said, “Thank you.” After she’d gone I thought, “That’s funny,” so I made a couple of enquiries. So I spoke to somebody there who was Egyptian and I said, “Who’s that lady?” and she said, “The biggest brothel owner in Egypt,” and her place was not only a beautiful

38:00 restaurant and bars but a brothel. But she adopted me. She even produced my wedding gown for myself and my bridesmaid for me to get married. She used to send a chauffeur with a great big car and we used to sit in there and have a great big picnic. Champagne and lunch and everything and she really enjoyed looking after us. So that’s one of my little anecdotes. I always laugh when they said,

38:30 “Who gave you away?” and I say, “Not Madame Bardier, my commanding officer gave me away,” but how she looked after me. Very, very famous and very, very wealthy and she took me to a party at the pyramids where I met King Farouk [King Farouk I of Egypt]. Not supposed to be out of uniform mind you and so I said to her, “All of this is hush-hush you know,” and she said, “I can’t have you being married to that lovely man in your uniform. He can be in his but you can’t be in yours.”

39:00 So that’s, one of the funny anecdotes. But I had a wonderful time there and when I used to hear the troops coming home from their chores where they had been, they would be singing, Dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, da da da da dah, dah, dah, dah, all being Jewish and that was something that they all sang in the fields where they were working or whatever they were doing and I went on one of my leaves and spent a week in the kibbutz and they said

39:30 to me, “What talents have you got?” and I said, “I’m a soldier,” and they said, “We’ve got plenty of those. How about looking after children?” and I said, “No thank you.” “Work in the laundry?” and I said, “That will do.” I thought when I told the kids back home that I was working in the laundry they laughed their head off but it was a lovely week and I thoroughly enjoyed it and learned a lot. So that’s it.

Great. Well our tape has just come to an end.

Tape 5

00:29 **Just talk about some of the things that you were talking to Kathy [interviewer]**

00:30 **about. Get some more details here and there and then we’ll come back to the story of, in a moment. London during the Blitz. I’m sure that anyone who was in London during the Blitz will forever remember that.**

Never forget that.

What images particularly stick in your mind of the Blitz?

The never ending sirens, the death,

01:00 the destruction, the smells, the privations, the emotions and seeing streets of houses wiped out except one standing, with blast. Seeing sobbing people coming out of air-raid shelters. Living like rats in the underground on an old mattresses and

01:30 things like that but the absolute indomitable spirit and I’ll never forget when we were moved to Hounslow Barracks King George V and the old lady, his wife came down because we’d had the first oil bombs which

02:00 were bombs, enormous. Not like the normal bombs that they dropped but these were great big things where they dropped them out of planes by parachute and they just used to drop down and cause fires. I mean fires that because of the oil and because of the make up, just awful and this was another funny anecdote. I had been

02:30 into town into London in Hounslow Barracks and we came home and just as I got to the gate of the barracks the siren went and the bloke said, “Hurry up and get yourself down to the shelter.” And I said, “I’ve just got to go upstairs and pick up a couple of things up.” A couple of us went up and we had no intention of going down to the air-raid shelters. We hid in cupboards and when in our quarters and when the orderly officer came around,

03:00 “Nobody here, everyone downstairs.” So that was fine. We all hopped into bed and we thought, “Bugger it, not another night in the air-raid shelter,” so we all hopped into bed. Well, a bomb dropped.

Sounds like a bomb dropped just then I think. It’s just the wind.

Oh, the wind. A bomb dropped and we thought, “Gawd,” and I’m lying there petrified and the bomb had hit a water main and my floor was afloat

03:30 and my slippers that were there, all our shoes were afloat and all this plaster coming down from the ceiling. Not in large lumps. Not to do any damage. I was lying there petrified, absolutely petrified until the dawn came and I sat up and one of the girls in the bed opposite me said, “Christ, you’ve gone white overnight.” It was all this stuff that had floated down

04:00 from these ceilings, you know the old white ceilings. I said, “Oh my God, I’m glad you people can swim because there goes our shoes.” Well, we had to get ourselves dressed, and we were in our pyjamas and everything. Get ourselves dressed, put our great coats on, get the shoes and stockings on, pull our pyjamas up here and go down to parade and nobody knew we weren’t down in the air-raid shelter you see because we all arrived on parade.

04:30 And when she said, “Dismissed,” the legs of my pyjamas fell down and she said, “You, over here.” So she said, “What have you got on under the great coat?” and I said, “My pyjamas.” “You weren’t in the air-raid shelter last night?” “No ma’am.” “Report to my office when you are fully dressed,” and I got a real

05:00 ticking off but it was the best night's sleep we had ever had. Beautiful. We were sick to death of going down to air-raid shelters and getting little or no rest but anyway, the royal family arrived two days later because of the damage that had been done to the barracks and they wanted to know about the death toll and they were absolutely marvellous. Talk about of the people, of the people and they immediately lifted everybody,

05:30 lifted everybody's spirits same as Churchill with his famous words, that "We will never surrender," after France capitulated when we were sitting there like ducks. However, Churchill I know he lost the election afterwards but he was very outspoken and he had some very wonderful ideas and he knew that we were ill-prepared. Very ill-prepared and they built all sorts of camouflage and

06:00 ersatz [substitutes], things at the ports to make it look like there was a great deal of stuff there. There wasn't and he said, "They will never, never cross the English Channel." I mean we could spit across the English Channel over to Calais and when I was on duty one night we got this message through, "Likely

06:30 invasion," and I thought, "Oh my God. Where? Where? Where?" So we assembled and we were all standing to and the next minute the whole of the thing between Dover and Calais, the water was alight. Absolutely alight. The invasion

07:00 had started only in a limited way but what they did they filled barges with tar and set them on fire and pushed them across and pushed them back and we found on the beaches the next day German bodies that had been burnt and that's the only time we had any form of water invasion. Or any invasion and it was very interesting because that wasn't allowed

07:30 to come out until after the war. The 30 years thing that they had come across. That that was our fight. Instead of firing or starting a battle let them think that we were not prepared and the next minute all these targets were there sitting there with barges running into them.

08:00 **Where were you stationed at that time and what were you doing?**

I was down at Dover at that stage because there were thoughts, as I said that I would go to France but that didn't happen so I was right, you know standing in the middle of it all but, as I say with France capitulating things changed very rapidly and I was sent back to London. But with Churchill saying,

08:30 "We will fight on the beaches we will fight here," he was a great orator and showman and immediately people stood 10ft tall and honestly, unless you were there you couldn't believe the privations but as far as senses go it was smell, death and sorry for all the dead people

09:00 because there were hundreds and thousands and when they knocked Coventry about which was this beautiful, historical part and going for all the bloody cathedrals, oh pardon me, the cathedrals, it was terrible.

Let me close that window. How would describe the smell and ..?

Burning, charred bodies.

09:30 Roasting, charred bodies. It was terrible and also bodies that had been blown up and were in parts and hadn't been collected and it was very, very difficult to get around because with black outs. I mean one minute you would be on the pavement and the next minute you could be face over apex down a crater. It was just terrible and the,

10:00 as I say, how stoic, particularly the love of my life, the east-enders of London. They were just absolutely incredible. Talk about stiff upper lip and they could always make fun out of things. They never lost their sense of humour. You know, it could always be worse but how they,

10:30 the number of families they lost and they were absolutely no opportunity to know the devastation and the amount of devastation for weeks or months later because of the amount of people who were missing, blown up in a crater and nobody would ever know. It was terrible. And they were worried about their people overseas. I used to cry when I was overseas during the

11:00 V-bomb [rocket-powered unguided missile] days when a thing would come across and its engine would cut and bingo this enormous bomb and I used to feel so badly when my mother wrote to me and told me about the V-bombs and the oil bombs and most specifically the V-bombs because they were after my time and I used to think here am I, living in relative comfort, no rationing.

11:30 I mean this was when I was in Alexandria. No rationing, nice swimming pool, nice sunny days, good food, plenty of grog and it was just fun. But they of course were just worried about us after the devastation of what had happened at Dunkirk and the fact that we were alone

12:00 and we blew the whistle, blew the, rang the, blew the bugle really in 1939 and the Americans didn't even join us until '41.

Back before you left a couple more questions. You mentioned the smells, what about the sounds of an air raid? What were the memorable?

Terrifying. Terrifying. You'd hear the mmmmmmmmm, that siren itself used to make hairs

12:30 go up on the back of my neck and then suddenly bang, the guns would open, the planes would come over, you would hear the crumble of bombs dropping, the noise was horrendous. Absolutely horrendous and particularly, I mean with the normal bombing prior to the V-bombs and the oil bombs there was a pattern and you could hear them and you could hear the bombs

13:00 whistling down but with the V-bombs, this thing would fly. It looked like a torpedo flying and there would be an engine and then, down it would drop and it was so indiscriminate. Previously there would be waves and our guns would be firing. We knew that we had some form of

13:30 defence because you'd hear the planes and you'd hear the boom, boom , boom from all the guns that ringed London and other places but I was London. But it was just a nightmare that fortunately, I didn't get nightmares but I used to feel so sad.

When the siren went, I know you told that one story when you didn't go to an air-raid shelter, what was the normal procedure when you heard an air-raid siren?

You would be

14:00 marshalled like the civilian population would be marshalled by ARP wardens into the appropriate areas, air-raid shelters or the underground tubes. Military personnel would get a bugle, fall in and they would send us down to the air-raid shelters.

You obviously weren't a big fan of spending the night in an air-raid shelter.

Terrible.

Can you describe the scene down in one of those?

14:30 It was like being down in a musty old cave. Have you been in a musty old cave? Well, there you sit with a numb bum and wondering if the next one is going to blow the door in and you feel helpless, inactive and helpless when, as I say, when on the guns you've got a chance. You can do your bit to make things, hopefully better for everyone else.

15:00 Similarly, if you're not in an air-raid shelter who knows what you can't do.

Down in a shelter with a numb bum in a dank cave how do people cheer themselves up or keep themselves going down there?

They used to sing and try and sleep. Try and sleep because basically it was at night.

What were the main songs that people sang in defiance of the…?

All of the

15:30 all the World War 11 songs. The What named the washing on the Siegfreid Line? and Pack up your Troubles and all of those World War 11 songs.

When you hear those songs today what comes into your mind?

I sing very lustily so does anybody who was involved in it

16:00 and also Vera Lynn and her contribution and all the sort of sentiment. When I was on the ship going out I had my birthday on the ship going to the Middle East and we had a radio station, you know Forces Radio and I'm

16:30 standing there with my little binoculars not even thinking about my birthday, looking to see what was going on and the next thing I hear was…I have to stop for a minute.

Yeah, sure, sure.

For my daughter, her favourite song for her birthday

17:00 which was La Mer because I loved the sea and I'm part French and I'm part English. Sorry about that. I read in your letter this happened and I thought, "This is not going to happen to me." Excuse me, I'm not like that.

Don't go too far with the…Why was that a particularly emotional moment for you do you think? That memory?

Of hearing my music?

Of hearing your music on the boat?

I thought, "Will I ever see my family again?" That's why. Who knows.

17:30 I could have been torpedoed like many, the rest of the convoy. It's only moments in the pathos of the things that are near and dear to you that make you think otherwise you don't think. You don't want to

think. As I said I had no fear of going to war, none at all. I was bullet proof and proved that way

18:00 but suddenly to sort of bring you back to reality and, this ship in the middle of nowhere on its way to war and for somebody to mention my name and my song for me. How would you feel?

I can perfectly understand and I thinks it a very good point about you do feel, as you said young and invulnerable but…

Completely bullet proof.

18:30 Nobody was going to kill me.

But by the same token was there still other times perhaps quieter moments when you did perhaps let fear creep in and…?

No, only when things were highlighted in my life. My life back home not my life in the Middle East.

How much correspondence were you able to have with your parents and friends back home?

Everything was very heavily censored. We didn't have

19:00 a lot of time to be writing. Whilst we were in our major training situation in Alex [Alexandria] we had plenty of time to write but not when you're on active duty, I mean you were too buggered. I was too buggered to write. All I wanted to do was sleep when I finished work.

What about receiving mail? What was the procedure there?

That was intermittent depending on where you were and how close to civilisation

19:30 you were. When you're in base it's usually about once a fortnight, but when you are on 'actively engaged in warlike activities' as the [Department of] Veterans' Affairs put it, I thought a few more warlike activities since then to, not very often. Not very often but as I say there was so little you could say.

20:00 You imagine, what could you say when you are in a security, intelligence unit intercepting the war you've got nothing to write about.

It must almost be difficult to write a postcard in that situation. What did you say? Any…?

Didn't have a postcard, no shops, no stamps. I mean the postal unit used to look after all the needs of the troops in the field but

20:30 there was nothing to say. "Rien au faire," as we say in France. "Nothing to say."

What about the letters you received from home? What would you do when you received some mail?

Get madly excited and parcels and things like that. And I probably had meditative moments

21:00 when I thought about them but to be perfectly honest the greatest mistake to make is when you've got a job to do to start letting your mind wonder to home. "I wonder what they're doing," because as far as I was concerned their life was no more secure than mine in London. I mean the

21:30 privations that they went through and to think that I missed a large number of them from being in the war.

It's total war, as they say. Everyone was in the war. They are as much in it as you.

That's right. They just had a terrible time. Terrible, terrible.

What parcels were they able to send you? Was there anything you remember receiving while you were away?

Yeah, I haven't got a very sweet tooth but I like

22:00 jubes and hard sort of lollies and things like that and I chewed chewing gum. That would keep my mouth wet. When you haven't got anything more than a litre of water and you get a bit dry it gets a bit tricky and I don't like sweet drinks. I don't drink soft drinks very often except such things as orange juice or tomato juice but I haven't got a sweet

22:30 tooth at all. And I'd also get tissues and makeup and those sorts of things. Face cream, sun block because we didn't have any shops up there and they came through via Red Cross and via the Forces Welfare Association. It was lovely.

I've heard the male soldiers talk of comfort parcels receiving from people

23:00 **they didn't know. Was that the case with the women as well?**

Oh my word.

What sort of things did you, did people in the community send?

To ladies they used to send soap, face washers, talcum powder, tooth paste, tooth brushes, face creams all that sort of thing. We didn't need any warm clothing. Mostly they sent soldiers

23:30 pullovers and socks and mittens and we didn't need any of that and they certainly didn't send us bikinis.

In those conditions in camp in Alex or when you were away in the desert, what things did you miss most or what was your, what did you want if you could get a hold of it?

When we were in Alex nothing, nothing at all and the same as when we moved to Cairo eventually but that's entirely

24:00 dissociated with life in the desert, in a tent, middle of nowhere, listening to war sounds etc, etc, etc. I mean, all you said was, "Thank God," when one of the guns stopped, and the planes, they'd send the planes first and then they had the guns. We didn't know how many there were but it must have been a hell of a bloody lot of them because it was like,

24:30 as I said when they shoot in succession. When I found out later in history there was at least God knows, a thousand guns side by side from the wadi across to the sea and we were very well equipped at that stage with planes. As I said Monty held out and would not be budged. He was right in the long

25:00 run but then you heard the most eerie sound. Talk about in a non-warlike situation hearing the sirens and the boom and the bang and this and the screams, I forgot the screams, to hear the track of the artillery, of the armour as they drive their tanks, they jingle

25:30 and that's the most eerie sound because you don't know how close they are or how close they're not and when you have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of tank that we were all deployed into the various three corps and when the barrage stopped and then a hushed silence for a minute and they, you could hear

26:00 all the jingle of the tanks as they rolled. Because in the desert in the night air, because this was all at night, in the night air you can hear for miles, miles and miles and miles because there are absolutely no sounds of any kind its just the desert is still and dead and cold.

26:30 **That barrage at El Alamein in October was one of the biggest of the war.**

Biggest in the world.

And it started very, very suddenly. What do you remember of the start? You weren't frontline but you weren't very far away.

No, we were all sitting waiting with anticipation. We knew, because we had been advised because as I told you Monty advised everybody on a need to know basis. Our intelligence people were told what was happening.

27:00 They were all part of our unit, because we were all part of a fairly biggish unit and I was told that we had to be very vigilant at this stage because D Day was imperative within hours and of course, everybody was on their medal, ears tuned and sticking to the dial and waiting for everything

27:30 and I think it was 9.40 the barrage started or something like that. Late at night and I know it was at night because I looked at my watch and it was at night that it first started but we had been sitting waiting in anticipation all day. We didn't know what was going to happen and then when it did happen we were all absolutely delighted

28:00 because we had never heard a barrage like it. As I say I don't know how many miles you would have heard that barrage but I would say in particular nothing between them and the Germans back there and we were around in a bit arc like this and all our troops were up there and we're back here with the mobile bath and laundry and the hospitals

28:30 and this and this and that and it was just unbelievable. I thought, "This is never going to stop." You can imagine how many shells they used in that barrage but we knew they must have softened them up because the Germans got the biggest bloody shock they'd ever had in their lives.

What could you see off in the distance?

Nothing. We were in hooches, we were closed in.

29:00 We couldn't see anything at all. Nothing. Not allowed to see anything. All we see is the screen in front of us and listening and operating.

When the barrage stopped and the battle began what happened back where you were?

Nothing changed. We knew it was next phase, phase two because tanks all went in and they all started their particular movements

29:30 in their particular sectors which as I say, we only had a very broad brush idea of what was involved

because as I say, we work on a need to know basis. I mean this lass that was in the Revelry it was only after the war that she realised she was part of a large intelligence unit. She didn't meet anybody, didn't know anybody. We didn't operate that way because we weren't in isolation. I knew what we were

30:00 and what we were doing. I knew what we were part of and when we all moved back it was just like a family being repatriated together. But we knew but we couldn't see anything.

In that battle situation about how long at a time would you spend at your screen?

Everyone is manned 24 hours a day and we would change over

30:30 4 hours because you couldn't do any more than that, you would go around the twist. And when I said you couldn't see anything when you came out for a breather the sky would be lit up like Piccadilly Circus and there was all the noise of course because there was all the planes and the barrage of guns and you knew there was activity

31:00 but you couldn't see what was happening. I mean you wouldn't know anyway. It was up to the generals to deploy and fight.

What did you do at the end of one of those four-hour shifts?

Go out and have a breather and a meal. We used to have four meals a day not three and have a sleep or try to.

31:30 Have a chat. If it was terribly, terribly hot, if it was an early shift we were doing we would go and try and have an APC [armpits and crotch wash] and amalgamate our water in a can and whip and soap ourselves and use the water. Everything was on a big share basis.

What could you see of the goings on around? The mobile hospital and kitchens you mentioned what.

32:00 No, no. They were there.

They were there but..

They were there but they couldn't see us. They didn't know they were there but they knew, I laid out a division in the field when I passed pre-entry for staff college, I know what a division in the field looks like and as I was saying you would have your various types of medical support, your mobile laundry and bath, you would have your ammunition supplies and your food supplies and your whatever

32:30 all located somewhere aft and we didn't know who was near us or who wasn't. And obviously we didn't want anyone to know where we were because if there had been any spies where would they have gone for first. They wouldn't have gone for a bath or a shower or a feed they would get rid of that intelligence unit and then we've have done something because we were

33:00 supplying them forward and that was our job.

We talked a bit about your job before but during that battle what were you listening for and what was coming up on your screen? What was the main thing?

Nothing comes up on a screen you are just listening.

Just listening.

You're getting the Morse code being transmitted between someone and someone and you take it down and as I say you pop it in

33:30 your little box and a guy comes along and taps you on the shoulder and lets you know he's taking it and he takes it into an intelligence section where they then decipher and then they decide where it has to be transmitted to and another group is transmitted. We are only receiving.

And during that event what were the lines of communication like? Were they going mad, were they slow what was the ?

Oh plenty going on

34:00 that's why we had eight at a time operating so that we could cover everything within a minute area and each of the intelligence people fixed the areas that we were to cover. We didn't know anything about that because they know where the deployment was and they knew which corps was advancing where and which was doing this and it was up to us to get

34:30 as much information as we could get on the wireless side so it could be fed back into a room behind us which we were never allowed to be in so they could do the decoding and deciphering and sending it to the respective divisional headquarters.

How long did that last for that state of extreme business and readiness of the

35:00 **battle going on in the distance?**

Went on for quite enough time I think thank you. I think from October right through to the end of November. Something about that if my memory serves me correctly. About that.

And what kind of a toll did that take on you personally that incredible tension of working in that kind of environment?

35:30 Well I think that we had been given the very, very best training. We were given the very, very best morale support and understanding. The same as I just had a little cry, if somebody else had a little cry pat her on the head and give her a kiss and say, "You'll be right don't worry." But I had, I personally was lucky that I had a lot

36:00 of intestinal fortitude [strength]. I have all my life because all my life, as I say I have been a stalwart. I've been a champion of people, I've looked after people and counselled people. I'm a fully qualified social worker. I've run a hostel for the combined services, 48-bed hostel for men who couldn't settle

36:30 back into army life and the fact that they, one bloke was so grogged up [drunk] he burst his oesophagus all over the floor and I wasn't sick. I used to get the boys and say, "You are going out, you come in drunk you won't get through the door." And I had probably as I say, a tough old bird the same as when I was running

37:00 an elderly citizens centre in Redfern. They appealed to the army, the town clerk. He was getting terrible reports about the citizens' centre about the amount of drunken men and they were serving, covering Redfern with the Meals on Wheels and Ted Luskin phoned my boss and said, "I believe Patty Rawlings is leaving the army," and my boss said, "Yes." And he said, "Has she got a job?"

37:30 And my boss said, "I would say easily." "I wonder she would spend her month…," because they only give you a month to sort it out, "…spend her month working in this centre in Redfern because I reckon she could clean it up in a month." Which I did and that never phased me and blokes would come in and I would say, "Where do you think you're going?" Tottering in and he said, "I'm going into have some lunch," and I would say, "No, you're not.

38:00 Get out of here or get down the back, have a shower, have a shave. You do not enter that place." Because they were terrifying the women and they were dear little women who were living in little rooms in Redfern and he'd say, "You can't talk to me like that I'm an old digger," and I'd say, "If you're not careful I will give a karate chop and now you know I'm an old digger." So I don't care. I am, won't say completely fearless but as fearless as

38:30 anybody can be because that's all I've known all my life.

In that situation in battle situation how much did someone like you, the stronger and indeed more superior members of the group have to help the others?

A great deal.

And what sort of help did you give?

Counselling. Understanding. Affection. Ability to carry on,

39:00 just say, "Nothing to be ashamed of. It happens to everybody." Don't make them feel as they are a slacko, make them feel that they are very much part of what we are doing and I have the ability to do that with people and have done.

What were the reactions of the other girls in that situation?

Very, very, very few slip-ups and then it's

39:30 either they had their periods or were thinking about their husband or they were, not their husband, their boyfriend or whatever or they were home sick or they were just feeling off colour. You couldn't say they had a hangover because we didn't have any grog. But I mean that sort of thing but because they trusted each other and respected each other and they didn't want to appear weak in front of each other. They would rather go into the toilet and bang their head against a wall

40:00 and scream the place down rather than let their fellows know they had been subjected to pressure.

In that case are women at war do they behave differently to me do you think?

No. I think they are stronger than men to be honest. That's what I've seen and noticed and observed. You see I think it's the gender. In many cases

40:30 men worry more about things they can't do anything about instead of worrying about things they can do something about and I think they don't want to look weak. I mean if a man could only cry in a wartime situation it would very much easier for everybody, but he bottles up and the next minute he's shell shocked and he's really having a serious

41:00 trauma. Whereas a women will have a good cry, put her head on your shoulder and you pat her on the head and the guys were very good in this regard to because I would say to the intelligence boys, "A couple of the girls are getting a little bit, you know, and I said I might change the shifts around a bit," and they'd say, "Leave it exactly with you but if they want to come out and have a cigarette with us or

whatever the case may be that's fine." They were great

41:30 because they relied upon us to give them the facts and if we didn't give them the facts then we didn't function and we might as well not be there.

Well all right, we have again run out of tape. It seems to be going faster every time.

Tape 6

00:31 **Pat before we broke for lunch we were talking about the Battle of El Alamein. I'm just wondering if you can tell me, you were there with your unit but were there any other women that were there that you came into contact with?**

No. All the rest were, there were three divisions. Three corps who were a mixture of Brits,

01:00 Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Free French, Ghurkhas and Polish I believe and they were subdivided but I didn't see any other women there other than our intelligence unit. An awful lot of women served in the Middle East from South Africa, from New Zealand and from ourselves

01:30 but very, very few other women, apart from nurses. So it was very rare to see women in combat in the Middle East and Americans. They were there. They came back particularly when America took over the role with, you know, "I shall return," when we kicked them out of Tripoli and they came in with the honour and glory. We won't talk about that. But no there weren't any other women.

02:00 **And I'm just wondering what kind of instructions were you given in case of a surrender?**

I can't discuss that except that we would never surrender. They surrendered to us and I had German and Italian prisoners of war working for me and my girls as batman

02:30 and handymen and all this sort of thing. We were in control. Fortunately it didn't happen. If it did happen I had my instructions and I can't talk about that. We did never expect to lose either. You've got to be positive. We were surrounded by the best force in any campaign we'd had in numbers.

03:00 I mean were light on the ground in Tobruk and if it hadn't been for the British navy and British air force the guys from the Dominion forces in Tobruk would never have lived through it and they were forever grateful because the supply line was fine. Rommel lost the line because he had no supply line and unless you have a supply line you can't even fight a battle. Look at Russia. Hitler lost because

03:30 he didn't have a supply line. You'd think they'd learn this from Napoleon the reason why he lost Moscow in the first place but no, it was push, push, push and that's why Montgomery was very, very circumspect. He said, "I've got a great army, but until I get exactly what I want I will not move." He went up against all sorts of Generals and hierarchy from five different nations,

04:00 he said, "I am boss."

Well even though in the signals you were a little bit back from the front line, I am wondering what type of weapon did you carry or?

We had normal rifles. Normal rifles which every soldier had whether male or female, rifles. However,

04:30 due to our situation and being a very sensitive group of the army or the battle we would have been protected at all costs. We would have been priority protection, not because we were women, but because we were the heart centre of intelligence of the whole battle of El Alamein. I mean nobody can look at the fact that it is male or female, male or female, female or male or what

05:00 or whatever nation we were the heart of intelligence. Without our help, I'm sure of that, we wouldn't have had such an easy time at El Alamein because we really basically when it came down to the end we had them running so fast we couldn't catch up with them to get them out. They were out before we even got to Tripoli because it was a beautifully well planned campaign. I mean they had Tobruk which was absolutely

05:30 horrendous and how those guys fought and stayed there and encamped there to give the allied forces time to start preparing another force. I mean they were just the bravest things in captivity and many of them are very good friends of mine here in Australia. Particularly the 2/13th Battalion, a lot of very good friends and we meet in the same place for our Anzac Day lunch

06:00 in the place in College Street and you know, it's great to meet those guys and the 2/13th. They were just brilliant. We didn't know them to any degree then but they were part of that think in Tobruk because my knowledge of Tobruk was limited because it was limited to everybody I believe and the second battle that was very, very poorly planned and poorly

06:30 executed lost. All I knew was that when I landed there was this air of tension in the air that the buggers could come down and overrun Egypt and we would not let them and we didn't and when we all moved

forward like this and all of the people. I mean imagine with the Brits and the Australians and everybody else everybody wants to be boss. Always had that problem.

07:00 The Australians thought the Brits were bloody terrible planners and the Brits thought the Australians were wild and woolly and weren't good soldiers. It was tough but when the crunch came the way that they worked together with those three divisions, divisional headquarters, the 13th and 30th and all these ancillaries at the end, the 10th I mean it was just the most magnificent thing of the war. And the fact that it finished the war over there I think was something

07:30 that we've all got to be proud of and we all had to bury our egos and think of other people. I didn't have that problem because we were all Brits. The intelligence of that organisation, we were all Brits. We weren't a mixture of everything, of all the odds and sods and bods. That was the fighting troops, they were.

Well as you say signals is the heart and communications is the heart and you were

08:00 **trained to lay signal lines…**

If needs be. We could do every mortal thing which was part of communications. Signals was part of communications and if we were needed, as male or female or whatever we could have done everything because between us, I mean we had to the most highly trained technical encoders, cipher operators all those people.

08:30 We had the intercept wireless operators. We had the people who had masses of experience in signals and intelligence because signals and intelligence, communication and communication and intelligence is synonymous with each other.

And what about I guess you know, as an intercept wireless operator you would have been, as you say, dealing with quite sensitive

09:00 Highly sensitive. Highly sensitive and if we buggered it up, to use a vulgarism, if our information wasn't factual from what we gathered from the intercept wireless group, mine, given to our intelligence section, sections, more than one, and that was issued to the commanders fighting the battle, if we mucked it up we

09:30 would have been responsible and it could have been a massacre.

Well I'm not trying to get you to divulge army secrets or intelligence that you don't want to but I'm wondering was there ever an occasion when you say intercepted signals that you got very excited about because you knew that it was.. ?

I wouldn't have known what I was intercepting darling. When you get dah, dah, dah, dah, dit, you take it down like you take shorthand

10:00 from your boss sitting in front of you and what he does with it is there business. I wouldn't have known. All I know is, not then but after the war and after we were down in Cairo we were highly commended, well I got a commendation being head of that group for the fact that our intelligence as a group, not insular as a group, it was the best ever

10:30 intelligence information of any battle in World War 11 and that made me feel good and everybody feel good but we didn't know that then. We were just dogsbodies. We were doing our own little bit and our little bit and saying, "How long is thing going on for?" But as I say fortunately the battle purse didn't go on that long but the lead up and the preparations and the privations and everything else they weren't exactly funny.

11:00 Not when you're young and you're missing out on jiving around somewhere or doing the hot trot at the Trocadero or whatever the case may be. We were, as my mother said to me, God love her, "The only thing that ever worried me about your ambitions and I was so proud of you, so very, very proud of you. You didn't have a youth. You went straight from your school uniform from Francis Mary Buss

11:30 into the army and I believe you probably won't even think about what you missed out on in your youth because I think you had a bit of a misspent youth very early on in your life, but you missed out on youth." You know the transition from school, schoolies week, where they all get pissed and carry on like a whatever they do in Queensland and the way the kids throw off the mantle of 11 years or 13 years of study, take a gap year,

12:00 travel the world before going to university or whatever they are doing? I never did any of those transitions. I dropped my school uniform in a basket and that's the end of that. I put a uniform on in the army, that was fine, I did my education at university, extended it, did my fighting for Britain, then came out here and then 18 months rejoined the army and spent the next of

12:30 my 22 years doing the same thing in a different way but the same thing.

Well I'm just curious, what did you see of casualties at El Alamein?

Too much. I'll mention one thing only that absolutely threw me because the Italians were the weak link in the German forces. They only had one like

13:00 the Americans have the marines, the rest of their forces are very suss to me after Vietnam, our soldiers SAS, magnificent in all of the things they have done. Come down another echelon from there and they are pretty bad. The Italians only had one type of Panzer Regiment that could do anything for the Germans but all the Germans had were the numbers and they were

13:30 escaping in thousands and we went through the Italian forces like a packet of butter but when we found out later, I mean we didn't know too much at the time. But when we had all these, and we were subjected to having prison of war camps all around us after the battle had moved on, and I had a German batman who was madly in love with me.

14:00 He was very sweet and he used to paint little photographs, little pictures of me in dresses. If you can imagine me in battle gear in dresses. He couldn't speak a word of English and I couldn't speak a word of German. But the Italian persons we had thought they were on a great thing having women they were batting for until they got a few kicks up the you know where and

14:30 sort of told the Romeos that we had no time for them. But they used to booby trap our people who had fallen and when the medics went out to collect them they would blow up. I mean there was an awful lot of mopping up because we covered a big distance between El Alamein and Tripoli, our forces I mean not us, but the things that happened between there until Tripoli were unbelievable.

15:00 **And what did you see yourself?**

I didn't see a great deal of the travesty of what had happened because we did never follow the force through. We had a big job to do and a big mopping up to do and still had a big thing to do from the point of view of classified information and our job was to sit there and get it finished until finally Rommel

15:30 capitulated. That's a mouth full. Capitulated. Finally I learned from my fellow soldiers because they were all coming back. Because a lot of us came back virtually together and we were reassessed, our jobs changed and a lot of them had other jobs to do in, some of them had to come back to Australia and some of them went over to Greece and Crete where they had

16:00 to restart getting Greece and Crete put together again or they came back down to Suez and we had all those other problems. Because the war never stopped. People say, "Oh, that wasn't a wartime thing." In 1951 when I joined, '51, Korea, after Korea we had the Suez, we had Borneo, we had the Malaya confrontation and then we went onto Vietnam, which was the longest war in the

16:30 whole of Australia. I said, "My peacetime service I'm talking about." Peacetime bugger.

Well, after El Alamein what were you hoping to do? Where were you hoping to be posted?

Oh I was still totalling involved in El Alamein and I knew that I was going back to Cairo because my whole company came back and became 516 or we became reinforcements for 516 Signal Regiment

17:00 which was already in Cairo and we were redeployed into teleprinter or encoding or decoding or whatever because there was still an enormous war front to cover in Greece and Crete. So we were still in a war like situation down there but it was very, it was a civilised war. Sleeping in a lovely bed, live in a lovely home, be looked after by Madam Bardier

17:30 and all those sorts of things. It was just unbelievable heaven. I was, another anecdote you want, I was on my way home from nightshift at Kasaneal Barracks and I came home and the Gaphier, who was the Egyptian Guard was standing at the door, and he said, "Saida," and I said, "Saida wala," and I walked in

18:00 and I went up these stairs because my room was to the right of this beautiful staircase going up. Exterior staircase and then the railings came around here and as I was saying there were four rooms off there but my room was there and I got to the top of the stairs and I thought, "Oh, what a beautiful night," and I was smelling the night air and I went in and got into my pyjamas and I had bought

18:30 a lovely bunch of grapes home with me and I got under my mosquito net and the next minute the most horrific scream came out. So I leapt out, lifted up the mosquito net, put my bedroom slippers on and raised out to see a dark figure leaping from the room next door over the veranda down to earth but he was at a disadvantage

19:00 because I was coming straight down the stairs and I went and grabbed this thing in the dark and it was a little Bazuto soldier. All I could see was the whites of his eyes and his teeth and he got out of my grip and raced across the road and down the hill which lead straight into the Nile. So I dived

19:30 straight out and across the road and down and he was running and he was carrying his boots and his shorts and all I could see was his singlet, his eyes and the teeth and as he turned around. I mean it was he plus me opposite each other and as he turned around I grabbed his singlet and I gave him an uppercut here. Because we were taught unarmed combat as you can imagine, that was our means

20:00 of defence and he was only about 5ft 6 or 7 and so I grabbed him by the neck, took him back up the hill, into the barracks and I said to the Gaphier, "You stand there," and I went into the office and the orderly sergeant was there and I said, "Would you mind putting this character there and ring the provost?" And this poor little, he was shaking like a leaf. Young man,

20:30 and I said, “I’ll be out the front talking to the Gaphier,” and I said to the Gaphier, “Ismal, tal (UNCLEAR spoken in Egyptian).” I said, “What was that man doing in my quarters?” I said, “Empty your pockets. How much did he give you?” He emptied his pockets and of course, he gave him money and said, “Female brothel.”

21:00 So I won’t tell you what I did to him but he’ll never forget it and the provos took this man away and I was terribly sorry afterwards because he was a dear young man. Very black, very African, very, very naïve but he had been walking around. I think he was probably had a couple of drinks and the Gaphier had said to him, put his head outside saying, “I have white ladies here. I have white ladies.” But two of

21:30 my girls were just about shell shocked because one of them was climbing into bed, he was climbing into bed with one of them. So anyway we fixed that little matter up very smartly but when I appeared at his sentencing the poor little bugger got, because of their type of discipline which was nothing like ours, the number of cracks he got with the whip was and I had to stand there and watch it. It was awful and I felt sorry for him

22:00 and I said to them afterwards, “If I had been his lawyer I would have put a plea of mitigation in,” because I used to defend and prosecute in the Australian Army and I said, “I would have put a plea of mitigation in,” and they said, “How come?” and I said, “He was a little soldier of 18, 19 years old, he was led astray by this Egyptian who’s got the morals of an alley cat.” And they all have. I hated Egyptians.

22:30 They used to do terrible things in Egypt. Get our soldiers drunk and then knife them and then put them in the Nile and sweep along and I said, “And had to stand here to see him.” And they said, “We have standards in our country and it doesn’t matter there is no such thing as a plea of mitigation.” Bingo. So that was that little incident.

Perhaps you could just describe a couple of the highlights with

23:00 **516 in Cairo and what was entailed in that work that you were doing.**

Yeah, well in 516 we became a composite part of the intelligence section there because the intelligence section no longer existed in the desert and 516 were an established signals organisation that were already located in Cairo and we were just reinforcements.

23:30 To me it was very, very interesting because they were still continuing the intelligence for future operations. I mean what we’d done and this was a much, much bigger organisation and as I say, we had these Palestinian companies under our command, all women that were all people who had been

24:00 rooted out of their countries because they were Jewish by Hitler and this started in 1932 and then they came into Palestine and the British Army recruited them and men to bolster the strengths in Cairo itself. But that’s when I got involved with living a fairly normal life.

24:30 It was absolutely magnificent. We were still working very hard but with the shifts we were doing we could still live a normal life and make friendships and that’s when I told you I joined the Anglo-Egyptian Union to try and get a bit of couth and culture because that’s the one thing in my life I missed. Everything was very basic and very gung-ho but the reading of books. I mean I hadn’t seen a book, I hadn’t seen a film

25:00 and the makeup and how cheap it was and all those wonderful things that women could do and go to Croppiers for morning coffee with your friends and go out to dinner etc. And that’s when I became involved with the theatrical unit.

Well, we will talk a bit more about your work with the theatrical unit but I’m wondering was it around this time that you met your husband?

Yes.

25:30 He belonged to the play reading unit also and we put on a couple of shows. This was before I ever got involved in the entertainment unit professionally and that’s how we met and he was a captain and I was only another rank. Absolutely frowned upon but I thought he was gorgeous but we played

26:00 opposite each other as husband and wife at a particular show and that’s how it all happened. So we decided to get married and we did, and at our party after the wedding we used the props of the play that we had used when we first met. And that’s how I got married.

26:30 My parents were delighted, his mother was horrified.

Why was that?

Well she had other great plans for him. Our family backgrounds were entirely different. My mother and father said, “We’re never surprised at anything your doing,” because I wrote and said, “I don’t need your permission, I’m over 21, but I intend to get married and I met him and he’s lovely and dah, di , dah, di, dah,” and my mother said, “That’s all right. I know why you’re doing this so you don’t have to get a glory [dowry] box together

27:00 in England." I said, "That's right," and she said, "I'll do that for you," and I said, "I know you will." But when he wrote to his mother he said, "She's very tentative about all this," and I said, "Well, make up your mind. Either we get married or we don't. If we don't get married here we won't be married anywhere else." So we got married and his father was, his mother was the only

27:30 member of the family who owned Gale & Polden Publishing Company which is one of the biggest publishing companies in England. She was a real matriarch. A real old tartar. His father was the most gorgeous thing. He was the verger of the Anglican Church at Hove in Brighton. Loved him to death and my grandmother, when I eventually met them all was lovely. But his mother was absolutely distraught with the fact

28:00 she only had a son and daughter, daughter was at teachers' college and the son wasn't going to be there to be married by father with all the finery that goes on with their family but he was adamant and he said, "We're getting married," and we did.

I'm just wondering why you didn't, why both of you didn't want to wait until the war was over?

We would never have got married because he'd been,

28:30 he was posted to Madagascar and then he came back to the Middle East and the war wasn't over, we might never have been able to get married. Simple as that and also we decided that if we lived through it all, if we were married we could save a lot of money because we'd get marriage allowance and

29:00 he'd get paid and we'd get paid and we'd have enough money to start a life in England when we got there.

And how did the marriage go?

We were married for nine years, but I told you his mother was the sole owner of the Golden Pallin, she was the only member of the Golden Pallin family living, this big printers and publishers. My husband

29:30 was very, as you can probably notice, he was quite a sultry looking guy, he was a sweetheart. He was very clever, very artistic, very, very artistic and his ambition was to get into marketing and advertising and I said, "Well, that's fine. When we go back to the UK [United Kingdom] we will have a nice little nest egg," with the fact that because we both got paid and what could you spend it on. Nothing. Not in a warlike situation, nor in Cairo really,

30:00 and also with the marriage allowance money, I got money for being married to him, I used to save it and bank it and we had a nice little nest egg anyway. But when I got involved with the entertainment unit instead of going home more or less at the same time as him I went home nine months later. He was already in England but he got the job he was after and he was very thrilled and he wrote me

30:30 and said, "I've got the job of advertising and marketing manager of the Shell Company of England," and he was thrilled and I though, "Great. He's getting settled." But he said, "I'll be very glad when you come home." Well I did come home but I had already been forewarned by my mother, a very shrewd lady who said, "I don't know how you are going to find your mother-in-law. I don't think you'll be very impressed." Because she's got all the money, loaded

31:00 and loaded and my father-in-law, the sweetest thing earning about 600 pounds a year as a verger of a church, church pauper and she just pressed the buttons and everybody jumped and my mother said, "I said to your father, Pat will never jump when she presses the buttons." Anyway I said I would behave myself and they were all there for the weekend when I got there and

31:30 my husband met at the docks and my family and his family were at Hove and we went in there and my mother-in-law. I say I thought my mother-in-law looked like a duchess she was even taller than my mother and a real, looked like Mrs Danvers so I said to my husband and she said, "How nice to meet you,"

32:00 with a hand like a wet fish and I said, "How nice to meet you." And she said, "I hope we'll have a happy weekend," and I said, "So do I." And she said, "Well I'm sure you and OJ are very glad to be back together," and I said, "Oh yes we are. It's been a long time." And anyway, my mother sat where you're sitting and I'm sitting here and my mother had the eyes and she had beautiful big, blue eyes and she had

32:30 the ability to go without anybody knowing she was winking and she was just waiting for the interrogation that my mother-in-law had given me and she said, "Well, you've certainly had a very strange upbringing," and I said, "I beg your pardon? I've had a wonderful upbringing. I think that's the wrong choice of words. I think you should say 'different' upbringing." So from then on… My mother and father collected

33:00 all the basic things for me when we first got our own apartment. She got a double garage full of furniture, prams, cots and our firstborn had been signed into the same school that OJ went to, which they do in England and I said, "That's getting a little past the thing," and she said, "Oh well, we've got to do everything here because to get your son into the school you wish to get him

33:30 into, you have to book him into the school before he's born." I said, "What happens if it's a daughter, then it will just go to the female of the species."

And did you have children?

No. I was still on the stage and I had to still continue being in the army. He got the job he wanted with Shell, he was terribly happy and I was still in the army but I had the permission to live out and we got

34:00 a beautiful flat in Golderns Green, Hampstead. I was mixed up with all of the theatrical people in the UK and he was very theatrical and artistic. Wonderful life but mother-in-law kept putting the pressure on and the pressure on and the pressure on saying, "I want you to come and work in the family business." But he said ,"At this stage of my life I don't want to start

34:30 at the bottom of the family business and work my way up. I'm an executive in my own right now." She said, "But who's going to take over the family company?" and he said, "Mother, that's not my problem." "But you're my only son," and the battle went on, went on, went on and it went on to the stage and when he said to me, he came home to me one day very disconsolate and said, "My mother said she'd disown me," and I said "Good, because I've disowned her already." So

35:00 he said, and I said, "We don't need her money. She's got more to lose than we have. All she's got is money, we've got each other and the wonderful life we have. We don't need her money." So that went on for a while and things were going quite nicely and then one day he came in and he said, "I've got a confession to make," and I said, "What's that?" and he said, "I've agreed to go and work for the company." And I said, "Good, if that's what you

35:30 want, then that's what you do but you won't have me there." So that's what happened. After nine years I said, "I thought you had more guts than that. We don't need her money. And money doesn't mean that much to me. Life means that much to me. It's nice to have all the, you know, home comforts but you and I together with the money I've earned and I've been offered a scholarship at the Abbey Theatre I can make a motzer [lots of money] there and

36:00 continue in theatre until we decide to have a family and you can continue to do what you're doing." But I said, "That's your choice and tough." So I decided to come to Australia when I had the opportunity and came. We divorced in '50 and I said, "I can't leave the country without you signing a form of release for me. Now you're putting your

36:30 neck out here because when the divorce comes they could catch you out for collusion because they'll say I couldn't have left without you signing. I will put a codicil to that that I will not if you sign this, I will not take you for one cent and I don't expect you to take me for one cent and we say that we agreed that this was the best thing to do."

37:00 So I was only looking through the divorce papers and my in-laws said to me, "You're raving mad. His mother owns the largest company in London. Go for it." And I said, "No. My word's my word and his word is his word." And I saw him again not from 1949 to '61 when the army sent me over there and my brother said to me, "Guess who lives just down the road?" and I said, "I don't know," and he said, "OJ," and

37:30 I knew he had remarried at Katston Hall because he wrote to me. We were in constant contact so I rang him up and we went and had lunch and he said, "You've worn better than I have," and I said, "But that was your choice wasn't it?" So that was that but I wasn't unhappy. As I say I wanted in my life with business and a career and to be married. The only thing I didn't have were children

38:00 but I couldn't have done what I did afterwards and I couldn't have been self contained if I had had kids. It wouldn't have been fair to the kids and I wouldn't have fought him. He got married and he had two kids and we remained friends until he died.

Yes, its interesting that you feel like you had no room for children and pursued a working life, a career.

No, because our careers. If

38:30 his career and my career were down the same line we could have coped with having kids but his mother was pulling him over here and my career was theatrical and it wouldn't have worked and who gets, sits in the middle, the kids and I've seen too many kids having worked in a Girls' training school with poor little kids whose parents are druggies [drug addicts]

39:00 or alchies [alcoholics] or whatever they are and they have no future, no life and I couldn't bear that. My kids would have to a balanced life. I'm lucky I have a lot, a big extended family of nephews, one niece, one niece only and myself. It was the first female in three generations in my family and she is the first of three generations in hers and she is the

39:30 absolute copy image of me. She's taller, probably better looking. That's her there and all those wonderful kids that I look after and I decided with my life because my brothers and their sons have more divorces than Pope, more sets of shoes than Marcos, Imelda and

40:00 they have had very troubled lives and the only person they've had who is on the ground to look after them is their Aunty Pat and all I have and own will be theirs because my brothers and their sons, they are all well-healed [financially sound] and they're doing nicely. All they've done is three divorces, three on one side and two on the other and I thought, "Well that's enough of that," and the kids

40:30 are just unsettled so Aunty Pat looks after them. That little one who phoned me, the only phone call I had, I said, "Damian, it's the wrong day, I've just started filming," and he said, "Aunty Pat, just to let you know that Belinda and I have had a spat and she's dumped me in Sydney and I have to fly home to Melbourne tomorrow, she's driven home." And I said, "Don't worry, darling I'll ring you tonight."

Well…

Tape 7

00:30 **What did you do when you got leave in Cairo? How much leave did you get?**

Well, it depends. I only had a couple of weeks on one occasion on another occasion I had a couple of weeks and I went over with some friends of mine who were Cypriots over the Cyprus and spent a couple of weeks with their family. One time I went to Sarafan, another time I went to

01:00 Haifa, Tel Aviv wherever. Every time I got leave I'd go off somewhere.

What were your impressions of Palestine? You mentioned the kibbutz you went to before.

My impression. I have to confess this, I've never been a Jew lover because the only Jews I've ever really met apart from those in my

01:30 military service we there people in Britain who were the tycoons of business and not very pleasant people and they used to run all the businesses and I wouldn't have trusted them with my cat. So I was not a Jew lover but I became a Jew lover in the war because when I saw what the Jews had done with the

02:00 terrible barren land they were given and they way they dug and they grew and they put olive trees there and they put in infiltration and they built the kibbutz so all of their people could live not just the bright Jews, not just the avaricious Jews, all Jews. So they built this kibbutz so they could live together in a life, not have to earn money. But when you join the kibbutz they say to you,

02:30 "Do you smoke?" "Yes." "Do you drink? Do you do this? Do you do that?" and they write a profile on you and that's the sort of money that is needed to keep you and that's the amount of work you have do to get that money. Because you don't get actually money you only get commodities. These dirty, filthy Arabs used to sit up in the hills and come charging down. The Palestinians

03:00 are reminiscent of the Aborigines who live on their, we tried to do the best for them and put them in structured homes but all they want to do is be nomads and roam around the place and when you put them on welfare, I noticed when I was in Canberra on several occasions, they would be outside the grog shop when it opened at 11 o'clock with their pension thing in their hand and it was disgusting. And I spent a lot of time in the Northern Territory.

03:30 I got a better appreciation of lots and lots of Aborigines because I went around with Northern Territory with Nova Peris talking about sport to encourage Aboriginal families to support their daughters in sport. And she and I did videos all over the Northern Territory and a lot of them are good value but an awful lot of them. I mean we get to Everley Street down here

04:00 and we get to see what happens down here. Well Palestinians were just that way.

What did you see, you mentioned before in the Kibbutz there was fighting between these groups. I mean, there was a war only a few later, what was going on?

No, no, no. The land that was given to the Jews, all the time the predators, the Palestinians were sitting up in the hills waiting to come down and

04:30 take what they had. They did nothing. I mean the Jews built Haifa, Tel Aviv, Bethlehem all these places and they crashed through the most terrible terrain to build and to protect their people they built the Kibbutz so that everybody had three meals a day and a place to live and at the corner of the Kibbutz there were the towers. Like towers in a prison and women had to stand up there and do their

05:00 time the same as the men to protect themselves against the Palestinians infiltrating trying to get something for nothing. They were absolute scum. Bastards. And when I went home my father-in-law said, "I want your view on the Palestinian–Jewish problem." And I said, "Well, I never think I would feel this way but I've seen them both at first hand and what the Jews have put up with since

05:30 they were kicked out from all their countries with Hitler and it's the greatest hodgepodge of nationalities of all time. Talk about we are multicultural, guess that were. And what they did with the land they were given and the way they were let down by the British who originally transported them

and then said, “That’s it enough.” But they protected their own and they looked after their own. There was no Mr Big and there was no Mr Little. All equal, equal the works

06:00 and jerks.

Well moving on from Palestine…

And my girls who joined the battalion were the people who were living in the kibbutz and they were up there killing people to protect their homes and their families.

Apart from spending leave there you went to Cyprus. What did you see there?

I went on holiday. I didn’t see anything.

The war wasn’t in evidence so much over there? What was ..?

Nothing. No. I had two Cypriots working for me

06:30 and they said, “We’ve going on leave in a couple of weeks how about coming over and enjoying Cyprus?” and that’s what I did. Lived with their family. I lived in Cyprus. You had to have leave otherwise you would go raving made.

What about in Cairo? What would you do for entertainment in Cairo?

Plenty of things. Very progressive city. Very, very French orientated.

07:00 A lot of culture, a lot of history. I would go down to Aswan, down the Nile. I would go Giza, I’d go to the horse racing. All the normal things. It was just normal.

What were your favourite parts of the city to be in?

Favourite parts of the city. Well, not

07:30 really much in the city. I preferred the pyramids and Giza and parts of the Forbidden Cities and all those sorts of things and that’s why I picked up the history by going down to Aswan on the Nile and calling in at all the various artefacts on the way down and back again. I just lap up history but it was quite a normal, after what I had been

08:00 through I was so normal, it was hard to get used to. We would go out and have a drink, we’d go to Cropiers, we’d go and have dinner, we would go to the Bardier Casino and we’d go into the Anglo-Egyptian Union and read and do play reading.

Can you describe the Bardier Casino for us? Was it a casino or a brothel as well or?

It was both. It was a casino, it was a brothel, it was a nightclub. Everything.

08:30 Crown City is probably a brothel too.

What was the respectability or otherwise of this place?

Very, because she was a very powerful woman. Very, very powerful woman. A multi-millionaire, had all this beautiful property. She was 80 per cent French and 20 per cent Egyptian and she provided

09:00 good entertainment in Cairo. I mean the brothel was just hidden behind thing. I would never had known if I hadn’t sussed it out because when I went there, my husband and I were invited there and it was beautiful. Met us at the door, took us in, we had a few drinks at the bar, we had a bit of dinner. It was lovely. It was just like going anywhere.

What was your friendship with

09:30 **Madam Bardier? Did you see her again?**

I saw her over a period of three years and she always looked upon me as somebody whom she had adopted because she was madly, madly ambitious and she wanted all of the couth and culture and the fact that she had people like my husband and I in the British Army lifted her status no end. But she was just

10:00 like an elderly mate. Very, very attractive lady, a very nice lady, a very generous lady and I think if I hadn’t been married and she could have adopted me she would of, but I don’t think I would have been part of that but that was the relationship. She loved me to death and she loved introducing me to people. I told you she introduced me

10:30 to King Farouk and I also went camel racing up at the pyramids and mixed in with a lot of the high society because she was well respected. The fact that she was madam of the brothel. I mean brothels are just a part of life in the Middle East and in most parts of the country and in most parts of the world. They are not these sleazy little places like we get down here in the back streets in Sydney. I mean they are renowned.

11:00 **Well they were a roaring industry especially in Cairo during the war for obvious reasons. What**

did you see of men on leave in Cairo?

Commissioned officers were not permitted in Madam Bardiers. I saw them getting into trouble in certain parts of Cairo and I saw them floating down the Nile with knives in their backs. They were a wild and woolly bunch and I

11:30 didn't mix with the troops in Cairo.

What sort of trouble would you, were you referring to?

Well, they would fight. They would break joints up and they thought they owned the place. As I say they would go down to the brothel areas and not pay the bill and next minute they would have a knife in their back and they would be floating down the Nile. That's what I saw of them on leave. Our

12:00 friend again.

It's always the way. What were the reputations of the various nationalities?

Australians were very, very wild. Very, very wild. Unruly, undisciplined. The British were a soft touch and they were basically the people we were dealing with. Dominions, they classified the New Zealanders and Australians all in one hit

12:30 but the British had a lot more relationship with Egypt over many, many years. I mean they trained their army sort of thing so but these other people were just wild and woolly.

We might just come back to your impressions of Australians seeing as you moved here later on but we'll move on from that. You

13:00 **mentioned that you started in the Union, the Anglo-Egyptian Union. Can you tell us some more about that? And what was it?**

It was a very, very upmarket club in Cairo and because I was British and when I came back I'd had no normal living I applied to join the Anglo-Egyptian Union. That meant that I could borrow library books, like the ROC Club of which

13:30 I'm a member here, have been for 25 years. Because of our, its incorporated with our Imperial Servicemen's Club of which I was a member 25 years ago and now with ROC Club, we merged. And you can meet some very, very nice people. As I said a great number of people in Cairo are French and the upper class people are French. I'd meet them there. I'd go there to lunch.

14:00 I'd go the library and borrow books. They'd have entertainment. They had this play reading which really got me started.

Sorry about that. The play readings..

Yes.

What was the audience? What were they set up for?

No it was just offering people who wanted a normal life in the middle of the war things that they enjoyed doing. I mean everywhere you have play

14:30 readings, poetry groups or you have writing groups or you have photographs groups. This is no different just because it was Cairo in the war. No different at all. And I thought, because I used to be always very interested in play readings. I was never a professional but I used to join play reading groups when I was quite young to give me a chance to express myself and learn something and learn history. So I joined

15:00 and as I say, for our Christmas. That was lovely entertainment. Back to normality. From having to live like a whatever in the desert and living in a very, very low standard type of environment in any part of the war. So we had a Christmas party and New Year part and we put on three one act plays. Two of which I appeared in.

15:30 One, my first part I was adenoidal Else of 15 years old with the long black plaits with bloomers and black stockings and adenoids and the second one I played was a very vinegary north country housewife who henpecked her husband. They were one-act plays. All of them were one-act plays

16:00 and it was just fun. That was our way of having a good party and after the shows which were done on the roof of the Union which was beautiful we were all going to go down and have a big nosh up and a few grogs and that's when I got the tap on the door to say, "You are requested at the door," and as I say it was Bernard Lee and Toren Thatcher who I knew very well from British films and British acting

16:30 and they asked me if I was a pro and I said, "No way. The fact I'm a madam I'm not a pro and the fact I act I'm not a pro." And they said, "We were impressed with you and a couple of your girls. Are they friends of yours?" and I said they're members of my unit and they said, "Are they pros?" and I said, "No but they've been people who've been in arts for a long, long time." "We would like you to come down for an audition tomorrow. We are getting together

17:00 a group to do for the next x amount of time, a series of shows to cover the Western Desert, to cover any other part of the war zone whether it be Italy or Greece or whatever the hell it would be and you have to be military people to get the clearance to be there." And then they said, "Unfortunately there are so many of our professional actors in Britain who are all

17:30 over the world." So they said to me when I went for my audition, "We are very impressed with your ability to produce dialects." I said, "That's been a fun hobby of mine for years. When I meet someone and they tell me they're Scottish I break into a Scottish accent as a joke. If they're Irish I break into an Irish accent. If they're Cockney I break into a Cockney accent. It's just a bit of fun."

18:00 And they said, "Well very few people are good at dialects, even professionals." "No, it's just like some people collect marbles and some people do something else. A bit of fun." So that was it and I passed the audition and they said, "We will now contact your commanding officer and get permission of release and then we will move you into a new location and we will start preparing the various shows we are doing."

18:30 We went up and down the desert more times than I've had hot dinners. Up to Tripoli and back again, Mersenbatru, Benghazi, Tobruk, here there and everywhere. All of the places that were now located through the desert by virtue of the fact that we had Tripoli, we had Saranakor, we had Egypt, we had Libya, we had the works and we had to man them all and there were all these troops everywhere so

19:00 we used to do all of our coaching and preparing for the various acts in Cairo and then we would move up the desert and do our shows and then come back again and so on. Bernard Lee and Toren were the two basic producers.

Tell us about the troop? How big was it and what did they do?

What troop?

The concert party.

Oh we did everything.

How many people

19:30 **were in it?**

Oh it varied because we had straight actors, we had vaudeville, we had bands, we had comics, we had everything and we just, we were never the same group all the time. If we went to one place and we were going to do certain plays, as a straight actress, I was basically a straight actress but then I got involved in comedy because Bernard said to me one day, "I think

20:00 you will be a perfect foil for Tommy Cooper." Tommy Cooper who was 6ft 5. Who eventually he died the year I went over to England. I'd seen him once when I was there but he was in a Command Performance and he died the following year but we were great mates and I was the foil for Tommy. In other words, the straight man. I also did, there were a couple of comedians in England who,

20:30 Elsy and Doris Walters. (UNCLEAR) and I played one of those because they didn't have enough people who were able to work in just one strand. I mean straight acting was my love, absolutely and I continued in, as a straight actress when I went back to England and the first play I did was By Candlelight with Edmond Purnam who was the student

21:00 prince and then I did Margaret Latham from then on and then I went to the various arts theatres over the south of England and continued meeting all of those people and I did a comedy with Terry Thomas with the teeth, the split. And I just sort of continued on from there. But our concert parties varied because we were all serving troops. If I wasn't out on the road

21:30 perse I'd being doing something connected with the concert party. Administratively, production wise or community wise or whatever. But we were just a large group of people from Cairo.

How did you move around?

Trucks, 3 tons with our luggage and buses. I mean we had our own buses but we moved all our own props and all our own

22:00 people.

Can you describe one of the performances? What would happen when the concert party rolled into a camp and what would you do?

Well it had been fully advertised and it said who we were and who we were not and we used to have our critiques there and the girls would go to their quarters and dressing room and the guys would go to theirs and we would be fed and then we would do our shows and after

22:30 the show we would have a party and mix and match with the troops. And that sort of thing. It was that sort of thing all the time.

Can you describe one of the shows? Where was the, how was the stage set up and where was the ..?

Well it varied. I mean if it's a straight play who you have to have sets. If it's not a straight play you don't have sets. The number of props you have, I mean Elsy and Doris Walters they had a bucket and a

23:00 thing and you know my hair in curlers and all that sort of thing and it was designed accordingly. It was just like any other theatrical company. I mean I've done the Opera House since there. Say to me what did you do at the Opera House? Very simple, I did the army concert at the Opera House with well known artists and I used to dress them and I used to do production and I used to be part of the production company but they are all different. I worked with Donny

23:30 Ruddle and the band and I loved that because it was all sort of get up and go and whoop, whoop and we did Donny Ruddle's show at Durnar on New Year's eve and I think I got a bit inebriated and swung up on the ropes and came down on the flies but anyway I lived. But that was the way we operated. It was fun and then we would go back to Cairo for a bit of R & R [Rest and Recreation] because we travelled thousands of miles. Not exactly

24:00 salubrious accommodation. It was barracks and it was the bare essentials and not very glamorous and we had to come out smiling and all teeth flashing and then go out and mix and talk to the boys afterwards.

There are no opera houses in the Western Desert, though. What, did you take everything you needed with you or did you?

No, no, everywhere

24:30 up to Tripoli they had built barracks after the departure and remember I was down in Cairo before any of this happened so I had plenty of times to organise, they had Derna, they had Benghazi, they had Merzer, they had Tobruk, they had wherever, everywhere they had established permanent camps because

25:00 there was an awful lot of mopping up to do. Even though we had got everyone out of Egypt, Libya and Saranakar we had to have permanent garrisons there for some time before we started demobilising people and sending them home. So just like any other, it could be a church hall, it could be the other ranks mess and we would have a stage and it would all be set up between our people and the units

25:30 and we just used what we had. The lighting wasn't always the very best and the dressing rooms weren't the best but we did the best we could just to entertain them. To relieve them all the tensions that they had been through. That was our job.

How did the audience respond? Can you describe an audience response?

Fantastic. I guess cheer and scream and jump up and down and dance on the tables if they had any.

26:00 I mean it was the most wonderful thing for them. You imagine fighting all the way to Tripoli and then come back and put in various stations all the way down as far as Alexandria. And that's where it began from Alex onwards and for them to have girls leaping around. They hadn't had any girls for a hundred years. I mean they didn't have any girls in the war when they were fighting from El Alamein up to

26:30 Tripoli and back or being stuck in Tobruk trying to fight their way out and they had already lost one battle but they had won a battle. So it was marvellous. We had POW's who used to paint the scenery and do all the hard work for us. Germans instead of painting me I'd say, "You've got scenery to paint," and away we'd go. We had an awful lot of support from the POWs [Prisoners of War]. They had no option

27:00 but they loved it.

Were they all German? Or Germans, Italians.

No, some German. Mostly German because we wouldn't have the Italians. I said, "That bloody Italian that serenades him, I don't want to know him because I'll knock his lights out. Keep him out of my hair." But the Germans were beautiful.

In what way were they beautiful.

There were very, not subservient but they were very, very, very aware of their situation and they were very, very kind

27:30 and they were very civil and they knew that if we approved of them they would have cushy POW life. But if we didn't approve of them then it would be into the POW camp. But they were selected POWs to do a lot of work with us and for us.

What opportunity did you have to talk to these Germans?

Quite a lot. I told you one was madly in love with me.

28:00 I used to come home at night from a show and there was pictures of me painted in evening gowns etc etc with a smile on my face. I also came home one night and there was, because I smoked then, a cigarette case made out of a metal from a plane that had been shot down and with a nail, nothing else

28:30 and he'd pinched the material, the sort of material off the seats of the plane and he built a thing that looked like the Taj Mahal and behind everything he put the blue to come through and put a little clip on it and it was all done with a nail and file and he was just the dearest little thing. But they knew, I said the difference between German soldiers

29:00 and Italians, they were disciplined soldiers and they worked according with the Geneva Convention the same as we did. The Brits and the Australian all worked but not the Italians. They were bloody useless, hopeless.

How did you respond to all this affection being lavished on you by all these troops and POWs who were helping you?

It wasn't obvious,

29:30 you wouldn't know but they used to just gaze at me like a puppy. Have you ever seen a puppy with its big eyes looking at you and going. He used to just look at me and smile. We couldn't even say a word to each other because he didn't speak a word of English and I didn't speak a word of German then. I've learnt since but I just smiled and said, "Danke," and he'd said, "Thank you," and away he'd go. Not to be seen, not to be heard, not to tread over a line

30:00 but as I say this Italian he brought me in a cup of tea and he's going, "Oh sol a mio," in Italian and I said, "Get out of here." "Oh, oh my heart," and I said, "See that. Small. Hurt. Get out," and I said to my boss I don't want him. So he got rid of all the Italians because there was an awful amount of animosity with what they'd done to our troops

30:30 and these boys who were with me weren't just actors they were fighters. They'd all been involved in the war but they were brought back to Cairo to start this organisation. I mean Toren and Bernard Lee were both majors in the army and they were in the El Alamein battle so it wasn't that they were actors first and soldiers second. They were soldiers first

31:00 and actors second. I mean they weren't made keen about having Italians with us when we travelled so they got rid of them and stuck to the Germans.

What about the attentions of the troops? You mentioned some of them hadn't seen women for a while and they would have been very keen to talk to you or more.

I mean they surrounded us. We always came down afterwards, after the finale and come down and talk to

31:30 them but they were very respectful. Very respectful and they loved it and the same thing with all the concert parties that I was responsible for here that went to Vietnam and I see a lot of them, Little Patty and this one and that one and all the other people that were over in Vietnam. And the guys were gob smacked [stunned] that somebody had brought them women and they used to just look from afar but we never had any trouble. Never.

32:00 **Where was your husband at this time? What was he doing?**

He was in Cairo and sometimes he was on detachment to various places being a Signaller. But as I say he went home nine months before me.

How did you like, dislike being newly married and separated from your husband?

It wasn't easy. Wasn't easy

32:30 but it just had to be. I was subjected to army discipline and so was he. We spent every spare minute we could get together and every time I got back to Cairo Bernard used to say, "I suppose you want a bit of leave now?" And I'd say, "Absolutely," and that was fine. It was just, I mean when we were in Cairo together in the service I mean that was easy

33:00 because we were both there but immediately I went to the army unit, it's only when I was in Cairo I saw him and the rest of the time I was travelling.

What was the biggest or most memorable performance you remember being involved in during your time in the concert parties?

What do you mean performance?

I mean performance.

When I fed Tommy Cooper because I had never done straight

33:30 work in my life except as a straight actor and I thought he was magnificent and he was magnificent and it was very easy for me to be carried along with the euphoria but when he went back to the UK and he was part of the First Command Performance I thought that's my greatest moment. I have been with a command performance

34:00 actor.

Can you give us an idea of Tommy Cooper's routines and what your job was as a straight woman?

No. No idea. You had to be an ad liber. He laid down the ground rules. He turned on the Irish act and he had the big flat feet like this and he was a very, very naughty boy about many things and he had a lot of people say, "My God, he's a bit off." But

34:30 I just had to ad lib. So there's no actual, there's no routine laid down between a straight man and a comedian. If you can't pace him and feed him then you no longer work with him. It's the hardest job I ever did because when you're a straight actress you have a script and you read it and you all know what you're doing and the same thing when I did Elsy and Doris Walters.

35:00 I knew the routine, I knew I had to sing and how I sang and I used to do all those old things like and My Old Man Said Follow the Band all those things are scripted but not when you are a straight man with a comedian of his standing. I can tell you.

Was he one of the more popular acts for the troops? What did they like the most about the concert?

I wouldn't have a clue. How would I know? I wouldn't know in their minds.

What brought the house down?

35:30 Everything. I mean two flies crawling up the wall they would have screamed the house down. This was civilisation. I don't think you understand being so young the privations they had suffered for so long and anything that was back to normality they would just go raving mad. Hard for you to understand because I mean you're far too young and you haven't had the sort of experience.

I'm certain I can't

36:00 **understand it but perhaps.**

True. This is what. The fact that there was a sign up, and I've got many of those signs that were put up outside their barracks. "The show will commence at 8.30 tonight in the Durnar whatever," and it showed the cast who was appearing and how much it was in pietas and the prices on the bottom. As I said I've kept those as souvenirs, some of them, not all of

36:30 them and they would all scrub up and shave and you know really get with it and go to the show and roar, roar, roar and the other girls did other things as well. We never had lessons, three girls. But sometimes I was the only girl.

During this time you were working in and out of Cairo you mentioned before

37:00 **you were trying to keep in touch with home and you were worried about what was going on back in England.**

Not then. What would be worrying me then?

Well what did you know about what was going on back then? What did you know about what was happening in the war at the time? Was this after the war had finished are we talking now or?

No but there was nothing happening. All the bombing had stopped and there was no problem of that kind in England. None at all. So I wasn't worried about what was going on in England then. It was during the war that I was worried

37:30 about what was going on in England. I didn't get back to England until 1947 and virtually was over.

Where were you when the war ended?

In Egypt.

Do you remember that occasion?

No, I couldn't remember. Whether I found out the war had happened. But that wasn't paramount in my mind. I was doing what I was doing and I knew I had to keep doing it

38:00 because my contract there was not up and I worked militarily wise until '46 and I didn't get back to England until '47.

How had your ambitions changed? You always wanted to be in the army and now suddenly you were in the army but you were also an actress.

Had nothing to do with it. It was synonymous with being in the army. I'd done my fighting. I had done everything I wanted to do and this was part of our responsibility to the

38:30 troops who were fighting and needed some entertainment. It's like saying report for duty or do jankers [fatigue duty] or go and drop dead or run a parade or whatever. You don't question orders if you're a good soldier. You do as you were told, and when Bernard said to me this could mean another two years

on your three years, well, so be it. If that's where

39:00 I'm needed and that's going to help these troops who've done a most magnificent job, that's fine with me.

Which was more satisfying for you, the more front line army experience or this one when you were helping the troops in a different way?

The whole thing. The whole thing because up there I was supporting them by making sure they got correct intelligence. Down there I was asked to lighten their load, let them settle down, get established in the various places they are staying in

39:30 until they can get home to their loved ones. Mine is not to question why. Mine's just to do as told.

All right. We'll stop there and take a bit of a break.

Tape 8

00:35 **Pat just asking you, I'm just interested if you missed anything about your master signals work when you joined? I mean you mightn't have time to reflect on your signals work but was there anything you missed about being a signaller when you joined up with the entertainment unit**

01:00 **and stopped being a signaller?**

No, it was just as I said I'm very, very structured. I take on the job and it may vary quite considerably but if you undertake a job you do. I mean I, it was such a transformation for me to be leading that sort of life and be mixing

01:30 in people with no danger with no problems, with no stress, with no strain and just being able to relax and be myself and enjoy as they enjoyed and knowing that we were giving them a service. Was just tremendous because we had all been in it together. I mean all those thousands of people in that battle which was the most telling battle of the entire war of which I was very proud to be a

02:00 part and any little part that I played I was always very proud. Funny thing, if you have an Africa Star whether its in the UK or here, on Anzac Day I lead my troops I walk down the street. First Anzac Day years ago and a guy suddenly came out from the crowd and said, "You're my mate. Up the Afrika Korps." And they

02:30 have a fellowship which is the strongest of all because of what we achieved in the Middle East between us, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Polish, Ghurkhas and the Brits and because we had a successful campaign, the most successful of the war. I mean to get Rommel out of Egypt when he could have been in Cairo

03:00 sitting down at Croppiers having a grog and a chocolate with a swastika on it. I mean that was the most fantastic overall, even full of problems, because you can't put all the diverse people with diverse egos together and think its going to be easy. It's not. But the ultimate was we won. Like the Americans when they caught Saddam Hussein, we've got him

03:30 and when we got Rommel out of Egypt we said, "We've won," and that was the most telling, there is no other more telling massive campaign with so many people integrally involved that was won and I've thought to myself, and I've thought many times since, "What a lucky girl you were to be there and play your part."

04:00 And afterwards because the guys knew when we were concert party that we had been with them at the battle we were just God to them. Those wonderful girls that gave us all that intelligence because it was made known that we were all soldiers and they'd say, "Where were you?" and I'd say, "Up there with you," and they say, "Oh my God were you?"

04:30 And they just thought it was just brilliant because people within a war zone people don't really know if the right hand, left hand know what they're doing. The only people who know are the commanders who have the plans of the war and they all know their role. This flank, that flank, a pincer movement whatever it is. Mobile laundry and bath, AGH [Australian General Hospitals], field hospitals whatever. Everybody's got to do their job

05:00 to the absolute nth degree and then they barely know what the left and right hand are doing but they know they are part of something and when we came face to face with those blokes and Bernard or Toren would be MCs [Masters of Ceremony] and they would be introducing the cast at the end and they'd say, "Warrant Officer Pat Rawlings, El Alamein. Sergeant Joe Blades, El Alamein."

05:30 I mean that would bring the house down more than the fact that we were bloody good actors and actresses. The fact that we were there and were part of it. So that's how the whole thing was embraced as far as I was concerned. I didn't care if they thought I was the next Margaret Layton or Terry Thomas

it was that we were sharing with them our joy of winning.

06:00 **And El Alamein was definitely a badge of honour. You say you can't quite remember where you were at the end of the war. I'm just wondering, do you recall any celebrations that you might have taken part in?**

Not like what happens in the cities here. No. There was no question of celebrations because everything was still under cover so nobody danced in the streets. We didn't have streets

06:30 to dance into. The only reason we knew that the war had come to a closed was when we were moved back out of the war zone and back to Cairo, "You're being redeployed." If the war was not over we wouldn't be redeployed. But no it wasn't like you see in the films all these Australians dancing in the streets here, and all holding arms and whirling around or what happened in the UK.

07:00 That didn't happen in war at all. We just knew that we had done our job and we were being moved back and we were grateful. That's all. So when we got back to Cairo we learnt more about what happened in Cairo because that was the general headquarters and that's where Wavel sat and that's where all the, and that's when Churchill came out and everything was decided, fixed and transmitted.

07:30 We were only allowed to know certain things when we came back. I learnt more and more and more when we came back. But I might as well have been a vegetable up there because we weren't told anything. You can't afford to.

Well you've already talked about the fact that you stayed on for a couple of years after the end of the war but I'm just wondering you briefly mentioned demobilisation

08:00 **earlier in the day, were you demobbed at any point or?**

No. I wasn't demobbed until, because I hadn't finished my term of service when I got back to England because when I signed up with for a further extension with the entertainment unit I had to fulfil my contract in the UK and I wasn't demobbed from the entertainment unit until '47 and from there

08:30 I was then redeployed to re-raise the artillery and the permanent army in Britain as a member of the Women's Royal Army Corps. So I wasn't demobbed from the British Army until 1947.

And how difficult was that task?

Well what do you mean how difficult?

09:00 **Re-raising the artillery what were the challenges?**

Not difficult at all because we had all of my staff and that was that Anne Tilbury and Richardson had all been right through the war and when we were just on the headquarters of the London District as a particular cell with just transition move back to regular army from wartime services.

09:30 Because a lot of ordinary people were being demobbed all the time but there was a regular element that had to be restarted and reprogrammed and everything else and I was just part of that command.

What were the highlights during those couple of years, '47–49 while you were with that unit?

Not very much. Very mundane, very ordinary, very structured. We knew what our job was and we just did it

10:00 but to get things back to normal again so we had a regular army and a territorial army and never the twain shall meet and the British carried on looking for the next war. So we carried on from there. Oh no, it was very ordinary. I thoroughly enjoyed it because I was able to live out and I'd live in army barracks

10:30 for a long time and I was able to live out in Ham Common and it was very nice to be able to travel around as a normal sort of human being.

Well what was the UK like in those years post war?

Still terrible because we were feeding the bloody Germans that we'd beat. We were sending all this food over. We were still rationed. Appalling and our standard

11:00 of living was still very poor, very, very poor. We were trying to rebuild our lives because there was little time to have rebuilt. I mean if you'd walked into Britain in 1949 and seen the devastation and the potholes and the cathedrals and the buildings and everything else and the shops and the houses and everything blown to pieces. It took a long time, a long time

11:30 and we were continuing with the supply of Berlin until 1951 and onwards. We were sending bombers over with food for them. The people we'd beaten.

And what were your own food supplies like?

Terrible. Very ordinary. We still had rationing. Still had rationing and I couldn't believe when I came to Australia and the first breakfast they offered me was steak, chops and tomatoes and eggs and I said,

"What?"

12:00 and they couldn't believe it. Oh no, rationing continued for a long time in Britain. That's typical of British persona. Beat the buggers to death and then feed them and look after them at your own expense and the expense of your own nation. You know one egg a month and this and this and coupons and not being able to get clothes and all this business. So my trip to Australia was very

12:30 timely in 1949 to walk into the shops here and live in the school and as I say the food that they were feeding us. We kept looking at it and saying, "That's a week's supply in England.'

And what did you know of Australia before you came here?

Not very much. I attended the seminar which prompted me because we had the choice, they were offering

13:00 all parts of the colonies and it was Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia, and I listened to all the presentations from all the people and I said to the guys "If we're going anywhere, I like Australia." And they said, "Yeah, we do too." Very good, very good presentation and it was the difference between our way of life which in Britain is very structured

13:30 and the new, young country with limitless opportunities which we found. And I did have limitless opportunities here to teach, be well paid, finish my degree at university and later on get another one through education in the army, getting into the army and having a wonderful life from there. It was limitless

14:00 opportunities and I was never, ever, ever sorry.

What degree did you do?

I finished my social work degree and I'm a podiatrist. Because when I came back to England in the army I was a bit bored and I thought, "What am I going to do?" and one of my nursing sister friends says to me, "Pattie, we've started up with a big bang the adult education

14:30 courses and this is what the army is offering. You get a choice of so many degrees and provided you pass each semester they will pay your fees and all you have to pay is your own books. If you fail you pay both." So I podiatry because I was interested in going through wanting to be either a nurse or a doctor

15:00 and my medical thoughts with everything I did with my physical education and kinesiology, the human body was a sort of thing for me and when I did podiatry and I had to do third-year medicine it was the closest I'd ever been to being able to do something productively, and I did post graduate and I also worked on sporting injuries and prothesis for sporting injuries.

15:30 So that all culminated together.

You've had an incredibly busy life.

No time to get into too much mischief darling.

Well you've talked a little bit this morning about how you first joined the army in Australia but perhaps

16:00 **you can take us through, and you had a very long career in Australia with the army. Perhaps you can just take us through some of the highlights from the Korean time and later from the Vietnam time.**

Well, as I told you due to my ability in the British Army and I was the one and only British Army person to start the corps here they used me as a guinea pig all the way through. I think we got that down

16:30 didn't we and because of using me as a guinea pig I had the most interesting jobs to do as a women. First general staff officer in Adelaide, I mean apart from all the other things I've done. Whether recruit training, officer cadet training and all these other sorts of things to go to Adelaide as a staff officer training at the headquarters and have the whole of the National Service

17:00 Battalion under my control from a training perspective just gave me limitless opportunities and made me appreciate and made me miss less the British Army where we had been fully integrated and the war situation, where we were fully integrated and I thought, "I'm going to enjoy this army," because originally I thought, "It's going to be very boring here in comparison with what I'm doing." Because when the director said to me, "I'd like you go to come in as an officer," I said

17:30 "Look, I'm not interested in standing at doors for curfews, checking the toilets and ablutions to see if they have been cleaned, I want a hands on job." So that's when I did hands on for the first four months and then she gave me a direct commission which I couldn't argue with because they wanted to use my training ability to train people here to make sure they were properly trained with my British expertise and they were and

18:00 they were all like little Pattie Rawlings. We used to slow march through the cities and parades and everything else and it was my forte. Thorn Jackson said, "Why lose all that to impart to our girls when

they've never had anything like it in the whole of their lives. Even during the war."

When you enlisted in the WRAAC in 1951..

Yes February.

18:30 **What was the state of the WRAACs when you enlisted? What was that organisation like?**

They enlisted me to start it. There was no organisation. All we had was a director, one Colonel Kathleen Best who was the director, a director in Sydney and a director in Victoria as the sort of start but we were all enlisted, there was five of us to start

19:00 the corps in it's various roles so there was no organisation. No nothing. And that's why there was a fight between the director and the AD [Assistant Director] WRAAC. The AD WRAAC said, "I cannot run this command and its training without Pat Rawlings, that's very simple. They have not got the expertise in female who are trained instructors." She said, "Once we get established, once we get organised you can have

19:30 Pat as an officer so she can do other types of training and if needs be go back to signals where she obviously shone." So there was a bit fight between these two but one was a colonel and one was a major so the colonel won. I mean the major won which was very strange, not the colonel. So I did all of that training and I took people that I was training, I used to have 84 in each recruit school and any

20:00 potentials I saw, I took them and ran a special course for them how to be a training instructor. I also wrote all the syllabus for the customs of the service, the staff duties in the field and all of the things relative to what the army is about because it was all just second nature to me and I had only

20:30 just left the British Army so I had a long hard training there. So there were two of us. I was the sergeant major here in Sydney and Jess Padley was the sergeant major in Victoria. She ran two recruit schools. I ran two recruit schools and then we amalgamated and we from Sydney moved down to Victoria and that then became the WRAAC Training Company. So we amalgamated all our expertise and then we went from there.

21:00 **I'm just wondering what you learned about the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Services], the Australian..?**

I know all about the AWAS, all about all of the Australian Women's Services and I mix with them. I've mixed with them for years because I'm the president of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps Association and was and started the first association, I'm also president of the Kirribilli

21:30 Ex-Serviceman's Association and every other military organisation, we are all very closely aligned. The AWAS, and I always say to them and they love this, "The AWAS were the people who were our former army personnel and we are the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps and we followed on from them and we are the first peacetime organisation that

22:00 set up a national association, of which I was state and federal president and we have continued your heritage." So I knew all about them.

I was wondering if any of the AWAS women stayed on or...

No, they were all demobilised but a lot of them joined and we brought in Colonel Best brought in after she got the hard core of the training staff, two warrant officers,

22:30 a couple of sergeants and a couple of majors, one in Victoria and one here. She brought in a selected number of former AWAS officers and I trained them at Healesville to bring them up to date into what was what and who was who and that gave her a hard core base to work on.

23:00 Major Crane who was the deputy to the director, she and I set up a school at the Army School of Health at Healesville and she was the senior instructor and I was the other instructor and I used to teach all of the hands on and give lectures on customs of the service and more modern situations within the Australian Army because I was trained when I was brought in

23:30 in February, I was trained by the RSM of Duntroon and the major of Duntroon who had brought me up to date of what was going on because they trained the cadets up there.

Yeah, that's an interesting point because I was wondering, given that you grew up in a British model I was just wondering how you adapted to the Australian model.

I learnt immediately I knew why they

24:00 were enlisting me and what value I was otherwise there wouldn't have been a dog fight between a colonel and a major and as Colonel Best said, "With her signal experience don't tell the colonel of signals here that you won't let her come to you. That you're saying she's got to train the women first." I learnt everything I could learn from Jock Wilson and also the RSM from Duntroon to make sure that I was up to date with what went on.

24:30 Their drill methods at Duntroon were exactly like my drill methods in the British Army which are very

pucker as you can probably see if you would like to have a good look at that. That's the parade I trained and they marched the British way, not the Australian way, the British way.

What's the difference? Hang on, you're connected.

I'm not moving too far. Shoulder height.

25:00 They don't stroll like a lot of Australians, they march the way I trained them and all the recruit schools I trained all permeated through and they all became Pat Rawlings soldiers because that was the only way I knew about drill. I mean I was trained by the guards so I knew exactly what you had to do but it was very laid back here and it was wartime anyway. They

25:30 never had a peacetime army here of women. I mean their job was to get on and do what they had to do to support the services but when it came to a peacetime situation, although they call it peacetime it was war for the whole 22 years I was in, they had to be trained to learn that there are lots of things that are very different and they've got to be soldiers. That's why when those nursing sisters came back from Korea,

26:00 I had them unenviable task of turning them into soldiers. It really was a pretty hard task because I wasn't a nurse and they certainly were not soldiers, but we had a wonderful passing our parade. Jesse Bow said, "How did you get them to do this?" and I said, "Years of training." And that's it.

And was there anything about the British way of doing things that didn't work in Australia?

26:30 No. No. I mean a couple of people that the director had brought in, in the Office of Qualifying School, thought they were a little bit above the fact and why did they have to import a Pom which I'm not in full sense, I was never born there, I'm only half British and half French. So I said, "I sense," I went out on the parade ground one day

27:00 and I said, "I sense there is a little antagonism about the fact that your officer qualifying and refresher course because you were all in the Australian Army and you were all officers. Why do they have to import me? Hopefully because I've had more training then all of you, I'll be able to teach you something and you can adapt to what

27:30 you need to take up and you can leave alone what don't want to take up." So I thought, "I'll fix you too." And at Healesville we had two tennis courts together and to control a platoon to move from one side to the other and back and do various manoeuvres, I mean it was split-second timing with your commands otherwise they would have been over the hill and into the ditch.

28:00 So one of them I said, "Lieutenant Mann, it's your turn now to go through the manoeuvres which I've just shown you." Well, she couldn't get half the commands out and I said, "Halt them there or else say don't say goodbye but they will be down the hill and in trouble," and the second one did they same thing. So when they came back on again I said, "We'll start again," and at the end of the lecture when we were going up to the anteroom

28:30 to have coffee they said, "That will teach us to open our big mouths won't it?" and I said, "Yes, that's only just one of the times. Just learn and be thankful that you've got somebody whose here with the experience you didn't have. It's not your fault you didn't have the experience. It's your government's fault that you didn't have the experience. It's my luck that my government that I've got the experience and either take what I teach you

29:00 or drop out." And that was it and that was the only time there was any discussion and after that I ran tattoos in three states, used to do marches through the city, the lining up for the queen in '54. I was her equerry in the '54 when she came over here for her tour, the queen. Each to his own.

29:30 But I felt I was lucky. I said, "You haven't been trained by the guards. Can you imagine what it was like? I used to go home and cry all the time but at least it was the best training in the world." If you want a ceremony watch Britain. Trooping of the colour all the various marches through the street. Their regiments, the tattoos. We could never, ever

30:00 because that's longevity of years, could we never, ever put on a show like that. But we can learn and adapt what we think would be satisfactory here and when I did that Princess Margaret Parade there, people said, "Never thought I would see that in a lifetime." And that's way I march on Anzac Day and me and my

30:30 troops and they march that way too. So each to his own. Lots of things they could teach me and I would listen to them and very happily listen but lots of things I could teach them and they had to listen, to learn so that they could take over from me when I went off to do other pastures to go off with male corps because this was the only time I was with the female corps until

31:00 Colonel Best intake at Healesville and an Officer Qualifying Course of warrant officers and sergeants that were hand selected to go through to OQS [Officer Qualifying School] and I lectured there down in Melbourne and then I went to my male corps again.

What type of walks of life did women come from in that first?

In the WRAAC?

Yeah.

31:30 Magnificent. Absolutely magnificent and they were very badly treated by virtue of their conditions of service because they were not permanent members of the defence force. It was only a temporary force and they could only join up for four years and a great number of them left after that period of time because they were professional women who just wanted their chance. They were too young

32:00 for the war and they wanted to sort of just carry on but they were treated very badly and the establishment gave them no incentive to get anywhere and many of them left but they were far, far higher standard in peacetime than they were in wartime. The AWAS in wartime and the peacetime recruits that I had. In Sydney I did the first school of '84 and they were all New South Welshmen and the second school

32:30 were all from Queensland with the exception of six New South Welshman and I had the most amazing people from the corporate world who had always wanted to be in the army and as I say, all you could offer half of them. They stopped at a corporal or a sergeant when they had the brains to do all sorts of things until we got the corps going and once we were accepted by the Defence Department and we got the royal [permission] then we went ahead

33:00 except we didn't ever have enough stated ranks for them to get promoted too far. I mean, I was a sergeant and that was as far as I could go in my day and yet from the time I was made a captain in 1955 I never had a lesser wage than a lieutenant colonel or a major because a full male lieutenant colonel is a major's job but the establishment didn't allow for women to fill their particular

33:30 codes because they weren't ECN005, which are women, but I was still the boss and I went through my pay sheet and I thought, "Gawd struth." From 1955 to 1972 I never was paid a captain's pay, 'lieutenant colonel, higher duties or major' depending on what job I was doing but we were never given the chance of the rank.

Do you

34:00 **think it mattered?**

Very much. It's changed now. They've got women brigadiers and lieutenant colonels and all over the place. They were entitled. It was just the male attitude and it was the male attitude that stopped any of these women from going overseas or getting anywhere and they were the only country in the dominion countries or any other country that stopped their women

34:30 going overseas and getting wartime experience and service because that was the Australian attitude and half of them were chauvinist bloody pigs anyway. The director said, "It's not me," and I said, "I know this." She said, "The older, stupid old fools up in army headquarters," and because I had been divorced when they selected me for the army and she said to me, and she said when she came up from Melbourne to interview me.

35:00 Dawn's very right, she has a magnificent record. She said, "Why do you have a different name from your family?" and I said, "Because I was married." "Oh my God," and I said, "But I'm divorced." And she said, "We still don't take divorced women." And I said, "What do you expect me to do ring a bell and say, 'leper, leper, leper'? I came to this country because it was a young productive country. You're that far behind the British guidelines you want to give up.

35:30 I'm sorry, take me or leave me." And she said, "I'm going to fight for you. I want you. I need you." And she got a Military Board Instruction 104/51 allowed divorcees without children to join the army. But I used to give them bloody hell about, if a woman got VD [Venereal Disease] in the WRAAC they would kick her out and I would say, "Come on. We treat our men and women,

36:00 all the men here get free medical treatment in the RAP and because she's a female and she gets VD you're kicking her out." And I said, "Do you remember Blossoms in the Dust. Bad girls don't have babies and we're getting rid of, you're keeping the bad ones and getting rid of the good ones." But their attitude was absolutely. Colonel Best said to me, "Dear God after a conference with you I

36:30 feel like that." And I said, "But you agree with me." She said, "I do but I've got to fight these fuddy-duddy men at the headquarters." And I said, "We'll win in the long run," and we have. Now, as I say, they have equal opportunities, equal rank structures, equal pay. What we fought for and did never get.

When was that case of VD that you just mentioned?

When we were

37:00 writing our rules and regulations in 1951 at our conference, our officers conference at Healesville and the rules that came down for our discussion were, "If a female gets a venereal disease she is discharged immediately." "If she gets pregnant she is discharged immediately," and I stood up and said, "My God, I thought I was coming to a young active country. I've never heard such crap in all my life.

37:30 Anyone can get a venereal disease and they are many and various. A man goes to the RAP, he's looked

after, he's giving condoms and a women is kicked out. What sort of equality is that?" And that's when I said, "I remember Blossoms in the Dust when Greer Garson said, 'Bad girls don't have babies.' So you are kicking the good ones out." That doesn't happen now. That doesn't happen any more. They are looked after

38:00 and they don't get kicked out for VD but that has not happened until we fought. I felt like a suffragette. I said, "I'm not going to burn my bra and hang myself up on the railings but you have so much to learn here." And it was true because that didn't happen in the British Army.

I was just going to ask you that. Was the..?

Certainly not. That's why I said, "Where do you get these rules and regulations from? You say we're antiquated, that doesn't happen to us.

38:30 Never has. Men and women are treated equally."

So when you were in the UK in the British forces if a women got pregnant she was not discharged?

No. No. She made up her mind whether she wanted the child and if she kept the child, yes. But if she wanted an abortion, no. No we didn't have any of that crap at all. We were more straight down the line and that's

39:00 why I couldn't believe. Colonel Best used to say to me, "I have a headache after we have these conferences and you tell us how antiquated we are." And I said, "Well you are. You are." And I said, "When people said to me, 'Why do you want to go to the colonies?' And I said, 'Australia is a young, vibrant country with I think, very clear thinking and I think I'll have a future there.' Well you can imagine

39:30 how I felt." I walked into a pub in Parramatta and they said, "You can't come in here. It's men only in this bar." And I said, "I beg your pardon." And they said, "There's a parlour around there for you," and I went around to the parlour and there are a couple of these topsies [women] with curlers in their hair shelling the peas and I thought, "God give me strength." A real big let down for me I can tell you.

It must have been a bit of a shock.

But I won in the long run

40:00 and I got the same sort of treatment from the males who thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. I looked after them and they looked after me and the accolades that, I was going through my paperwork to see if there was anything I needed, that I had from generals about going around doing the conditions of service and pay and how interesting my lecture was and looking after the soldiers that were unfortunately

40:30 injured very badly in Vietnam and the amount of time and energy and things, they thought I was Florence Nightingale by the time I was finished. But that was my personality and I will fight anybody and I don't care. People have a love/hate relationship with me. Some people who lay down and I walk all over them adore me. Other people think, "She is an egotistical bastard," and hate me. I don't care.

41:00 I count my friends on two hands. I've got hundreds and hundreds of friends, not friends, acquaintances, but that's my way of life and don't ever change, and certainly not at this age am I going to change and I wouldn't change one thing in my life that I've done.

That's good to hear. Our tape is just about to...

Tape 9

00:30 **I have one out of order question that I want to go back to before we continue on.**

Without notice?

Without notice. A question without notice. We were talking before a while ago about the Blitz and about what happened during air raids in the Blitz. One thing that we haven't gone through in detail is what happened on the gun in an air raid. I was wondering if you could tell us...

You just stand there and fire.

Can you take us through how the air crew works together when an air raid happens and you mentioned that the men were shooting the gun and the women were plotting the course.

01:00 **What was that?**

You were put on a stand to. There would be a command. Stand by your gun. You knew exactly what you had to do. Nobody had to tell you anything. I knew I had to operate the height finder and somebody else

would operate the predictor and we would get the information we were getting as to where it was coming from and we would plot it and plot it and we would tell the gun crew and the gun crew

01:30 would come in and fire and the gun crew would keep firing until they either got killed or ran out of ammunition which we never would. That was all. Simple as all that.

How was the communication happening at that moment and where's the information you are getting coming from?

The information is coming to the person who is the main operator of the gun with the information that is coming through from the people, the plotters that we have a raid coming, we would

02:00 have heard the air-raid siren go, he would give us the information, predict, height find, take action. And we would take action and we would pick up from our instruments and we would relay that to the gun centre and say, "Gun crew, breach, fire," and we would keep doing that all the time.

How quickly was the turnaround on that? How many times would you fire?

Bloody quickly. It

02:30 doesn't take long when you've got the information coming and the person who is the head of the gun, the particular gun and they were all under the control of one person and we all just contribute something. So when we stand to and we take up our positions and the information, "Raid coming from," wherever. So that's where we pick up and that's where we predict and that's where we get the height

03:00 and then we give him the information and he gives the information to the gun crew. The gun crew fire. Move the thing around. Once you've got the shell out of the gun if it's still the same affect that, it's a wave and they used to come in waves and be a fairly continuous sort of wave. I mean they'd still be pointed in the same direction but if there any change it used to be changed, he would control and we would all act like autonomies.

03:30 Bang, bang, bang. Simple as that.

We were talking before about the sounds of an air raid. What were the sights and sounds on the gun crew? What were the sounds like on the gun crew? What could you hear?

Bloody awful. You know you've got 100 bombers flying over you and all, we weren't concerned with what was coming over us with what we were trying to bring down. We were concerned with our own job. You don't have time to think about what's

04:00 happening. You know there's an air raid, there's a siren and you can hear the noise of them. They are great big bombers that came over in quillons over the Channel [English Channel] because they could spit from one side to the other, I told you and we are immediately in a stand to position and away we go. We just work like as if we were all wound up. It works that way.

What could you see of the results of your gun and

04:30 **whether you shot things down or not?**

Well, you could hear. All of a sudden Meeeeeaaaaaaaaw and hit the dirt somewhere. Meeeeeaaaaaaaaw. Another one, another one but we wouldn't know if it was us or any of the others in our regiment but you would hear if very clearly. They scream when they come down. You see a flash and see something hit and then Meeeeeaaaaaaaaw.

05:00 **How did that sound make you feel?**

Great.

Was there any type of tally about who was accredited with shots?

No, that's all a load of bullshit. They would put the number of planes they shot down on their fuselage. Bullshit. Just nonsense. Not concerned with that. All we were concerned with was that we could protect our area and by firing

05:30 and firing sometimes we had several hits. Sometimes we had no hits at least we were protecting them and the more we fired the less chance they had of doing any damage.

You were wound right up working like autonomies as you said. You got really wound up in this whole frantic work, what was the scene like when that air raid had finished?

The all clear went, we all breathed a sigh of relief. Checked each other out. Anybody hit. No, no, nobody hit and if somebody was hit, medic, take them away and look after them. We just breathed

06:00 a sigh of relief. "Thank God. Could do with a cup of tea." And that was it.

How many hits were there during your time on the gun?

I never counted the hits. I have no idea.

So was it common after a raid to have people…

We'd never know.

06:30 You wouldn't know whose gun hit who.

Not your gun but how many people were injured if you said, say afterwards.

You mean in the platoon? Some shrapnel. Nobody killed in my time. I told you I was hit by shrapnel but I'm alive and was alive but I can't remember within the regiment how many people were killed but there's a history of who was killed and who wasn't. But that wasn't my job. All I know is

07:00 that I'm alive.

What happened on the occasion that you were hit by shrapnel?

I didn't know. I was so busy doing what I was doing and I said, until I got back to my tent and took my boots and gaiters off and my shoe was full of blood and then I find this orange bit there. Cut through my daks [underpants] and this piece of shrapnel just ripped my leg open. That's all but you don't pay any attention to that. You just keep going.

07:30 I can't get you to understand is that you are absolutely ice. All you think about is survival, survival, survival, not location, location, location, survival. And when the all clear goes and you hop off and you think wasn't that great but you don't count things. It's cowboy stuff to say how many people were killed, how many people did this. That

08:00 was the last thing on my mind, I didn't want to know. I didn't know if any of my mates were killed.

Don't sell yourself short. You've gone a very long way to helping me understand what it's like and that's why I keep asking you about it and that description is really good. I mean for people in the future who when no one is around to tell them what it is like to shoot down or be on an ack-ack is great.

I mean we probably cheered. Said ,"Yeah beauty," and he would come down and we all hoped to God he didn't land on us

08:30 but that was success and as a team that was success and we all used to say, "Everybody right, everybody right?" all amongst our team. Yeah, but as I say I didn't know that I had been hit until I had been in to get undressed to go to bed. And I've got this lovely scar that looks like a quarter of an orange to prove it. My war wound.

That was my question without notice. Thank you for that.

09:00 **I just wanted to make sure we covered that before we went on. Back to where we were before, I wanted you to describe again in a bit more detail what your job was in the Vietnam War.**

Right. Well, I told you I was the AD WRAC in Tasmania and I get a call from the commander, the general at Headquarter Season Command at Victoria Barracks and he called me in and he said, "Captain Rawlings

09:30 or may I call you Pat?" and I said, "Thank you, Sir," and he said, "We have been charged with opening a cell, military only to cover the logistics and needs of the Vietnam War." And he said, "You must be aware that it's not a very popular subject in Australia and we've had riots

10:00 and we've had people raiding in the streets and remonstrating about the government sending troops to Vietnam." And he said, "We are trying to keep everything low key so I had," because you have an awful lot of public servants working in military establishments, particularly at headquarters. I don't know what the percentage but it keeps fluctuating and sometimes it gets too much. He said, "We've had two cases "

10:30 and this was in early days there were troops that we had sent over to work with Montinyard and teaching them fighting of a particular kind. Mountain and also forest. So he said, "But they are such an impersonal, they don't wish to get mixed up with the real problems."

11:00 And I said, "No, sir, I understand that," and he said, "Now your appointment has been discussed at very high level in army headquarters." I didn't mention this because this was a bit boring but I used to be responsible for the legal and financial affairs and the superannuation system called Defarb. I used to go all over Australia lecturing on the pros and cons and whys and wherefores of Defarb

11:30 and they brought in a new pay scheme of a star grading so you could be a sergeant but you could be a star 1 or star 5 and everything would change so my job as administrative officer on the headquarters staff was to go all over the countryside explaining these things and because I used so much about, this is when I worked with Ramey, Defarb, the brigadier in charge in

12:00 army headquarters said, "I think Pat Rawlings would be ideal because she was on our staff who were alerting and training troops into their financial intricacies and that's not easy." It's a knowing the Act and knowing the law and all these sorts of things and he said, "What we've got to ensure is that every

death is treated with absolute compassion.

12:30 Every soldier's body is brought back to burial which will all be organised with those in Eastern Command and Australian Capital Territory all be organised by you here, all legal and financial matters are explained to the widows or mother as in the case of sole son support and we want somebody who is on call in the cell

13:00 to have the necessary backup to work with the casualty people." We worked in a cell. A branch in army headquarters and I was the DAAG…deputy assistant general personnel services [DAGPS] and I had a staff of all army people and there were three captains, there were two majors, myself and, I was the temporary major but the major and

13:30 three captains who were responsible for the troop movements overseas, running the Vung Tao Ferry. NOTOCAS [Notification of Casualties], otherwise advising the families of the death of their son and funeral arrangements to be made within the service when they came back. And I was the coordinator of all of these people and my job, as I said was to go out. And I said,

14:00 "That sounds like a very big job to me, sir," and he said, "Well, the first time you've every in your life to say what you want and who you want to help you with that cell." I got a couple of very, very good females. One warrant officer and one sergeant who I wanted to be my administrative backstay in the barracks. So I said, "When does this start, sir?" and he said, "I want you to hand over Tasmania

14:30 in a week and come over and we will get organised from there and we will organise a house for you in the barracks." Because originally it was muted that you would go to Georges Height, which was our WRAC training establishment, and he said that would never work because Captain Rawlings will be expected to work 16-18 hours a day sometimes and she couldn't ever abide by three meals a day in an officers' mess in a training establishment.

15:00 She's got to have a house. So they gave me a beautiful house and I went back to fix up in Tasmania and I drove back. Put my car on the ferry and drove back into Victoria. There was this beautiful house with a moat all around. Sandstock. Glorious. You can imagine Victoria Barracks in Paddington right opposite to where the matron was and right next to where the commander's house was. So, I thought, "This is going to be interesting,

15:30 how do we get started here." So I decided I would have to have a, we would have to have a conference with all the facets of what we had to do and the people responsible so we could all interlink with each other and we could all be supportive of each other. But I say my job was to work out all the finances that they were eligible for with the death of their husband in Vietnam and that was a certain amount

16:00 of pension which is very different from things happen in Australia, in non-warlike situation and also for the mothers what they would get if they could prove their son was the sole supporter of them. I also had to make arrangements with rehabilitation centres for troops that were wounded and when they came back I had to interview them and decide

16:30 in discussion with them whether they wanted to stay in the army or they wanted to be rehabbed [rehabilitated] and I would work out all the pension entitlements for them and other things where guys were moving into homes where they were now in wheelchairs and they needed the army to provide rails, widen doors all that sort of thing. And that was all in my portfolio. The other thing I had to do was to try

17:00 as much as possible to save the widows from being subjected to a lot of unrest which was going in Australia and I would look after their civil debts for them. In other words investigate what their financial situation was and what they needed with the death of their husband. If they had a place to live or if they wanted retraining if they were young and if they had civil debts

17:30 let me know who they were and I would attack the people concerned such as a 20-year-old woman who was barely literate had a $5,000 Encyclopaedia Britannica when I walked into her house. That's just an ornament. She can hardly read or write and they were going her for the $5,000. She was completely out of her depth and so I spoke to these people concerned and said, "Take the books back please,"

18:00 and they said, "Can't do that," and I said, "Do you want any reputation left? I said I will absolutely vilify you if you don't do that because your salesman have sold to somebody who is not even mentally capable of knowing what a Encyclopaedia Britannica is," and they, money, they were overdraw with Harvey Norman and all these funny things so I used to go out and see

18:30 them and nine out of 10 of them were very amiable and I'd get her financially set up, get her training if she needed, organise move out of the barracks into accommodation, public housing if need be. Anyway, I did all of those things and I'd fly all over Australia. Usually in army aircraft to all of these people. I would attend their funerals. I'd do all of their legal work that I could do and then get an army solicitor

19:00 to finish the paperwork off so it didn't cost them anything legally and make sure they got their money. And you know I'm still friendly with the first one I ever saw and that was Zany Perello's husband Tony, who was with the training team way before the whole entire structure changed over there and we told the Americans to go there way and we'd go ours because we had lost too many people. And that's why we sent battalions. People

19:30 wanted to know why we sent more people but we were only logistically supporting the Americans and we lost more people because they go into war with a cigar and one of those musical things crashing and banging and they were hopeless. So we just said to the Americans, “Look you have your location in Vietnam and we’ll have ours. We’ll do Long Tan, Nui Dat, Vung Tau and we will send the battalions and we will send our logistic

20:00 support people to support our own area.” And that’s what I did until the end of the war.

It’s a fascinating job in some many different ways. I see a couple of questions about different sections of it.

Not fascinating. Exhausting.

Fascinating as well.

Exhausting. I nearly died.

From the interviews you had with the injured soldiers what insights did that give you into the soldiers lot in Vietnam and how the war affected them?

Oh a great deal I mean I

20:30 knew a lot about what went on in Vietnam and I also knew a lot of things nobody else would know and a lot of reasons of why they had to be protective of what went on in Vietnam but also be very careful of not upsetting their families out here. When the guy was supposed to be, when they used to go on R & R, when the guy was supposed to be here and his wife would ring me up and say, “I was at the airport for hours waiting for so-and-so,”

21:00 I’d say, “What happened? What are his particulars?” and she told me and I would turn over my ‘need to know sheet’ and he got VD and they stopped him from coming. I couldn’t turn around and say, “Sorry, he’s got syphilis,” and you had to adjust yourself to all those tricky things and make up all sorts of things and I had people that came back and died here who were injured and brought

21:30 back to Australia and died here which I had to deal with in the situation here. And the padre who contracted cancer came back from Vietnam and sort of have a talk to him man to man and say, “Sorry but I’ve got to tell you things I think you should know. Like what we’re going to pay your wife and kids when you’re gone. What a lucky man you are that you can discuss with me and go to heaven knowing your wife and kids are going to be looked after.

22:00 Other people blown up, they don’t know.” But it took it’s toll on me it really did. I nearly had a nervous breakdown at the end of the years.

I can imagine having to deal with that much grief alone would be very, very difficult.

I was at every funeral. I did the march through the streets I did all the protocol and when we put the first march through the streets and that stupid female threw

22:30 red paint all over the commander and I used to say, “Blah, blah, blah,” and I used to say, “Look, you just don’t know what you’re talking about. Don’t annoy with me. You don’t know the facts. If you knew the facts and if I had time to tell you, you would know very differently that it was a situation that we did the best we could and saved an awful lot of lives by dumping the Americans and sticking to our own area.

23:00 We lost very few lives after that apart from Long Tan which was an absolute marvellous effort by our troops who were ambushed by a VC [Viet Cong] group. We didn’t do too badly.”

I imagine one difficult situation might be when the anger was directed at the Australian Army from the widows themselves. How did you..?

No, it never was. The

23:30 widows was supportive of their families it was only the bloody civilians out on the street, the rent a crowd who were saying, “Down with Vietnam, out with the Vietnamese and all this business.” I mean we, I was there to protect the wives. They were anti-. They weren’t anti- at all and they realised just how much future they had because he was killed in Vietnam. They got

24:00 a magnificent pension. They were retrained and the kids were put in Legacy and let Legacy look after them. We did all their legal and financial affairs for nothing, or I did. I mean they appreciated just how lucky they were and their attitude was they hated the Australian public who made absolute hell for those blokes when they came back.

24:30 **The job, as you said was exhausting and I can understand why but was your attitude towards the war changed during doing this job coming into contact with the front line effects of the war on the families at home?**

My feeling about this war only came to when I’d just come back from five weeks there of fact finding and I realised we were wasting our time because they have now all joined together and it is the biggest communist country in the world

25:00 whereas we were fighting communism and that's what we were there for. And when I went into the country and did a lot of fact finding and thoroughly enjoyed it I couldn't believe the fact they have now joined together north and south and it's a fully communistic country and we were fighting for the south and we lost all those people. I mean, we didn't lose a great number when you think it's

25:30 the longest serving war we have ever been involved in. Less than 500 and some of those were not casualties, not war casualties which we won't discuss. I think I got very disappointed and I wrote an article for my Best Times which is our publication for the Royal Australian Women's Army Corps

26:00 and in it I said, "I'd learnt a great deal, I'd observed a great deal and for the first time in my life I said 'Was it or was it not worth it?'" And it wasn't because it is now all the Republic of Vietnam.

There's a current controversy about the amount the widows are given today in the Australian Army.

26:30 **Do you have an opinion on that?**

No, they are bloody well looked after. Everything about it, they are looked after. As I told you, if they want retraining to get themselves jobs. If they want help with kids and education we have Legacy, we have a legatee who is a father figure for them and they are mollycoddled from woe to go. Very well looked after because half of them, and not being unkind, because I visited so many and I

27:00 walked into a barracks or married quarters at 9 o'clock in the morning and there is snotty nose kids sitting on the floor watching television and Mum watching television, "What do ya want?" and I thought, "Blimey, knock your head off," and they wouldn't have had a penny because most of these people apart from the training team and the Tony Perallos and one or two of the other warrant officers they were young

27:30 kids and they had nothing and they joined the army because they couldn't do anything else. So they are terribly well looked after I can assure you. I've had this question put to you before but nobody knows better than I how well looked after they are because I was on the board for the Vietnam Veterans and I did a lot of work for them when I came back. In fact with the

28:00 committee bought the first half way house for them so when they came down for medical treatment they could live in the halfway house. This was after I left the army and I also did a lot of work with the Vietnam Veterans' Counselling with my knowledge of Vietnam and the fact that many of them knew me. In fact I was asked to lead their parade that they had on Anzac Day

28:30 but I lead my own troops. Because I worked with so many of them I knew every battalion and I knew hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of the soldiers and the way I looked after them and got them a lot of things when they were wounded. Helped them stay in the army. One of them now works in Australia House, Dave Monday. Not Australia House, RSL [Returned and Services League] House, Dave Monday who lost his leg and I got him a job.

29:00 He's been there ever since but he was my sergeant clerk in Sydney before he ever went to Vietnam. So I have been an integral part of the lives of many of those people.

We might have to leave that there because there are a few general questions I would like to ask you before we finish, we are coming towards the end of the interview. You have a great deal of expertise in women as soldiers and women in the army. So I would like to ask you a few general questions about that. You said once in your career

29:30 **I remember you we were talking about the story in Durban when you were trying to get the women off the boat, you were demanding that they weren't ladies they were female soldiers. How do you define the difference and how difficult is it to be both?**

We all have a role in life. When I'm playing a lady I am a lady, I'm not a soldier. When I'm playing a role in a job, I'm a soldier. I just happen to be a female soldier and you are a male soldier.

30:00 It doesn't mean that I am not ladylike, it means that my role is not to be a quivering little female. I've got a job to do. I am a fighter. I've got my job to protect what I'm doing and fight for my country. The fact that I happen to have boobs and not something else makes no difference. Your responsibility and mine are exactly the same. But if you want to play ladies that's fine,

30:30 we can all play ladies and that's why I say to you I feel that unfortunately in the Australianism they are cutting out a little bit of the femininity by them wearing trousers all the time and wearing male uniforms whereas in the British Army we used to wear boots, belts and gaiters but when we went out on the town we were ladies, not female soldiers. But when I on the guns I'm a female soldier. That's the difference.

31:00 **For better or worse men and women are different.**

Thank God. "Vive la Difference," as my father would say.

How does an army in this day benefit from having women in all areas?

Well firstly they couldn't have done without them. They weren't there because they wanted them to be there. As I say the Australian Army is not a good example but Britain could not have existed if it hadn't been for their women and what they did

31:30 there, they sent a lot of their women overseas and kept their male specialist at home to train more people to go. We weren't enlisted to relieve men so that they could go to the war. That wasn't our role but that was the role here. The Australian women they couldn't have kept their small force in the field because they were a very small force

32:00 and to think that we had to bring these poor buggers back from the Middle East and then go straight into another battle because you didn't have the numbers and because your women, they didn't allow your women to be used in a capacity that they could be used in. Like today. We have females who are captains of Australian ships. We had females who are flying fighter pilots and

32:30 females you know, commanding RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] bases. In the army you have women who are in the high prized jobs like the defence secretary and they are running male battalions because they are now realising that's what they are there for and that's what are good at. I mean they did themselves a disservice in World War 11, I can tell you that.

Well given

33:00 **the..**

A lot of the ex-servicewomen in this country hate them for that reason.

Given the important role that women, fundamental role that women had in winning the war how do you feel about the recognition that has been accorded women in the Second World War?

I've been accorded every recognition in the world. Every recognition in the world and so has anybody from the British Army but I wasn't here in Australia so I don't know what sort of recognition. The Australian women claim

33:30 and that's why they persuaded me to do this for the sake of all ex-servicewomen because they feel denigrated that they are not accorded the sort of equal accolades that British women, Canadian women, New Zealand women, South African women. They are just used as meat weights and their full potential was never, ever

34:00 given the chance. Never. Only nurses.

You, on that subject, you showed us the impressive medals you've received through your career both in service in Britain and in Australia. Indeed you are the most highly decorated women in the country. Is that right? Or thereabouts?

I mean I've got an Order of Australia for which I am so proud. Not being

34:30 born and bred in Australia. I'm very proud of that. I am also proud to get an Australian Olympic Medal for sport for what I gave of my life to Australian sport over 40 years both to able and disabled and making sure everybody had a chance in sport. I'm also, as I say, very grateful for my military medals. I have equal

35:00 military medals with the men whereas here they have nothing. They have two funny little medals hanging down. That's all they had the chance to win and when I march with mine, the only people who can come anywhere close to me are nurses and my old friend Nancy Wake who's dying, I think she could bet me with being the most highly decorated women. But she is dying in England but I met up with her in England when she came back from France

35:30 and then went back and ran the French Resistance. She commanded men in the Resistance and I didn't see her again until I saw her at the combined services club in the city when I was having a battle royal with the combined services club about selling the hostel at a bad price. I worked for them for eight years and who should walk in but Nancy Wake to go the AGM [Annual General Meeting] and I said, "Just the girl I want." "God struth," she said to me,

36:00 "Pat Rawlings, you haven't changed very much," and I said, "Well I'm sorry I can't say that about you Nancy. I couldn't call you the Little White Mouse now, you're a bloody big fat rat," and she said, "You're dead right." But she, the strange thing is and let's face it. She was honoured by the French with the Crois de Guerre, she was honoured by the British with the George Medal which is the highest

36:30 medal a female can be given, she got sweet fanny adams [nothing at all] from Australia. All they do is highlight their men and forget their women. Look at what the Australian nurses went through. Viv Bullwinkle was a great friend of mine, Betty Jeffrey, Ellen Savage, Teddy Doy, Jess Bow the privations they fought

37:00 and all my friends who had to evacuate from Greece and Crete and those who worked in the Middle East. The 'old grey mares, I call them, and they have adopted me because I trained them to be soldiers and they always have a laugh at my expense about this but they don't get the accolades that they

deserve in comparison with the men. They simply don't but this is not so in England and

37:30 nobody that I know has had a commendation from a male general in a theatre of war. None of the nurses got any of that from their generals in the theatre of war in the Middle East, in Korea, in Vietnam, in Greece and Crete.

Of all the achievements that you accolades represent, it's a difficult question, but if you had to single one out what would you

38:00 **say was the greatest achievement of your long career?**

My Order of Australia, not being born in Australia. I'm an Australian citizen of course, have been for years but the fact that I got all the military accolades, efficiency decoration and dah, di dah. The other thing is winning the Royal Humane Society for Bravery in Australia. Those are my two

38:30 highlights and talking of my mother being a strange woman and when the director wrote to her and said how brave I had been and I'd been awarded a medal and she came into the ward to see me, Eidelberg, laughing all over her face and said, "Now I know where you get all of your cheek from. Your mother. I wrote her the nicest letter saying that we were very proud of you and she said, 'I know she's brave

39:00 but tell her don't ever do that again!'." Colonel Eidelberg nearly died. She said, "I think you're a chip off the old block."

No doubt you were.

Everything I've done and I don't do things in my life to get awards or medals. As I say the Hall of Fame, Life Membership of Australia, of New South Wales, my clubs, life member

39:30 of my associations. I don't do these things for accolades but in the wind up at the end of life its very nice to know, I'm a life member of the Kirribilli Ex-Service Club, that I can look at those and pass them onto my kids and say, "That's what your Aunty Pat's done with her life," and that's important. Nobody,

40:00 I don't think you get any credit if you go out trying to big note yourself. You get nothing. I mean when I got the Order of Australia I couldn't believe it. I don't know to this day where it all came from and when I got the Hall of Fame, I mean I knew where that came from, that came from my sport because they said you've given 43 years of your life to this sport you are entitled to be in the Hall of Fame but again

40:30 you don't do this for gain, you do this because. I think brought up with the right traditions and values in life.

We are coming, this is the last question, we have very little time left so I'm afraid we have to be a little bit brief, if you were to take something from your own life and the events that we've talked about today, especially during the war and leave it as a message for future generations, as this archive is being designed for future generations,

41:00 **what would that message be?**

Lead your life and treat your fellow man the way that you would wish to be treated. Whatever endeavour that you do in your life whether it be fighting, education or looking after people make it your very best effort at all times and be a good human being.

Well I think that's a very succinct

41:30 **message, thank you very much for that.**

Pleasure.

And it's been a pleasure talking to you.

You too. Thanks guys, you've been great.

You've been great.