

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Yvonne Bolton - Transcript of interview

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**Some parts of this interview  
have been embargoed.**

The embargoed portions are  
noted in the transcript and video.

### Tape 1

00:31 **Now we're rolling, so where did you grow up in Perth?**

I was born in Carlisle, which when I was growing up was in the sticks and it is probably only about seven or eight k's from the city centre.

**What sort of things were there to do in Carlisle?**

Oh, ride my bike.

01:00 Go to school. If we were lucky we went to the beach. We had a pretty ordinary life because I was born in '37: there weren't restaurants to go to. My family weren't poor but they didn't have a lot of money.

**How many brothers and sisters did you have?**

I have two older sisters: one is eight years older

01:30 than me and one is nearly six years older than me. And then my mother died when I was sixteen and then my father remarried again when I was almost twenty-three, and he and his new wife had another child, so I have got a step sister who is twenty-four years younger than me.

**Still managed to keep up the band of girls theme?**

Yes all girls.

**So what**

02:00 **did your father do?**

He actually worked for the public service and he was a foreman there and worked on the mechanical side of things. But they went through the Depression and that was pretty bad for them. They worked on farms or where ever they could get work.

**How did the Depression affect them?**

My older sister was alive then,

02:30 was born I should say, she is still alive. And you know it was just very hard to feed the family. And he actually was a fairly inventive man and he helped produce what they called a gas producer that they put on cars, I think it helped with the economy of fuel. And so that is how he actually landed the job in the public works, because he had been a bit inventive and I guess

03:00 was lucky to get that job.

**So were you living on more of a farm situation there?**

Oh no, we were living in half of a house which my father built. And when he got a little bit more money he added to that. In those days there weren't these big double brick houses. People now think they are

poorly off but they are lucky really.

03:30 In those days the people didn't even have washing machines. My Mum boiled the clothes and starched the clothes: she was very busy just being a housewife.

**What did your house look like?**

Oh, it was a fairly large kitchen, people ate in the kitchen those days. I am trying to remember: when it was half a house,

04:00 we just had a kitchen and more or less couple of bedrooms and then as we got older, the front of the house was added and we had a formal dining room which was used when we had guests. Everyone sat up there very prim and proper. We all had a bedroom: we were pretty lucky compared to other people that lived around us.

**Did you have electricity out there?**

04:30 Oh yes, electricity and flushing toilets. Oh, eventually we had a flushing toilet but when we were kids we just had, you know one of them pans, out the back. The dunny man came and took the pan away, you almost forget that, that's really incredible.

**And it wasn't really that long ago either, that's the crazy thing I always find.**

05:00 Well, I am thinking back now to seven, eight, nine, ten. I wasn't a little wee thing: I remember we used to have to go outside to the toilet and I remember that my sisters would take me down and run away and say, "The bogeyman is going to get you!" so I was old enough to find my way back.

**That's a very Australian story isn't it?**

05:30 **What sort of things did your sisters and yourself used to get up to?**

Burning the strap when we were naughty, we had a copper then, and you were allowed to hit children then, we were never abused but I mean this was just a fun thing. Mum would get really upset and the strap would be burnt. I mean that didn't happen every day.

06:00 We would ride our bikes, but they were actually quite a few years older than me and that made quite a big difference. I didn't really do a lot with my sisters, they were at home but during the war my elder sister was old enough to actually go out: go to parties with the American sailors. There used to be a family who hosted some Americans

06:30 when they came into port. And she would go there and I would be really fascinated with some of the things they would send her, like those decorative cushion covers from Hawaii and silk stockings, and I can remember, actually when the war was over, one of the American sailors came to see her from America, and he was very taken by my sister. She was very beautiful,

07:00 she still is an attractive lady. And she had just got engaged to my brother-in-law. And here am I sitting at the table saying, "My sister has just got engaged!" and my mother was kicking me under the table.

**So it didn't go down too well with the family?**

Oh yes, they were really pleased that my sister got engaged to my brother-in-law Kevin.

07:30 He was a really great upstanding man, but I think they felt a bit sorry for the American who came all the way from America to look her up and she had just got engaged.

**Oh, I thought your brother-in-law was the American?**

No.

**I am with you now.**

Sorry.

**That's all right.**

And we had an air raid shelter, that's another thing we did, when the sirens went, we had an air raid shelter

08:00 we would go down into. All of our rooms would be blackened just like black in this room, had to draw the curtains at night.

**Was this actually at school that you had the trenches or anything?**

I can't remember them at school but I can remember them at home. The Second World War was over by 1945 and I was only seven or eight

08:30 then so I can't remember too much about school at that stage.

**What sort of sport did you play?**

Not much sport when I was young. I am not very co-ordinated with my hands and eyes, like catching balls and things. But the usual things, like rounders,

09:00 but I really didn't play a lot of sport when I was a child, riding my bike was the main thing I did.

**What about the 50s?**

Oh the 50s: I started nursing in '55.

09:30 Before I started nursing I was growing up with rock and roll and the big skirts and the roped petticoats. That was pretty exciting.

**Because that was like a real era?**

Yeah it was wonderful. The little tight bodices on your dresses and your plush sleeves. And we would go to the Embassy [Hotel] in town or we would go to Winnie Wrights and learn dancing.

10:00 I loved dancing, it was great. I suppose you can call that a sport.

**What sort of dancing would you do?**

Oh, we would do the quick step, modern waltz, as much rock and roll and jiving as we could do. It was fun. We would practice it at home, the rock and roll and the jiving I am talking about, and the music was just wonderful.

10:30 I had girlfriends and we would go to each others houses, not too many boyfriends there then. We really weren't really sophisticated and into boys at that age, and every time you wanted to go out with a boy my father would say, "Well, you have got to be home by ten." Once one of the boys had a car, and he was so upset, and I was so immature I couldn't even imagine why my father would be upset.

11:00 Because a boy had a car.

**Sounds like they were incredibly innocent days?**

They were innocent days, not like the days that the adolescents grow up in now, it must be very hard for them.

**How much American influence did you see in the 50s?**

Not much, I wasn't aware of it. Probably older people saw it but for us there wasn't a lot.

11:30 I suppose mainly the fact that a lot of the music came from overseas, the films came from overseas, but we just accepted that.

**I think it's the time of rockabilly, when it started to get really a different sort of music than what your parents were used to, was there some sort of a conflict at all?**

No, not really,

12:00 I think they were just pleased to watch us. Certainly there was never any conflict, I mean in those days you didn't have the loud blaring music. We had records and you would wind the record player up and you would be dancing away and then it would slow down, know what I mean? So it just wasn't like today where you have got the great big speakers.

12:30 You have got TVs and everything in your own room.

**What sort of music was your favourite?**

The jive, I loved that. I still like it, my husband and I jive now.

**Great!**

Oh yeah, it is good.

**That will keep you fit.**

It does actually.

**Quilting and jiving.**

13:00 Good combination.

**Where about did you actually go to school, was it in Perth?**

I went to Carlisle Primary School, which was just opposite and then after that I went to the Perth Girls' High School which is where the police headquarters is now in Plain Street. And after year nine I went to Kent Street High School,

13:30 did my Leaving [Certificate] there and as soon as I finished there I went nursing.

**What was discipline like in school in those days?**

It was okay, I just accepted it. No, I mean it certainly – I can't remember anything terrible about the discipline. You knew what you had to do and that was it.

**What sort of subjects did you enjoy at school?**

- 14:00 Oh arithmetic, English, loved history, geography, biology. I can't really remember too much about what else I did. I know I hated French. I didn't start that until I went to high school and I didn't like that at all, didn't really see the relevance.

**What made you think about becoming a nurse?**

- 14:30 I was actually going to become a school teacher, my brother-in-law was school teacher and my father thought he was pretty great and so they all encouraged me to become a school teacher and when I was fifteen I got a bursary, that meant that you got a certain amount of money every year while you
- 15:00 were doing your years eleven and twelve. And that just helped you, it helped with the money situation, buying books and things like that. And then my cousin went nursing and she started to tell me all about it. And I thought, "Gee, I would really love to do that." I went up to Royal Perth Hospital, she was on the ward one day,
- 15:30 had a chat to her and saw what she was doing. Came home and very quiet, at that stage my mother had passed away and my sister and brother-in-law were living with my father and myself and my sister said, "You are really quiet, what is the matter?" and I said, "I don't want to become a teacher: I want to become a nurse." And so she said, "Well, you better tell Dad then." He was not very
- 16:00 pleased. He said, "Oh, you should become a teacher: you have always got a job when you're a teacher." I said, "I don't want to become a teacher, I want to become a nurse." The money that we had been paid had gone into my bank account so he said, "Well, you have got to pay back all of the money." And I went nursing and he was very proud.

**So you actually had to pay back the money?**

Oh yes.

- 16:30 Because they had paid for two years, a very meagre sum really. Obviously if you weren't going to become a teacher then they required the money back. And it is strange really because I became a nurse and there is always so much work for nurses, and several times there has been so much unemployment with the teachers. I was lucky to do nursing actually.
- 17:00 **Makes you wonder where your father got his idea from?**

From the Depression. I mean they, see I wanted to become a hairdresser when I was fifteen, and my father said, "Nobody wants their hair done. When you're fifteen you're not leaving school." And so that's why I went on and did my Leaving, I just think he was concerned about my future, that's all.

**How old were you when you left school?**

- 17:30 Nearly eighteen. I went nursing just the day after I was eighteen.

**So were you still living at home when you went to train as a nurse?**

Oh yes, I remember going to the nursing home. We couldn't live out, we had to live in the nursing home. And I was all dressed up in a suit and gloves and hat for

- 18:00 my first day, that's what happened in those days. We lived in Forrest House, which was in St Georges Terrace but up the other end and we arrived there and they gave us our uniforms, showed us how to starch our hats and showed us where our room was. And I thought, "What do I do now?" I just got on the bus and went home.

- 18:30 Yeah, we were really home bodies, and then we lived in the nursing homes and as a group of girls we had a lot of fun.

**What was the uniform like?**

It was a blue uniform, mid blue, and white collar, white apron and white hat, little sort of hat on your head.

- 19:00 **Very smart.**

Yeah, it was smart actually.

**How do you starch a hat?**

Oh, in those days you used to have to mix your starch up and then iron it with a hot iron, damp it down and then the actual starch cooked as you were ironing it, and it was a stiff hat, and that's what we had to do with our veils later on too.

**Sounds like an awful lot of work?**

Oh it was, ridiculous actually.

19:30 But you had to have a really smart hat on, same with the collars. They were starched and they were so stiff that you would get great big wells down the inside of your neck where they would rub.

**Gosh.**

You didn't get any sympathy though.

**So with your first day after you managed to starch your hat and get organised,**

20:00 **you went home. Is that allowed? Can you go home at any time?**

Oh, you can go home during the day but there is a bed check at night. The gate or the doors would be shut wherever you were living and they would do a bed check and if you weren't in your bed you would be off to see the matron. And in those days the matron was someone to be afraid of. In fact nursing, when

20:30 I went nursing, '55 to '58 it was, with the other nurses was lots of fun, the patients were lots of fun. But the people like the matron or the other registered nurses or sisters as you called them then, they were pretty hard to get along with. Many a time you would be in the linen room crying, and you would be expected to do so much work

21:00 that it was impossible to do it in the time that you were allowed. So you would be coming on anything up to an hour, hour and a half early and going off an hour and a half late. And you would be just told that you were inefficient, you had to work harder and you would be waking patients up at something like four o'clock in the morning when you were on night shift because you had so many sponges to do

21:30 and the poor things. I mean it was cruel often to them and it was fairly cruel to us as young girls just leaving home. You would just grit your teeth and say, "They are not going to break me." And do it.

**Why was that going on do you think?**

I just think, I don't

22:00 really know. But it was abuse of power. And it was not only the sisters that did it, the females, it was abuse of power by the doctors then too. You know it was just incredible, I remember going to the operating theatre and some of the surgeons, they were just awful to some of the young nurses and also the physicians in the wards.

22:30 They were treated like kings, you had the big entourage in the wards where the people would come around, there would be the residents and the registrars and the senior sisters and the staff nurses and it was just like in some of those old films that you would have seen. I can't remember the name of them now, the nurse series

23:00 I think they were, it was just terrible. And they talk about the good old days of nursing. And we were taught some procedures, but you had very little supervision. And I can remember giving my first injection, my first enema, no supervision, being scared stiff. Shaking like a leaf.

23:30 I can remember giving out medications when I had only been nursing something like two to three months, working out doses, the only time you were ever supervised was getting narcotics out. I mean that was all antiquated because the morphine came in tablets and you would have to put the

24:00 tablets in a spoon and boil it over a little Bunsen burner. The syringes were wrapped in old rags and boiled, and you would be so busy that sometimes you would forget and you would boil the pan dry and all of the syringes would break and melt. Then you would get into trouble for that. If you ever broke a thermometer you would have to pay for it.

24:30 They were pretty bad days. But I can remember lots of good things too.

**I just wonder if it has anything to do with this higher knowledge that doctors, well, they still today have. I mean they knew everything so everyone else had to be subservient?**

Maybe, I don't really know. I mean

25:00 traditionally doctors were male and I mean even in the home the male had more power than the mother. What our father said was law, but I mean he was a very kind fellow, he never abused us. I can remember getting a smack from him once and I think it upset him more than it did me.

25:30 I don't know, I think it was just tradition. I mean we worked long hours and we worked very hard: we never ever got any extra pay, we were paid a pittance. But people used to say they can never afford to pay nurses shift allowances, and so

26:00 it was the poor nurses who worked all of the Saturdays and Sundays and evenings. You would be left in charge on night duty, and you would have the night supervisor coming around expecting you to know

every patient in the ward, and exactly what was wrong with them etcetera. But it was just absolutely amazing when the wages improved

26:30 and we were given shift allowances and some of those older sisters, suddenly they wanted to work shift work and get extra money. So shifts like a Sunday shift became well sought after.

**What sort of time did you get off when you were training?**

I can't remember but I think it was four or six weeks a year.

27:00 The time off was okay for annual holidays but we worked five and a half days a week. We had one and a half days off, but we also worked a lot of split shifts where we would work say seven to eleven, and then have about four hours off and come back at five o'clock in the afternoon

27:30 and worked until nine.

**So it must have felt as though it was a continual process rather than having a weekend off or anything like that?**

Yes, I guess so.

**So tell me about some of the friends that you made while you were training?**

Oh, I am still very friendly with two girls that I started nursing with. One actually lived in Floreat and she was my matron of honour

28:00 when I got married. We went overseas together and used to share houses together. After we finished we did our midwifery together over in Melbourne. And the other girl now lives in Forbes and I did the same things with her too.

**Sounds like it was a pretty tight group of women?**

It was, a very tight group. Actually that is

28:30 something that nurses probably do miss out on today. Because they don't live in, there are no nurses' quarters to my knowledge. So they are just coming and going, it is like working with people, not living with people.

**How many of the nurses were living in the home environment together?**

Well, we had quite a few nurses' homes so

29:00 every nurse lived in. I did my training at Royal Perth Hospital and I can't even remember how many nurses there would be there, I would just be guessing.

**What were the conditions like in the nurses' home?**

Oh, they were okay, we shared rooms with people. There was a lounge room, communal showers.

29:30 As I said we could come and go as we wanted to during the day, right up until we finished there was a bed check. So I mean people weren't always in their beds: they would get home after ten o'clock at night. I think that was the time you had to be home by. One of the nursing fences - you would have to climb the fence to get in or a friend would leave a window open for you. You would know you weren't going to be home by ten o'clock and you would stuff all of

30:00 your bed up. We were just pretty normal sort of girls really. We didn't obey all of the rules.

**What sort of punishment would be handed out if you weren't in your bed at ten o'clock?**

Well, I mean the worst punishment would be going to see the matron. And I don't know, I suppose you could have been expelled, your training ceased. I don't know

30:30 if that happened to anyone but I guess so. I know we were all petrified of being caught but we still did it.

**Did you ever have any run-ins [conflict] with the matron?**

Not so much when I was training: I had come in pretty innocent and immature. I tried to behave myself. Had a few run-ins since then but not so much then.

31:00 **What sort of things did they teach you? You mentioned that you were taught how to give needles for a start: how do they go about training you?**

They would tell us about the drugs, and there were so many drugs those days. They would show you how to draw the injection up, how to use the equipment, where to put the injection if it was an intra-muscle injection,

31:30 or a subcutaneous injection. You would practice by putting them in oranges and then you would do the real thing except there wasn't anybody there when you did the real thing.

**Because that seems to be quite crazy?**

Oh, it was ridiculous actually. I don't know how I didn't kill someone. I mean you could draw up an antibiotic or any sort of drug,

32:00 any sort of drug really so long as it wasn't a narcotic. Even insulin, just inject it. I mean these days - I was teaching nursing for twenty years: it is so much different now. I mean we did the same process, we made a video and the nurses would watch that, the trainees, and we would demonstrate and then

32:30 they would inject each other with distilled water. And then when they got to the stage of giving and injection to the patient we would be there and they would be supervised until they were confident. And they would be supervised whenever they gave a narcotic or the drug calculations would be supervised and checked.

33:00 Much better now. And people talk about the good old days.

**Did you have a lot of study to do as part of your training?**

I guess we did: we thought we did at the time but I can't remember doing a lot of study. I have often thought about that and I thought well

33:30 I can't remember it. I can remember we used to get a lot of old papers and we would practice on them, and once I got the old paper I had been practicing on, they just recirculated it. That was pretty good.

**So how long did you actually manage to do your training for?**

I did three years of my general training and then we did

34:00 about three months staff nursing at Royal Perth Hospital.

**What does that mean, 'staff nursing'?**

It's when you're registered but you still are supervised in more administrative type jobs. You are able to wear a veil but we used to wear a blue uniform, so there was the staff nurses against the more senior sisters who wore white.

34:30 And in most hospitals it was required that you did about twelve months staff nursing and if you wanted to get a really good job you needed to do that staff nursing. And then after a group of us had done that for about three months then we had already booked in to do our midwifery at the Queen Victoria Hospital in Melbourne. So we went over there and did that and then you came back and

35:00 finished off your staff nursing.

**How were you treated as a staff nurse?**

Oh, that was much better, we were I mean we were then registered but you still had to work the long hours. But there were lots of residents and registrars around. We had a really good time as

35:30 staff nurses it was great.

**Did you feel more a part of the group then?**

Yes, as a trainee nurse you were part of the group of nurses but once you became a staff nurse you were a group with the resident and the registrars, they mostly lived in and we had lots of fun and parties and things like that.

36:00 **So there was a social aspect to that too?**

Oh yes, that was really good: I enjoyed it.

**What sort of parties?**

Oh, just the ordinary sort of parties in those days where you would go to someone's house and a whole group of people would come. When I was staff nursing we were renting. We rented a house in Wembley, for a while we rented a house in South Perth, a group of us girls lived together.

36:30 **Must have been a relief to get out of the nursing home?**

Yes, but the nursing home I think was the only thing that saved us when we were doing our training because we had all of the support of our mates. We would go back to the nurses' home and have a bit of a cry and sit around and talk all night or whatever.

**So you think the benefits outweighed the negatives?**

37:00 Of living in a nursing home? Most definitely. And I think because we were so immature, most of us who came in, we really needed the support of each other.

**So did you enjoy renting with the girls?**

Yes, good.

**How was that different to being in the nursing home?**

Well, then we had to do our own cooking

37:30 and we could come home whenever we wanted to or see whoever we wanted to. By that stage we had boyfriends. It was like normal life I guess.

**Where did the boyfriends take you out?**

Oh, mostly parties or – there wasn't much restaurant going in

38:00 those days. I mean you were really were still in the – I finished my midwifery in '59 so I mean you are still looking at the early '60's. I mean the most you would go out to was a Chinese Restaurant, and I think the steak houses. Once we went to a French restaurant in Sherwood Court in Perth.

**Well, that would have been special.**

It was, actually I can still remember it.

38:30 **What did you have for a meal?**

I think I had snails. I have always liked food, love food. We went out to celebrate.

**Was that a special night?**

Yes, actually I am just trying to think now when it happened. After we finished our staff nursing one of the other girls, the girl who lives in Forbes and I, we went to New Guinea

39:00 for a year.

**Before we get into the –**

And so we celebrated getting that appointment.

**Oh I see. Before we get into New Guinea I haven't really asked you what the midwifery course was like in Melbourne. How did you get over to Melbourne for a start?**

By train.

**What was that like as far as conditions are concerned?**

I have been by train several times since then. It was great, we had our own little carriage. And in those days there was

39:30 a lounge room with a piano and there was a lot of entertainment. You know, just amongst the passengers. I mean there is the much older crowd that go on the train now. We had a lot of fun on the train. To get to Melbourne I think we

40:00 caught a train to Kalgoorlie, changed the train went to Port Pirie, changed the train again got on one to Adelaide and then another train over to Melbourne.

**How long did that take?**

I think it was about three days. Three or four days, I can't remember .

**And what did you think about Melbourne?**

Loved it, absolutely loved it.

40:30 **Where were you staying there in Melbourne?**

We lived in the nurses' home for a little while and then we rented a house in one of the suburbs there in Melbourne. There was a group of girls there, once again we had lots of fun.

**More friends?**

Well, actually there were more friends because there were some from WA, some from Royal Perth but by that stage we had met a couple of

41:00 other girls from Queensland and so we were all living together and just generally enjoying life. I mean we were – I don't know, twenty-two or something by that stage, life was a ball really.

**What sort of social occasions would happen in Melbourne?**

Oh, parties. I used to have a friend

41:30 who lived up in the hills in the Dandenongs. She was teaching up there. A girl who I had actually met while I was doing my schooling: she had come over here to do part of her schooling and then gone back



to Victoria. And I used to go and stay up there, and we would go to dances there, lots of dances, get all dressed up.

**And what did you think of the course itself?**

42:00 Yeah, it was good. It was the thing that you –

42:04

## Tape 2

00:30 **Yvonne can you tell me about the kind of training you did in your midwifery course?**

Yes, we looked after the mothers and the babies and we worked in the delivery room and I guess we worked in the special nurseries and when I did my training in '58, '59 it was quite a progressive

01:00 hospital, really, because the mothers had their babies with them, the babies were in the cots and they stayed beside their bedside, and they could even keep them beside their bed if they wanted to. And then it wasn't too long after that when the babies were in the nurseries most of the time and the mother would have to come and get them. So I was pretty lucky that I did my midwifery training when I did.

01:30 It was only a year. Even though it was a great year, I knew when I had actually almost completed it, it wasn't going to be a thing that I wanted to do for the rest of my life. That's one thing about nursing: there are so many aspects to it that you can choose something that you really enjoy.

**Which hospital did you do your certificate at?**

02:00 I did it at the Queen Victoria Hospital right in Melbourne. And when I was actually doing my midwifery there they were filming *On the Beach*. You were probably too young to be familiar with that.

**No, I am familiar with *On the Beach*.**

Yeah, they filmed it right at the back of the Queen Victoria Hospital. It was a women's hospital, the staff were women, the patients were women. I don't even know what it is now.

02:30 I think it may still be a hospital but I don't think it is a midwifery hospital.

**How did working there compare with your earlier experiences in other hospitals?**

Well, I had only ever worked at Royal Perth before so it was really just an extension of that, but a different type of learning. And by that stage we had a lot of freedom and we were living out and so it was really

03:00 going to work and going to lectures and writing up case studies, that type of thing.

**Any memorable experiences from your midwifery certificate?**

Oh, more the social side I am sorry to say. I can remember seeing my first baby born. I mean I don't think you would ever get sick of

03:30 seeing babies born, it is just so beautiful. And being in the special nursery with the little preemie babies, they would be there for months and you would get to know them and they were beautiful. It was a long time ago and it is not one of those things that is indelibly carved in my mind.

**What was it that**

04:00 **directed you away from midwifery as a specialisation?**

Well, I suppose it was because I came back to WA and I had to finish my staff nursing, and in staff nursing you used to have to do so many weeks in the medical ward, so many weeks in the surgical ward, so many weeks in an operating theatre etcetera. Well I did my time in the medical ward and the operating ward and

04:30 then they sent me to the operating theatre and I said, "How come?" I wasn't a brilliant student in the operating theatre but they needed someone and I was sent there. And I loved it, really liked it. And so I spent ten or fifteen years or more in the operating theatre until I went into – after I came back from Vietnam I went into teaching.

05:00 **What was it that appealed to you about surgery?**

It was, I guess, one day was never the same as the other day. You could become very good at it, you could specialise in it. I suppose the people working there and it was exciting. In sum,

05:30 you worked hard and it was really very taxing, I don't know what else. It may be sometimes an adrenalin rush.

**So it provided you with a challenge?**

Oh, definitely yes. I met lots of – the sort of people that I met and worked with were great, I enjoyed their company too.

**I will just rewind a little bit**

06:00 **and ask you about some of those memorable social occasions in Melbourne you were talking about?**

Okay social. Not in Melbourne I don't think, dancing was my memorable experience from Melbourne.

**It must have been quite a big city to visit compared to Perth?**

Oh yes it was, the shopping was great, really liked that.

06:30 All of the fashion, and we had a little bit more money then. But once the year was up I was quite happy to come back to Perth.

**Whereabouts would you shop in Melbourne in those days?**

Oh, Myers had a big department store and we would go to fashion parades then they had. Get all dressed up and go to a fashion parade and they would serve

07:00 you afternoon tea. I think these days to go to a fashion parade you probably have to be specially invited but you could just go and buy a ticket and go to the fashion parades in those days.

**Where were the parades held?**

In Myers. Really very special things.

**And was the fashion years ahead of Perth at that stage?**

Maybe. I can remember the fashion more in Melbourne.

07:30 The women in Melbourne were certainly very smartly dressed. And I like clothes so it was great. I used to spend all of my money on clothes, it was good.

**Was it difficult then to return to Perth?**

No, I was ready to return. Because I knew I was going to finish my staff nursing and my friends were returning.

08:00 It was more difficult to leave Melbourne the second time than it was then. I went back to Melbourne when I was in the army and that was hard to leave then.

**You got more and more attached?**

Oh yes.

**What marked the end of your staff training?**

Well, when I actually finished my staff training it was in the operating theatre

08:30 and so my girlfriend and I, who lives in Forbes now, we decided that we would like to go to New Guinea and we went to New Guinea and worked there for a year. And I suppose, apart from a few other things, that must be one of the most indelible things in my memory. Because it

09:00 was just so different. I worked in the operating theatre there, both in the European hospital, but mainly in the native hospital. The type of surgery that we did was very different. A lot of the New Guinea natives, they actually ate betel nuts and so they would get a lot of cancer of the mandible and so we did a lot

09:30 of reconstructive surgery. And I did a little bit of obstetrics there, caesarean sections and things like that, women having babies and needing some surgical intervention. And their country was just so different in those days, I am talking about 1960 we were there, you could hop on a local bus

10:00 and go into Port Moresby and there would be all of the locals on it with their string bags and their WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s or whatever. And you go to the big open markets, and we would go to the yacht club. And I learnt to water ski and sail, just things that I had never experienced in my life before. And the commercial pilots would ring

10:30 up and they would say, "Anyone got a day off today: we're flying out to Tarpini." Or somewhere over the island. 'I feel like some company.'" And we would go in these little single engine Cessnas and fly all over the place, all over the jungle and mountains and they would land on incredible air strips and the

11:00 natives, they would come up and they hadn't seen many white people before, especially ladies with blond hair and all of that. And so I just thought it was just fantastic, loved every minute of it.

**Sounds incredible.**

Yeah, we did a lot of call work, that's one thing when you're working in an operating theatre, the operating theatre does work twenty-four hours

11:30 a day, so there is always a lot of call work. But I didn't mind that either. It was great.

**How did you get the opportunity to work in New Guinea?**

We saw an advert: I think it was in the paper. I can't even remember getting nursing magazines in those days so it must have been in the West Australian or something like that. You know how they advertise jobs in that section and we just applied.

12:00 **Sounds even more amazing?**

I know.

**It's an adventurous decision.**

Yeah, it was actually: it was an adventurous decision for us but we just did it. I remember getting off the plane up in Port Moresby and this blanket of hit us. Wow, you know. It was just amazing how we got used to it.

**What did you know about New Guinea before you went?**

12:30 Probably not much.

**What were your expectations then?**

It is going to be an adventure: I know that is very naïve but it was going to be an adventure of going overseas. To somewhere outside of Australia and not really knowing what to expect.

**The stories you have told me were probably beyond your expectations, flying around in a Cessna?**

I would never thought of it,

13:00 never thought I would be doing something like that. I thought I would just be working in a hospital, and I don't know what I thought. But I never thought I would be flying in a Cessna over jungle. I mean we had met one sort of couple who had this big cray boat. And you would get a few days off and a group of you would go away on a boat somewhere.

13:30 And one of the other girls here had a boyfriend that owned a plantation, and he would get a charter plane and we would fly down to the plantation for a couple of days. Those thoughts were never in my head before I went, never.

**Where did you learn to water ski?**

At the yacht club in Port Moresby. Fell off and I thought,

14:00 'You're really stupid,' and then one day I stood up. It's great.

**You mentioned that you worked in two hospitals in New Guinea?**

Well, they were really part of the same hospital: there was it was the Port Moresby General Hospital but there was a European section and a native section. The actual European section, it had like

14:30 traditional wards whereas the native section had very open wards, they were really only benches, mainly benches where the patients slept, and they had a little intensive care ward in the native section and that was fly wired in and it had beds in it. Most of the cooking was done by the relatives.

15:00 Between each ward they would have a courtyard, a big courtyard and most of the cooking was done by the families and most of the, well you just never knew who the patient was and who was the relative because anyone would just take a rest on the bed whenever they felt tired. But the actual

15:30 operating theatre in the native section was much more modern than the European theatre. And so when I say I worked in the European and the native operating theatres, if there was anything big to be done it was always done in the native operating theatre. Much more modern, much bigger.

**That's interesting.**

Because there weren't a lot of Europeans,

16:00 white people in New Guinea. So it was more like a little, well, I can't remember doing too much in the European theatre.

**Were the natives reluctant to accept white medicine?**

No, not really. There was the witch doctors

16:30 and you would get - I suppose when you look at the number of patients we had in the hospital and their

population and the number that were treated by the witch doctors, I suppose to some extent you could say they were reluctant. But once they came into the hospital they actually needed to come in. I can remember one

17:00 lady coming in with a retained placenta and she had severe burns on her abdomen where the witch doctor had placed something incredibly hot to try and burn the placenta out. So they were fairly ill by the time they got to us.

**I don't suppose there were too many witch doctors that were surgeons?**

No. I don't think so. And of course the other thing, you got young girls

17:30 coming in and they would come with their chaperones and they would be guarded the whole time. I mean because once a young girl wasn't a virgin the bride price would really fall. And that was paid for in stock and whatever.

**I was just going to ask Yvonne, did you learn any interesting witch doctor medicine?**

18:00 No, I didn't. I guess I wasn't that interested in it then: I just thought traditional medicine was the only way to go. And some of the things that I saw was fairly severe and that probably turned me off it. I am more interested in natural medicine now than I was then.

**The case of the placenta wouldn't have been impressive?**

No. Not at all.

18:30 I mean to me there was only one way to get a retained placenta out, not that way.

**What about other cultural practices outside of their medicine practices, what did you learn about the way they lived?**

They were very gentle people. Their diet was mainly a vegetarian diet

19:00 and it was very rare to see any of them come in with something like appendicitis. We only had one person come in with appendicitis while I was working in an operating theatre and that person had been eating European food. They were very friendly, nice people. Very overcome by grief when anyone died.

19:30 There was a lot of wailing, they were very family orientated. They used to, I can remember going up to one place called Tarpini and getting off the plane and they were still feeding a pig. I mean that was very sacred to them so one of their

20:00 boobs would be really long and thin and the other one would be saved for when they had to suckle their child. They had traditions like that that were very hard for us to understand.

**Did you get the opportunity to visit their villages often?**

Yes. Well, there were villages around Port Moresby: it certainly wasn't sophisticated then,

20:30 with big modern stores. And certainly when the pilots took us around we would go to very remote villages. And they lived in thatch cottages. I wish I had taken more photographs actually because after a while your memory fades a bit which is a shame. I mean you remember a lot of things but some of the details fade.

21:00 **What would be the purpose of the visits?**

They would be delivering things. We certainly just went along for the ride. They would be, I guess, delivering food or mail or whatever, I don't know.

**Were doctors visiting the villages?**

I was unaware that they were. They would certainly be visiting the

21:30 larger villages, but certainly not some of the villages that we went to.

**I am just wondering how or what sort of relationship the hospital established with the villages if there were doctors going to the villages to visit people who weren't well or if the natives actually took responsibility and came to the hospital seeking help?**

I don't know I wasn't really into,

22:00 I just worked in the operating theatre and I wasn't into community health then. It is terrible to say this: I suppose I just never thought of it. That was just my world. These days I would be more interested, but I was only twenty-one, twenty-two then.

**It makes perfect sense to me that you would be out learning to water ski.**

Yeah.

22:30 **Can you describe Moresby itself?**

It was just a small country town really. A couple of cafes, if you could call them that, you certainly couldn't call them a restaurant. They had a Burns Philp store where people would buy certain produce, like plantation owners and things. Other than that

- 23:00 there really wasn't much there at all, yacht club. Lovely coral, beautiful: I learnt to snorkel there as well, I mean it is embarrassing to say, I keep thinking of all of these great things that I did.

**Can you describe the hospital itself: you have mentioned the two sections?**

- 23:30 Yes, well the main thing with the actual European hospital, it was just traditional small wards and there wasn't ever many patients in there, and a small operating theatre. And that was a fairly traditional, say small country hospital. The actual native hospital was just like a big open air bungalow

- 24:00 really with wooden benches, with, when I say a courtyard, a strip of grass between each one.

**On the hospital grounds?**

Oh yes, it was all part of the hospital yes. Our quarters were you going to say?

**Yeah, what was your accommodation like?**

Oh that was okay, double storey wooden building, a room to ourselves. We

- 24:30 had a big mess, I suppose you could call it a mess. Dining room where our meals were prepared, lounge room where we could sit. It was quite adequate and quite comfortable.

**How many staff were there?**

I couldn't answer that, I can't remember. There was only - in the operating theatre

- 25:00 I think there was only two of us, two registered nurses. A girl called Paula and myself. I can't remember anyone else. But we had a lot of the native boys working with us. They were trained to assist and mostly they were very good too.

**How would they provide assistance?**

They would -

- 25:30 mostly we would be scrubbed, which is sterile, handing the instruments over. And they would be getting things or counting sponges with us or assisting the anaesthetist. They were a little bit like it was in the army, they were trained like a medical assistant, they didn't,

- 26:00 when I was there, have any official nursing training. It was just all on the job stuff.

**Was that like an orderly?**

Yeah, well, there are different types of orderlies, specialised for different areas. But yeah, like an orderly, they were specialised in the operating theatre they would do all of the cleaning, well we would help them too. But they would help pack up all of the instruments etcetera.

**What were the doctors like?**

- 26:30 Yeah, they were fine. They were, I can't remember, I can remember one particular surgeon, he was doing a lot of research on these people that got cancer of the mandible. Some of his surgery was a bit grotesque actually. I felt a bit sorry for some of the

- 27:00 natives who had this reconstructive surgery done. But yeah, they were fine. I can't remember too much about the surgeons so they must have been all right. I can remember this one particular fellow, I can remember his name, but I can't honestly remember too much about the others. He was the main one we worked with.

**That's okay. I am curious that you mentioned his reconstructive**

- 27:30 **surgery was grotesque?**

Well, I specialised in plastic surgery before I went, in the operating theatre before I went to New Guinea and so yes, I thought it was, I wouldn't have liked to look like them at the end of their reconstruction.

- 28:00 Compared to what I had seen before. I think he was doing more research than anything else.

**Okay, that's quite curious. What led to your departure from New Guinea?**

Well, we went on a year's contract and then we decided that we would go overseas so

- 28:30 we flew back to Sydney and we caught the FairSky over to England. Six weeks cruising on the FairSky, that was great, had lots of fun. And when you think six weeks, wow, you would pay a fortune for that but in those days it was cheaper to go by boat than to fly. Only the rich flew and it was

29:00 the only way to get there if you didn't fly.

**If I can just ask you quickly, how long was it before you were on, what was the name of that ship?**

Fairsky.

**How long was it before you were on the Fairsky after you left Port Moresby?**

Oh it - we were there in a few days. Flew out of Port Moresby, arrived in Sydney, on the boat.

**So you didn't return to Perth to see the family?**

No.

**Do you remember notifying family that you were going to go?**

Oh yes they -

29:30 "Okay, she's going to England."

**Had you been writing home to them and letting them know about your adventures?**

Oh yes. We are a pretty close family and in those days you didn't ring because it was too expensive but I always wrote home. I always remembered birthdays and Christmases and all of that. They knew exactly what was happening.

**What was their reaction to some of the adventures they heard you were having?**

30:00 They still marvel at it. Still like to talk about it every now and again. Because at that stage they weren't having any adventures like that because they were older and they were married and they were having their families. But I mean they had a lot of adventures after their children had grown up but at that

30:30 stage I was doing something that was incredible to them.

**It is incredible by today's standard. So what kind of things did you enjoy on the Fairsky?**

Well, there was swimming and the eating of the Italian food and the parties, the ports of call. I mean I went to Singapore in

31:00 '61 and we were fortunate enough to have a lady on board who had become friendly with us and she lived in Singapore so she took us all around. We were only there for a day. That was really fascinating. I had this Lurex orange dress made in Singapore: I mean revolting when I think about it now, strapless.

31:30 Well, it is probably not so revolting now because a lot of those things are back in fashion.

**Retro.**

That was delivered to the ship but that was the thing to do in Singapore, have something made and get it delivered to the ship. We went to Colombo, Ceylon as it was called in those days. Bought a ring there, the thing to do, buy a ring.

32:00 Some jewellery. And I can remember that because there was so many beggars. I have never been back there, I don't know what it is like now but it was very sad seeing them. Our next port of call was Port Said when we went through the Suez Canal.

32:30 We went to Cairo, they were all so different and so fascinating.

**Did you spend much time at Port Said?**

Well, we actually got off the boat and we took a trip to Cairo and we rejoined the boat at Port Said. So we had a look around but we didn't really spend much time, it would have probably

33:00 only been a day trip.

**Sure.**

I can't remember sleeping anywhere off the boat. I can remember getting

33:30 back on the boat and all of these hawkers or whatever we called them in those days, climbing up the side of the boat. I bought some beautiful jewellery there, it was so cheap but beautiful. Silver jewellery with stones in it, costume jewellery but it was very ornate and lovely.

34:00 And then from there our next port of call was Naples, so here we were in Italy and we were really pretty stupid, you know young and stupid. We met these young boys and they said, "We will drive you around, show you what Naples is like." So there was, I think there was probably three of us, my girlfriend Gloria included and a couple of other girls we had met on the boat.

34:30 And they drove us out and around to this lonely beach and it was quite obvious that they wanted a bit more than what we had even thought of, I don't know why we didn't think about it. And we said, "Oh no,

we want to go back to the boat.” And they took us back I couldn’t believe it. I mean these days they would probably be raped on the beach or something. But yeah. And after Naples

**Were you in Naples very long?**

35:00 No, see the boat, they only stayed there for a day. They can’t afford to stay there much longer. Port fees are fairly high and then we went to Southampton. And we actually then went up to London to Earls Court where all of the Australian used to go and still go. And then we found ourselves somewhere to live

35:30 and then we had to start earning some money again.

**How did you go about finding a place to live?**

Well, Earls Court had a notice board and there were usually lots of notices, places to rent. So we eventually found a place: there was always people putting notices up there.

**Was it a very comfortable place?**

Yeah, it was

36:00 three: ground floor, first floor and a top floor, and there was tenants that we didn’t know really very well in the ground floor. And then we had the next floor which had a bathroom and kitchen, lounge room and one bedroom: we all slept in the one bedroom.

36:30 and the people upstairs, they were Irish, they used our bathroom as well. It was pretty basic but it was comfortable. And we were right near the train, so public transport was very good.

**Did you have work established before you got there?**

No. You just arrived there and I said I didn’t want to do nursing I wanted a change so I

37:00 went to work at the war office in their canteen. I lasted there for about a month: it was too hard, so much repetitive morning teas and lunches and afternoons teas. You had to have a special pass to go into the war office.

**How did you come across that opening?**

I am not too sure. Probably by a notice board.

37:30 I can’t remember that .and then we went away over to Europe: we had this little old car that used more oil than petrol I think.

**Do you remember what model it was?**

Little Austin I think. We went around staying in youth hostels to all of the typical tourist places like

38:00 Germany and Italy and we didn’t go to Spain that time, France and I can remember my girlfriend Henny, she had a birthday breakfast in Italy, I think it was lunch in Austria and the evening meal in France. I mean, yeah, that was really good. We spent probably about six weeks touring around .and then we came back and I got a job

38:30 with agency nursing, where you could just work whenever you wanted to, paid much more money too. Some of the highlights in that: I worked at the Moorefield Eye Hospital, that was interesting. I looked after Peter Seller’s mother in Hammersmith Hospital.

**What was Mrs Sellers like?**

A character, yeah, she was a character.

39:00 A nice old lady: liked her drink. And I met Peter Sellers only once. He came to the hospital to see his Mum but he was filming the Pink Panther in Rome at the time. And then I went to –

**Do you remember the occasion of his visit?**

Oh yes I do. Because he was married to an Australian at the time so he had a little

39:30 conversation with me.

**What did you talk about?**

I don’t know. I really don’t, I think I was excited about meeting Peter Sellers, you mention that to some young people now and they don’t even know who Peter Sellers was. Do you know?

**I am a fan of Peter Sellers.**

And then I went to, after she was discharged from the hospital I went to live in his penthouse with her in

40:00 Hammersmith I think it was. For a couple of weeks until she recovered. And I can remember she had this cook who was gay, nice man, my experience with gay people then. That was a bit of a novelty.

**You hadn't met a gay man before?**

- 40:30 Well no. I hadn't really but he was a nice man but he was a very emotional man. So I sort of met this fellow in New Guinea and he was pretty special and anyway he had come to London but he was living over in Belgium and they had a yacht and he arrived in London, rang up, "Can you meet me?" and
- 41:02 I just, "I am going. I am taking the night off." You know, I mean I was like live in and they had this storm while I was away and by the time I got back they were both emotional wrecks. He couldn't cope and she couldn't cope but I had had a great time. So after that I decided it was not worth it. I left that job.

**We're getting the wind up there so we will change tapes.**

41:30

## **Tape 3**

- 00:30 **Hanging around Earls Court, from what I can gather about England and Australia those times, that was just the peak time to have a wonderful time in England and so many Australians were doing it at your age?**

Well, I think even now Earls Court is a place where Australians congregate. But we actually then went to live out at Chiswick, which was not actually in Earls Court. My husband

- 01:00 actually was in England at the same time as me but we never met, and he actually has much more vivid memories of Earls Court than I do because he actually lived in Earls Court and he went to the dances in Earls Court, whereas we lived out at Chiswick and so we were doing agency nursing and we were travelling to a lot of places around and in
- 01:30 London. But we still did a lot, probably as much as what he did and had as good a time. But I mean they were different things. I mean we would go to Covent Garden and there were so many wonderful shows on, and you would buy very cheap tickets and climb up on the gods and watch the shows. You asked me before about going out and I could only remember
- 02:00 parties earlier on, but now it is sort of different because you are going to the pubs and I can remember going to Kensington and sitting down in coffee shops for the first time. And having blue vein cheese and black coffee, and I mean that sounds so mundane now but it was so different. And there was a store called
- 02:30 Darien Toms and you go right up to their roof and they had this magnificent garden up there with a - lovely store you know, you couldn't believe that you were on top of a store. We would hitchhike to places, down to Devon or Cornwall, we hitchhiked all around Scotland, you would have to hide often if you didn't want a lift. And once in Scotland
- 03:00 we were walking up the hill and we didn't want a lift and this truck came behind us and we thought oh, we won't hide because we were enjoying walking, he will never stop for us being a truck. And when we got to the top of the hill, he was up there waiting for us saying, "Hey, do you want a lift somewhere? Where are you going?" and staying in all of these little B and B's [bed and breakfast hotels] or youth hostels
- 03:30 and paying two and six pence a night. Some ridiculous thing. We had a great time going around seeing things. Eating out and seeing shows.

**That would have been different to seeing some theatre?**

I can remember though being in Melbourne,

- 04:00 I had forgotten about that. We did go to see My Fair Lady and I can remember that now, that was probably about the first real show that I had ever seen.

**It is still good today.**

Yes, isn't it? Another memorable thing when we were in London, we had a five day

- 04:30 smog and Gloria and I were actually looking after the same person, and we were doing double shifts because it would take us so long to get to work. From our place we would have to put our hands along the picket fence and get to the railway station and once you got on the train
- 05:00 that was really slow going, and so it would be hours to get to work and we were looking after this lady and so we would do the double shift and that would give her time to get to work and I would get home and we washed our hair at the end of this five day period and the water was ink black, and we wore ink petticoats so you couldn't see the black so much. And there would be slush and dirt up your
- 05:30 legs. That was something I can really remember, I can remember lots of lovely things in England too,



beautiful greenery, lovely flowers.

**What did you think of the weather?**

Well, we had just come from New Guinea so we had arrived in these little cotton dresses and that, this was in their summer, we arrived in

06:00 May. And my sister had sent me over some winter clothes that I had. It wasn't really like summer but it was very pleasant, then the winter came and that was very cold. I mean we would hardly get undressed to get into bed. We would probably end up having two baths or something a week because it was too cold to get our clothes off. And I

06:30 imagine these days and if you were a bit richer you would have had a nice warmer place, but we had this kerosene heater that we sat around. My girlfriend Gloria, she was actually born in England and she actually wanted to stay in England for the second winter and I said, "I don't want to do that." I had had two summers and one winter and I wasn't

07:00 ready to go home, so I saw a job that was advertised in some magazine. A job working in Bermuda and I applied for that and got that.

**How did you get to Bermuda?**

I went on the Queen Mary from Southampton to New York. And my sister actually recently gave me a postcard, she was sorting

07:30 out some of her things and she gave me a postcard that I had written to her when I was on the Queen Mary. Fascinating to read what you write about, "This boat is a quarter of a mile long." I got off in New York and stayed with a cousin in New York for a couple of days, who was working at St Lukes hospital and had a look around New York a little bit.

**08:00 Because that would have been pretty large even in the '60s?**

It was. Big, large. I can remember more about it when I went back the second time than that time. And then I got on the Queen of Bermuda and sailed to Bermuda and stayed there for a year. And that was brilliant. I worked in the operating theatre there

08:30 and the hospital itself had a little sailing boat and we used to after work, go out and sail. And we would swim. I remember we would swim of a night and there would be all of these fluorescent lights around you, have you ever experienced that where your body just becomes fluorescent? And we were

09:00 actually at Hamilton and that's where the hospital is but there is American bases at each end, one a naval base and one an air force base. It was part of land lease during the Second World War, exchanging land because Bermuda was British, for warships, et cetera. They traded land for warships

09:30 and I don't know what else.

**How big is Bermuda?**

Can't remember, but we could loan a car, only people who actually were residents there could own a car and there was only one car per family. So we had this little Mobilette and the speed limit was twenty-five mile an

10:00 hour and we would go around the whole island in a day so, I am guessing now, maybe twelve, twelve mile long or something.

**Because I am thinking it is not very large, is it?**

It is not large at all. But because of the American bases at each end there was always Americans ringing up the hospital saying, "Do you want to come out to the boat? We are having a cocktail party."

10:30 There was lots of swimming to do, lots of parties to go to. Beautiful place. And of course the entertainment was wonderful too with some of the hotels and the Jamaicans or some of the, see Bermuda, I am correct in saying, it doesn't have any of its

11:00 own population as such. You know like Jamaicans, they've actually come from other islands to live there. I am not too sure of its complete history but it had been British for a long time. But the entertainment was wonderful with the singing and the music that they created.

**11:30 It had a Jamaican feel to it?**

Yes. Definitely.

**What did you think of the Americans?**

They were good fun: we had a good time with them. I thought more of them when I met them in Bermuda than when I was travelling around Europe and England, I thought they were pretty loud then. I think it is probably the same

12:00 with any people when they are in a crowd with their own nationality. You know like Australians in a group, I don't know if you have come across a whole group of Australians, when they are in a group they are pretty loud and you think, "Yuk!" But the Americans that you met in Bermuda were very nice. I was actually in Bermuda when President Kennedy was assassinated.

12:30 And that was something that I remember.

**How did you hear about it?**

People crying the streets, news or someone told me, it was hysterical: no-one could believe it. Here are grown people just sobbing. After I left Bermuda, I returned home via the states and Canada. I would have –

13:00 sorry?

**That's all right, just before you get on a ship and get out of Bermuda,**

I flew out.

**You're too quick to get out of Bermuda there, can you describe the sort of duties you had in the hospital where you were working there?**

In the operating theatre, scrubbing, you know handling instruments, preparing trolleys,

13:30 scouting, looking after people who are scrubbed. I worked in the operating theatre the whole time, it was good.

**What were the people like that you worked with?**

A lot of Canadians, Americans, English—really nice people. But I lived in a nurses' home there so I got to know them really well and we did a lot together.

**What were the conditions like in the nursing home?**

Very good.

14:00 Nice room. We had a dining room that we could go to, it was in the hospital.

**And how many nationalities would there have been in there?**

I don't know if there was any other Australians when I was there. I don't think so, not when I was in the hospital. It was mainly British

14:30 American and Canadian.

**Because I am thinking you are at a bit of an outpost and I am also thinking not too many Australians would be brave enough to go to somewhere like Bermuda?**

I didn't meet any I don't think. I wanted to live in Bermuda, I did not want to leave Bermuda: it was just like a paradise. And it wasn't because I had met

15:00 some wonderful male or anything like that: it was just so nice to live there. But to actually stay in Bermuda, if you left you had to be able to have your return fare out of Bermuda once you got back in again. To where you lived, when I came from England I had to have a return

15:30 ticket to England because they obviously don't want to be stranded with anyone. I had been away then for just over three years and I thought it was time that I came home to see the family. And so I was returning to Australia which meant that I would have had to have enough money to go from Bermuda to Australia, back to Bermuda and back to Australia again. And when you look at the map about the furthest

16:00 place you can go from Australia is Bermuda. So I didn't have that sort of money. So I decided I would then come home.

**Before we talk about that, you mentioned that you were in the Moorefield Eye Hospital? What was so special about that experience?**

Well, it was a famous eye hospital. World famous eye hospital, where

16:30 they did lots of eye surgery and it was just like, you know, to say I worked at Moorefield Eye Hospital, it is something that you don't forget. And actually another place that I worked at in London was the Douglas Bader Limb Fitting Centre, in the hospital there, I had forgotten about that, but that is another place, it is

17:00 probably non existent now but after the Second World War that's where the fellows used to go and have their limbs fitted and made for them et cetera.

**What does that involve?**

It would involve just the fitting of the appropriate – measuring up, having it fitted, and then being

trained to use it. There were other people in there too but that was

17:30 was one of the main functions of the hospital.

**Did you find that an interesting job?**

I was working nights so I didn't really see what was happening in the day but it was an interesting place. They had some wonderful old men in there, who would say, "Nurse, you come here, I have got something for you." And they would get a little bit of chocolate out of their drawer for you, they were so nice.

18:00 And it was interesting because every week you would have to report while you were on duty. And you would get your ration of sugar, your ration of tea, and your ration of this and that in a little paper bag. So it was really quaint. But if you were going to the Moorefield Eye Hospital, that was an experience working there and I was thrilled to be able to say that I worked in the Moorefield Eye Hospital

18:30 But I worked in the private section too. And that was just such a contrast, because you were actually tipped when people left.

**Really?**

I was given money and a white dress and a few other things. After a while I thought, "I don't like this." Regardless of how you think you would appreciate something like that, you start to think, "I don't like it,"

19:00 because you start to wonder, "What is this person going to give me when I leave?" It is a horrible feeling. It was much better being at the Douglas Bader Limb Fitting centre, where an old man would say, "Come here, Nursie." And give you a tiny little bit of chocolate.

**Do you think with the private hospital it was a reflection of the health care system, like the more that you gave the better treatment you received?**

19:30 Probably. You start to wonder that, yes. You start to have these feelings about, if I looked after someone, gave them really special treatment. I mean it is terrible to say this but these things are going through your head and it is just contrary to what you were brought up to believe in. I mean

20:00 you give your services for nothing really, regardless of whether it is public or private. I mean these days the big hospitals, you wouldn't know if someone was a public or private patient and you don't really care: it doesn't make a difference.

**Anyway so you came back to Australia: that must have been a rude shock actually after Bermuda?**

20:30 Well, I came via - I had six weeks holiday in the States and Canada, so it was a matter of seeing Niagara Falls and New York and Washington and the beautiful rocky mountains and San Francisco and Los Angeles.

**Who were you travelling with?**

A couple of girls that I met in London,

21:00 and a couple of girls that I had met in Bermuda, and we all met up in New York and one of the girls that I met in Bermuda she came back to Perth with me and worked in Perth for a while before she went back to England. But that was all exciting and then I got on a cargo boat from Vancouver back via Hawaii and Fiji, back to Sydney.

21:30 **Was that because it was cheaper?**

Yeah, another experience and it was cheaper, and I don't know if any big liners went that way. And we're talking about years ago where it was a natural way of going. To go by boat rather than to fly.

**What were the conditions like on a cargo boat?**

We had a little cabin. I probably shared it: I think I shared it with

22:00 Paula and they provided you with meals to eat. They were carrying timber and so there was all of the timber on deck. And they had a little - you know one of those above ground pools that they put up after they got going. It was a lot less people, good fun,

22:30 it was different.

**So you probably got to know the crew quite well?**

The crew were part of it, you ate with the crew. They were just there for you to talk to whenever you want to or party with.

**You have done a lot of partying haven't you?**

I know when you think about it, pretty superficial.

**No, I think it's wonderful.**

23:00 **So coming back to Australia what was that like?**

Well, it was I guess it was great seeing all of the family. Then after you have been back for a couple of days you realise that life goes on without you and you have to start your life back here. And I went back to work at Royal Perth, and once again I went back to work in the operating theatre: really picked up

23:30 where we left off. Working in the operating theatre and worked with plastic surgeons, orthopaedic surgeons, just general surgery really. And that's when we lived in, I can't remember, it will come back to me. And we actually just

24:00 had a good time.

**You mentioned also that you had an interest in plastic surgery, was that continuous throughout your nursing?**

No, not really. Once I got into the army there was very little plastic surgery done then. Actually when I went back to work in Royal Perth there was a girl who came to work in the operating theatre and she came from Queensland.

24:30 And we got friendly and were talking and things like that and one day we got changed to go home and she put on this uniform and I said, "Where are you going?" and she said, "I belong to the CMF [Citizens Military Forces]." She said, "I belonged to the CMF when I was in Queensland," and she transferred over here. And I said, "Tell me about it, that sounds interesting." And she said, "Why don't you come along and have a look?" and I did

25:00 and then I joined the CMF.

**What sort of things did you see on that first night?**

Oh, it was really just a training place where we went along and we trained nursing assistants. Basic techniques of what to do, how to wash a patient –

25:30 they weren't allowed to give injections but you know those sorts of things. Then we would go away on camps and we would set up a mock hospital and we would always go away with some of the other CMF people and they would have mock exercise and they would be brought into the hospital and we would look after them. It was just preparation for war.

26:00 In case we were ever needed really.

**So it was like a dummy hospital?**

Oh yes, it was when we went away to camp.

**Whereabouts would the camps be held?**

Oh, one was at Northam, I know that. I can't remember now, it wouldn't have been that far away. I can't remember.

**Was there some sort of a uniform that you had to wear?**

Oh yeah, we wore the army uniform.

**What did it look like?**

26:30 Grey cotton dress again with the white starch collar.

**Can't seem to get away from that can you?**

And the white veil starched, looking very nice. And we had a little red cape, right down to our elbows. Very smart. Scarlet nurses. But our

27:00 uniform for the winter time was a grey serge suit, skirt, jacket, hat, light grey shirt, tie.

**So with your position of being a nurse, did you end up being in charge of a lot of other CMF ladies?**

Well not really, because

27:30 just entering the CMF, there were other people who had been there longer than me. And there was one regular army person who was a major and she was in charge. And then it was really only once a week that we went to Karrakatta where we had these little sessions where we would do training for ourselves and

28:00 for the other girls that came in. I think the camps were only once a year. Twice a year.

**What did you personally get out of attending the CMF?**

I suppose it introduced something else into my life that I hadn't really thought too much about. Of course Vietnam was on then, I joined the CMF must have been about

28:30 1965 and I joined the regular army as a result in 1967.

**Just with going back to what you said, Vietnam was on at that time, can you remember when war did actually break out and what your thought about it was?**

No I can't. I don't think it actually broke out as such. The advisers went in. I can remember

29:00 when the first team of nurses went, and I was still in the CMF, just about to join, I must have still been in the CMF. I joined the regular army in '67 and by that stage I had become quite interested and I joined the regular army to go to Vietnam.

**How much of the Vietnam War were you taking notice of in the papers?**

29:30 Oh, probably quite a lot I would say. I mean being in the CMF I was very much aware of what was happening.

**I am just interested in what a lot of your friends were talking about in relation to the war?**

At that stage there was no anti-feeling about Vietnam that I was aware of, later on lots.

30:00 But at that stage I wasn't aware of it. I was just aware of what was happening and nurses were now going and I thought I would like to be a part of that. I also had the, I believed that I had the experience. I had a lot to offer being in the operating theatre

30:30 and having a lot of experience in that.

**So what you're saying is because you have seen quite a bit from being in an operating theatre you felt that you had a lot to -**

Offer. And it was also and I hate to say this, but - another experience. But I mean that was only part of it. I really did think I did have a lot to offer

31:00 in relationship to my work but also part of it was, I guess, another adventure. I hadn't thought too much about war as such.

**You weren't thinking about the war so much as you were thinking about the nursing aspect of it?**

I guess so, yes.

**What did your family think about you being interested in and going and joining the Vietnam War?**

31:30 They were accepting. They were certainly - I was, well, when I joined the regular army they were quite accepting of that.

**Was that in 1966?**

I joined the regular army in '67. And I don't know if I had, I don't think I probably even talked about Vietnam but they were well aware that Vietnam was on, but they certainly did not say, "Don't go, don't go." Or anything like that.

**32:00 How did you go about joining the regular army?**

CMF. I just said, "I would like to join the regular army." I had already passed my captain exam by then.

**What sort of things did you have to do for a captain's exam?**

Oh, mainly - now you're asking me. Mainly about, you know, the

32:30 army and - I will have to pass on that one.

**That's all right, sometimes we ask you questions that are just so in detail that they are hard to answer. So what sort of training did you get after you joined up into the regular army?**

None. Full stop, none. Oh but

33:00 a year after I joined up I went on an orientation course and that was about a year after. It was pretty poor actually: I got more training in the CMF. If I hadn't have been in the CMF, it would have just been unbelievably complicated. But I mean

33:30 I was lucky because I did have that experience. But I mean other people that joined at the same time as me, they hadn't had that experience and they didn't go on their course for another year anyway so it wasn't because of my CMF training that my course had been delayed.

**How did you go about letting the army know that you wanted to go to Vietnam?**

- 34:00 It was just generally, you know, talking to people. I mean it is not like a big establishment or anything like that. I went to one military hospital to start with in Yeronga and I was working in the operating theatre there and
- 34:30 because I had worked at Royal Perth and quite knowledgeable, they didn't really have a well organised operating theatre and that wasn't due to anyone in particular. I mean you have got to think that suddenly there is a war on. And it was a conflict that
- 35:00 was only fairly new and so they weren't getting a lot of people back from the war and so when I went to work in the operating theatre, I came in with all of this knowledge and so I was able to organise the operating theatre. New ways of doing things and more efficient, etcetera. And I worked with surgeons there,
- 35:30 all of the surgeons were civilians but one in particular, Colonel Davis, he did go up to Vietnam. I just generally made it known that I wanted to go to Vietnam, and so after I had been at one military hospital for eighteen months, I went.

**Did you have to stay on base when you were working in the military hospital?**

- 36:00 At Yeronga? No, actually we could come and go as we pleased: being on call was always more restrictive. Working in an operating theatre you are always on call, it is just something you accept. When there is an emergency you have got to come back to work. And so when you're on call, you have to be available within about ten minutes but as a group we lived in the quarters there
- 36:30 and there was a group of us who actually rented a unit down at the Gold Coast and on our days off we would go down there. We rented that for a year and so we would have our time off down there.

**So basically the differences between a civilian hospital and a military hospital are negligible apart for the fact that it needed a bit more organization because the war in Vietnam had broken out?**

- 37:00 The difference between the running of the hospital at one military hospital and the running actually of the hospital and working at the hospital at Royal Perth to me was no different because when I went there I organised it like it had been done at Royal Perth. I made the rules, I was the only one working there. And
- 37:30 I had medical assistants helping me, but you know if you are the only one and you are making all of the rules then it doesn't differ too much.

**What sort of uniform did you have to wear?**

The usual operating dress, hat, mask. No different.

**So can you remember finding out about the fact that you were posted to**

**38:00 Vietnam?**

Well, actually I had been back on holidays to Perth. I probably had about a month there and I came back and they said, "Your posting has come through to go to Vietnam." And so because I hadn't been told before I went on annual leave, I was immediately sent back to Perth again.

- 38:30 Everyone that went to Vietnam that I knew of had some time at home before they went and I had a car at that stage so I drove it to Port Pirie and put it on the train and left it here in Perth. I left it with my sister. And then went back and then we flew to Singapore.

## **Tape 4**

**00:30 What happened when you got your posting, Yvonne?**

Do you mean how did I feel about it?

**Yeah, how did you feel about it, what happened? All of that.**

Well, I was told that I was going to Vietnam and then went on the plane, it was a Qantas flight. I remember we had to wear our ordinary civilian

- 01:00 clothes on the flight, we got off in Singapore because Singapore wasn't actually involved in the war and so they couldn't be seen to have people passing through their country in uniform. So once we got back on the plane we got changed and arrived in Saigon. We were picked up in Saigon and then

- 01:30 driven around Saigon. I remember lots and lots of motorbikes and lots and lots of people, but it was really only a quick trip around Saigon and then we were, I think we were in a Hercules from memory,

and we went straight to Vung Tau and arrived there.

**I'll just ask you a few questions: it must have been awkward changing into your uniform on board a regular Qantas flight?**

02:00 Well, there was only one other female on board with me, and all of the rest were men. I guess it was: I can't remember too much.

**Excuse me asking but were you forced to get changed in the toilet?**

In the toilet, yeah. I guess so, it had to be like that.

**Were they regular soldiers on board?**

Oh yes, it was chartered

02:30 for the army: we were all going to Vietnam.

**So there were no civilian passengers?**

No, not that I was aware of.

**What was your first impression when you arrived at Vung Tau?**

Well, we got off the plane and taken to the quarters and I thought, "Oh, I just feel like I am in prison."

03:00 I had never sort of had that feeling before but it was pretty barren. Huts where we lived - I suppose we were lucky we weren't living in tents, but we did have almost like a cubicle, open drains. It was pretty basic. And

03:30 at that stage I realised that I had no expectations: I did not know anything about Vietnam. I had just really, "Yeah, that would be interesting to go to Vietnam," and I had had no idea really. I had just thought I would be working in the operating theatre. I probably hadn't thought deeply enough and we certainly hadn't had anyone

04:00 sit down with us and say, "This will be happening, this is where you will be living." There was none of that.

**What kind of belongings did you take with you?**

Oh, we were able to wear civilian clothes when we were off duty, so there wouldn't have been much I took. A few dresses, gear to wear while we were off duty and of course our uniforms.

04:30 And we actually, for the people that worked in the wards, they did wear the grey mostly, the grey uniform and the veil but because I worked in the operating theatre I would have mainly wore the jungle greens down to the theatre and then changed in the theatre.

**Once you had been shown to your quarters, were you given time to unpack and settle in?**

05:00 I arrived at the quarters and it just seemed like it was minutes later the sirens went, the dust off siren and that meant that there were choppers coming in with casualties. And someone grabbed my hand and said, "Hey we have got to go." When the dust off siren went, everybody regardless of who you were,

05:30 what your job was, you had to go down to where the helipad was to get their jobs. Someone took my hand and said, "This is the way we go." And I knew where we were going, to the operating theatre, but I hadn't even seen it at that stage. And so there was this huge barn like room, very big with stretchers

06:00 all down each side, and I can't remember how many bays there were, I would say at least twenty but I am guessing now. And they all had oxygen and they all had equipment beside each bed and that was the triage area where the helicopters would come down onto the helipad and people would go out with the stretchers and bring them in

06:30 and the doctors would be out there prioritising them. Some would remain outside, and like you might get one of the administrative staff sitting with them giving them a cigarette, talking with them, making sure they were okay. And the other more severely injured ones would come into the triage and they would come into the triage

07:00 according to their priority.

**You were just discussing the triage area?**

Yes, well, there was different priorities in the triage: number one would get the top priority in the triage, so they placed me towards the back of the triage where

07:30 the not so severely injured people would be, and that was supposedly an introduction and there was a team of us, at each patient. They would actually come in all still in their jungle greens, come straight from where they had been injured.

08:00 And this bay that I had been put on to was a young fellow and where they had to check him over first, and they rolled him over and he had this severe injury on his back that no one had noticed.

**We might pause there, Yvonne. Would you like to back track a few paces and continue that**

08:30 **story?**

Okay. The bay that I had actually been put on had this soldier and he supposedly hadn't been injured very severely, and when they rolled him over he had massive wounds on his back and he was bleeding pretty badly and going down hill pretty badly. And so

09:00 I just froze: I couldn't believe it. And I thought how am I going to ever cope? But I suppose I did cope, I can't remember much about that. And then the rest of what I can remember is repeating of all of that you know? The sirens going and it didn't really matter if you were eating or sleeping or whatever you were doing.

09:30 As soon as the sirens started you were there. And you know, the casualties were coming in and in 1969 when I went there was a lot of casualties coming in .and they were pretty severely injured, like loss of limb or the shrapnel would track right up through their bodies, through their

10:00 abdomens and chest and into their brains sometimes. So you would actually start in the operating theatre and you wouldn't really know what kind of surgery you were going to do: you might start off with an abdomen, go into the chest and then the brain. Some of them were really terrible, terrible injuries. But the one thing

10:30 that was really good was the fact that the soldiers when they arrived, they really felt that they would survive when they got to the triage. Because they had been flown out in the gunships and they thought that if they got there they would be all right.

11:00 And many were: actually they were really wonderful people. And we worked jolly hard but you didn't really seem to notice it, I mean if you weren't there then there would be no one else to do it. But I think that the worst thing was that there was only one team of us and there was no one to

11:30 relieve us, so the stress was enormous. Not only for me but for everybody who worked in the operating theatre. I was the only female working there, I was in charge of the medical assistants, I was in charge of more of the professional aspects you could call it, but there was a sergeant there who was actually in

12:00 charge of discipline of the actual medical assistants, being privates or corporals. But we worked long hard hours. And once we had a dust off came in, thirty-six or so people, we worked for thirty-six hours straight. And then we sort of just fell into bed and

12:30 the dust off siren went again and we started working again. After that I believe they got two teams or more people but it was just too much for one lot of people to manage it but we would actually come off and we would be so tired that you couldn't go

13:00 to sleep you were just so stressed out. You would go up to the mess and just sort of be there with other people. Because it's probably the only place that I have worked where the people were really important, I mean when I first started nursing it was great to have the other nurses but when I worked in Vietnam the people that I worked

13:30 they were just like your family. More so than your family, you just relied on each other so much.

**How did you support one another?**

I don't know: I guess by talking to them, being there. Being there I suppose really. We smoked like chimneys: I didn't smoke until I went there. Well, I had

14:00 the occasional social cigarette. But they were cheap: we smoked together, we drank together, we partied together. But when I look back on it we mustn't have drunk that much, we probably talked more than we drank because we were on duty twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. And so we were

14:30 never - you couldn't get drunk or anything like that. So it must have been a drink that you held for a long time but we certainly spent a lot of time in the mess.

**I'll just ask you a few questions Yvonne, from what I understand you had no orientation of the hospital at all?**

No. None.

**That must have made it particularly difficult to react to the first arrival of wounded?**

15:00 Well, it did actually and I think it was pretty criminal because I don't think I was an isolated case and I think it happened probably to most people who went there.

**You mentioned that you were working in a team. What did a team consist of?**

We had surgeons, anaesthetists



- 15:30 and me, medical assistants, that's it. And actually there were other, there was the commanding officer there and he was surgeon and he would come down and operate, wonderful man, really wonderful man. And he worked probably harder than anybody else, because he had, as
- 16:00 commanding officer, he had to run the hospital and then he would be down in the operating theatre operating away. He was about the size of a match stick. And we had a psychiatrist. He was fantastic and he would - see they would finish the surgery and they would have to leave and there would be this terrible mess in the triage
- 16:30 because we would move from the triage straight into the operating theatre. And so the surgeon and anaesthetist would leave once the cases were finished but I mean they would then have to go and see the patients that they had attended to and make sure they were all right. And so we were left to clean up and repack instruments and whatever, and the
- 17:00 psychiatrist would come down, often with a can of beer for the boys. And get on the mop and help and you know he was fantastic. I still see him at some reunions. The commanding officer that I told you about, he has had a cardiac arrest and died.

**What was his name, sorry?**

Ray Hurley. He was living up on the Central Coast and my

- 17:30 husband and I actually went up to Gosford to see another girl that I was in Vietnam with, her and her husband, and her husband was in Vietnam too. And we went to see Ray and he had just come out of surgery and was at home after he had cancer of the bowel. And we had this lovely reunion and he gave me some photographs that he had. And his wife was there
- 18:00 and some of his children came that day, came in and out. And by the time Quentin and I got back to Sydney my girlfriend rang and said, "Ray has had a cardiac arrest and died." So that was sad but I mean he worked so hard, it seemed such a shame that he didn't - well, I can't remember now when he died
- 18:30 but I suppose he had had quite a few years in Gosford. But I have seen a number of people die since then, I am sure it played a big part in their lives, stressed their bodies out et cetera.

**You must have been very grateful that you had the opportunity to visit him before he died?**

I was, it was really good.

**I was wondering Yvonne if you could explain the procedure that you would follow in**

- 19:00 **taking in the wounded, treating them and then retiring them to another ward to recover, I am not sure of the procedure you followed?**

Well, they would come by gunship, chopper, and there was a big helipad and you know the choppers would be coming one after the other depending on how many were wounded and people would go out with their stretchers and bring them in

- 19:30 and as I said before, they would come into the triage and there would be people assigned to every bay and they would be prioritised then for surgery. We had two theatres, one had a single table in it and the other one had two tables in it and we just immediately started operating.
- 20:00 And as one procedure, case, finished another one would come in and so it was virtually the same team that had been in the triage that went into the operating room. But of course a lot of people remained in the triage, people who worked in the wards, they then had to double up.
- 20:30 Like I said there was no time off. They would either be, when there was a dust off on they would either be working in the wards or working in the triage or helping wherever.

**How many wards were there?**

There was an intensive care unit, a medical ward, and a surgical ward. I

- 21:00 am just a bit hazy because you know I worked in the operating theatre the whole time and so I didn't go to the wards very much. But they were pretty big wards.

**You mentioned earlier that you treated thirty-six men in the same number of hours?**

Yes.

**That doesn't give you much time for turn around between each patient?**

No, it doesn't.

- 21:30 Some of them may not have needed any surgery maybe. A bandage or a cigarette or something, I can't remember how many cases we would have done. Didn't even count them. And some of them would be on the table for a short time, others much longer but it was full on,

22:00 a lot of work. But everyone just worked so well together.

**I am wondering just how you do move from one case on the table to another case without any preparation for the next case?**

Well, the one case would go out and then you would have everyone in there cleaning the theatre and then

22:30 we had to organise it so that we could set up within like a couple of minutes. It was just a matter of opening up, once the trolley was cleaned, opening up a big pack and putting the pre-sterilised instruments on the table, doing a count. You know by that time the anaesthetist would have anaesthetised and we would be on our

23:00 way again. The whole thing was to have a turn over in a matter of minutes.

**In those circumstances was it difficult to keep the surgery sterile?**

Well, we did our best. We kept taking swabs all of the time. And our infection rate to the best of my knowledge was

23:30 pretty good. I mean some people they had lost so much blood and they were so traumatised that they would probably get an infection anyway. But I mean it wasn't sort of - the infection to the best of my knowledge wasn't as severe as it could have been.

24:00 See a lot of the soldiers, they had been stressed so much, they had instant ulcers and they were vomiting blood even. You know you think people who are stressed can get an ulcer over an number of years, but they could get it within a matter of hours and they lost so much blood that we were just using bags and bags of blood and there would be blood all over the floor.

24:30 And then they would get this bleeding syndrome because they had lost so many of their clotting factors, and so you would have to start bleeding soldiers for fresh blood so that they could replace some of their clotting factors. But I mean I can remember one particular person

25:00 and he had lost both legs and both arms and he had was having surgery on his brain and he arrested and so the surgery stopped and looked around and you know, it was a bit of a blessing really, and then suddenly he started breathing and we had to

25:30 start patching him up and took him to the intensive care. And you think to yourself it's not fair, why did he have to start breathing again, you know? But I mean he did die a couple of days later, we were there, one of our doctors stood on a mine and he was blinded,

26:00 so there were lots of awful incidences. But the whole thing, I think that's why Viet vets stick together because they do, because they were treated so badly when they came back, but fortunately they have still got this comradeship, if you stick together you'll be all right.

26:30 **Yeah I think that is a subject that we should talk about later in quite a bit of detail, that treatment that Vietnam vets got, and camaraderie as you mentioned. You just mentioned, Yvonne, a doctor who trod on a mine? Where was he in danger of treading on a mine?**

Well, there were land mines all around, not within our compound but

27:00 wherever they were patrolling and fighting. And he stepped on the mine, he was out on patrol because some of the doctors were on patrol, they weren't all at the hospital and he stepped on the mine, and of course the mines were designed to blow up around about here and he got

27:30 the shrapnel in his eyes.

**Did you treat him back at the - ?**

He came back to where we were.

**That must have been difficult news to receive that you have just had one of your own injured like that?**

Yeah, it is pretty awful to think that.

28:00 But I guess at that time you did accept it: you had to.

**I am just wondering about the time that you would have after surgery to unwind, you mentioned earlier that you would go to the mess and have a few drinks?**

I remember one party we went to and got all dressed up. But I mean everything was temporary.

28:30 You know if the siren went that would be the end of it. And actually a couple of times going into Vung Tau: the fellows would take us in, I remember once going to a brothel.

**You went to a brothel?**

Oh yeah, they were just, see Vung Tau was a Viet Cong area where they came for their R & R [rest and recuperation], so I mean, I suppose that's one reason why we were never bombed

29:00 and attacked right in the compounds. We had lots of alerts, I am not saying that it was safe, no place was safe around there but we were maybe a bit safer than all of these poor young fellows who were out on patrol. I mean they had a terrible time, some of them were only nineteen. Really bad. And we

29:30 were taken to a brothel and the girls were more interested in talking to us, I suppose it is just a job to them. They were just there, it was a crazy place.

**Can you describe the interior of the brothel?**

Just like a bar, they told me it was a brothel,

30:00 the girls were just there. I mean there were quite a few bars and you would see the girls in their rickshaws, dressed up going off to work. There was a hotel we used to go to, American hotel, I think it was called the Grand Hotel, there was a night club that sometimes we went to. That sounds like we had a big social life but we didn't: I mean they were probably been to each one once or something like that.

30:30 We didn't go off base very much at all.

**How often did you leave base?**

I wouldn't even hazard a guess. It wouldn't be once a week. Once every couple of weeks maybe, for a couple of hours. And the RAEME [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] fellows they restored an old pink Citroen for us, well, they painted it pink.

31:00 And we could drive that around the compound and it was the beach - there was the Playboy Club there and there was the beach we could swim at. Actually one of the Vietnam vets I know got off the internet me with my dog tags on and bikini. Walking back from the beach with one of the other girls. Put it on the net.

**Do you have a copy of the picture?**

He hasn't given me a copy, I don't think. But it is all over the net now.

31:30 I could have had a copy, I must have, I think I have got one or I had seen in somewhere before anyway. It was one of them taken when we had the 'what do you call it' crew up taking all of these photographs of us: it is all in the national museum now. In the operating theatre or swimming on the beach or whatever.

**So you are a Vietnam poster girl?**

32:00 Yeah. I was in the museum for a while but they keep changing.

**You mentioned that you had the opportunity to speak to some of the girls working in Vung Tau brothels: what did you manage to discuss with them on your visit?**

Oh, they didn't speak very good English but most of them had children. They were just like anyone you would meet on the street, want to talk about their kids or whatever.

32:30 I mean you would never pick them for a prostitute but I don't think they had much choice anyway. They probably had no other way of supporting themselves.

**What did the boys think of the girls working in those establishments?**

I don't really know.

33:00 I couldn't really answer that I mean they would go in there and they would be having a drink or chat to them but I wouldn't hazard a guess anything more than that.

**You weren't aware of the incidence of venereal disease?**

No, not really, because I wasn't, because it wasn't -

**Sorry?**

33:30 It wasn't the area that I was in. I think there was quite a bit, I don't know how much amongst the Australians I would only be guessing and it is not really fair for me to do that because I was just

34:00 involved with the operating theatre and the triage.

**Were they being treated for VD [venereal disease] at the 1st Australian Field Hospital?**

I would imagine so but I don't know. I wouldn't even know how many of our soldiers got venereal type disease.

34:30 **What can you recall of the Playboy Club?**

Well, they had shows on down there but we really didn't get too many: we were too busy. See the soldiers would come, the patrols would come in and they would maybe be on rest for several weeks and they would have shows down there

35:00 and they would use it more than what we did. I mean it was – I am talking about a couple of kilometres away but just in that compound.

**Did you visit some of those shows?**

I can't recall ever going to a show there.

**Was there any entertainment held at the hospital?**

No.

35:30 **Did anybody, entertainers and such, visit the soldiers recovering in the recovery wards?**

I can't remember. It is better, because I worked in the operating room, maybe they did. I know Johnny O' Keefe came when I was there, I don't know, I didn't hear him sing and he may have visited the soldiers in the ward I don't know.

36:00 **Too busy?**

I guess so, yeah.

**What about the American soldiers did you have much to do with them in Vung Tau?**

Yeah, there was 36 Evac [Evacuation Hospital] and we visited their hospital once and sometimes they would come over, they would get steaks or something like that. They had better food than what we did. They had better equipment. They might come over and we would have a barbeque.

36:30 But our food was terrible.

**What did your food consist of?**

Dehydrated whatever, turkey, chicken, steak, you name it. It was all dehydrated and if you had have put a blind fold on anyone, they wouldn't have been able to tell what they were eating. It was terrible, you would be there getting the flies off your food. Trying to eat with your other hand.

37:00 Go out to the kitchen and the Vietnamese cooking would be picking their toenails.

**Sounds revolting.**

The food was revolting: I found in revolting anyway.

**Did that affect your morale at all?**

Well, you lost interest in eating. And so I got ill when I was in Vietnam, I got

37:30 hepatitis B from all of the blood I had been handling, I didn't realise that it was hepatitis B until years later when they took blood and found out I had all of these antibodies to hepatitis B. But I mean, I knew it was hepatitis, but I didn't know it was hepatitis B. So when I lost appetite and couldn't be bothered

38:00 eating, I just thought it was the food. So I mean it was a combination of being ill and the food.

**Was the blood being screened?**

I believe that it wasn't being screened for hepatitis B. We used American blood and then of course you would use fresh blood too. And I guess

38:30 that's how I picked it up because we handled a lot of blood.

**What kind of protective procedures did you take to reduce your exposure to the blood you were handling and the risks?**

Only normal procedures that you would take in any operating theatre. If you were scrubbed up you would have gloves on, if you had a pin prick you would change gloves but we wore no gloves

39:00 when we were actually scouting.

**What's that sorry?**

Scouting is when you're not scrubbed and handing instruments, that person needs someone around that would like go and – if you dropped a scalpel would go and get you another scalpel or if you wanted another suture would go and get you another suture. Who would give

39:30 you more sponges, who would count them. They do all of those sorts of jobs, general run around. You have got to have someone like that. So the only precautions that we would take would be the washing of our hands. Of course we wore a mask: that was more to protect the patient from our germs than

anything else.

40:00 **What was the likely scenario in which you contracted hepatitis?**

It could have been handling the clothes, handling linen, even putting blood up. You know, cleaning anyway. You have only got to have a little nick and

40:30 the virus gets in. You're not even aware that you have infected yourself.

**And the environment you were working in was probably an extreme risk I suppose?**

Oh well yes. I suppose we were very lucky that AIDS [Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome] wasn't around then. Now they take much more precaution. I mean the wear goggles and masks and gloves all of the time.

41:00 We didn't have any of those safety precautions.

## Tape 5

00:30 **I was just curious, how much were you getting paid while you were there, was it enough do you think for what you were going through?**

You should talk to them about how much money you got. I was a captain while I was there and I was getting paid less than the private soldier who was working with me. Pretty bad, hey?

01:00 **How does that work?**

Well, it was just like pay for women and pay for men. So even though I was doing a very responsible job and holding a rank, because I was a woman then I got much less pay.

**Well, that is certainly something we haven't touched on, I guess it is 1969 we are talking about?**

01:30 Yes, it is not very long ago. It did change before I got out of the army but while I was up there the pay was very poor.

**So you were probably getting paid half?**

Oh, I don't know. It was something you didn't really dwell on. But every now and again, you knew it to be such.

**Did any of the other nurses**

02:00 **talk about that sort of thing, that inequality that was going on?**

Yeah, we talked about it. Possibly not in Vietnam, but we were all aware of it and moves were being taken so that it would be redressed.

**And how long did it take for it to be redressed?**

Well, I got out in December '73 and possibly, I don't know if it was

02:30 equal pay, but certainly our pay had been increased possibly a year before then. So I was getting what I thought was quite a good salary then.

**Takes a while. Going back to what you were talking about before lunch, you said when you heard the siren you knew there were choppers coming. Was there any other warning that you could get that there might be wounded coming in from what you might have heard on the radio or the - ?**

03:00 Not that I was aware of. That was the only warning that we got.

**Was there any way to find out how battle movements were going so that you could be more prepared?**

Well, it wasn't really that sort of war. They were working in patrols and suddenly they would be fired upon by a sniper or they may come across some

03:30 Vietnamese and they had to get permission before they engaged in any fighting. It wasn't like that they were fighting on a front or something like that. So there were a lot of soldiers from various battalions out on patrol.

**So the only warning you had was the siren literally?**

Well, they could get the people they said from the casualty area

04:00 to the hospital within minutes and the Australians were very good at lifting the casualties out. They were called gunships because they were designed to carry one person with a gun to protect them when they went down into the areas to lift the casualties out. But the Australians didn't carry anyone with a gun, they actually

04:30 had increased space to get the casualties out.

**How many could they carry on board at once?**

I don't know, I can't remember. Its not like they were very big, not like were talking about some of the big choppers that you see today. I would only be guessing, four, and I am guessing, I don't know. It was the thing

05:00 that they came in and went out again so quickly. They would come in and drop some off and go out again and pick someone else up. There may be half a dozen choppers landing at the same time.

**How would patients get out from your base, would they be helicoptered out?**

No, well, depending on, someone that was wounded or ill they could medivac [medical evacuation] them out, because they didn't have the facilities

05:30 to rehabilitate them and they certainly couldn't spare them, once they were wounded or sick they needed to evacuate them out so they could get someone to replace them. So they were evacuated in a Hercules that went via Butterworth. And they could carry, once again

06:00 I am only guessing, I can't remember how many people but they could carry a lot because they were all in stretchers, on bunks up the side of the aircraft.

**What was the average time that somebody would stay in your hospital?**

Oh, I would say probably only, depending on their health, once it was realised that they weren't going to go back

06:30 to the battlefield then they would probably be out in a week or as soon as their condition allowed them to be evacuated. Some people with intensive care, they would stay in longer until they were stabilised.

**Did that give you time to get to know the patients after they came out?**

I didn't get to know them, I was working in the operating theatre.

07:00 But the people that worked in the wards, they got to know quite a few of the casualties. I think maybe that helped.

**You think it helped?**

I think it helped. Well, I know it helped the soldiers and I think it probably helped the people that were working in the wards: we only ever saw them pass through.

**You only ever really saw them in little pieces?**

07:30 Yeah, well yes. In the triage [sorting and allocating the injured] and in the operating theatre.

**Does that make your job harder do you think?**

It probably to some extent made it easier then because you weren't so personally involved, but it may make it harder now.

**When you say they were quite badly shot up when you would see them,**

08:00 **what was their mental state like, were they really distressed and how would that be dealt with?**

Well, by the time they actually got to the triage area they were just so relieved and happy to be there. I mean some obviously if they were very ill, they would be probably to some extent unaware of their surroundings.

08:30 But the majority of them were just so relieved to be there and get treatment and they knew that they would get good treatment there and then they would go home.

**Was it just Australians you were treating?**

We did have some Americans and we did have some prisoners of war too. But not many Americans and not many prisoners of war.

09:00 **What was the general attitude of treating POWs [prisoners of war]?**

Well, they were probably treated, I couldn't say better than our own soldiers but we were very much aware of the issues that were involved. You just had to treat them as best you could, the same as anybody else.

09:30 **Do you think they were surprised to get such good treatment from the enemy?**

Hard to say. I wouldn't really - you couldn't really tell what they were thinking, I suppose someone who used to interrogate them or something could but I couldn't.

**That's all right: did you have any Vietnamese working inside the camp?**

Yes, a lot, certainly in the kitchen area.

10:00 **What sort of jobs would they have to do?**

Cooking and cleaning our quarters, they didn't, well, I wasn't aware of them working in the actual hospital. But certainly in our quarters and mess areas they were.

**What about facilities like laundry?**

They would do our laundry, I don't know how they

10:30 did it but it was done. But I mean it was pretty basic sort of laundry, there was no starching and all of that.

**Was there fresh water around or did it have to be carried in?**

We had fresh water to drink, whether it was carried in I don't know.

**Just from what you described before, the site you were on sounds very bleak?**

11:00 Yes, it was pretty bleak. People that have been back to Vietnam say it was very beautiful, but where we were it was bleak, and even though we were on a beach there was the cyclone, you know the barbed wire rolls that they have, that was all the way along the beach.

11:30 **Did you ever have threat of break-ins to the camp?**

We had alerts and then we would be confined to our quarters until the alerts were over. Being red, or yellow, or you know, depending on the severity.

**What use was it to be actually confined to quarters?**

Well then, if you were wandering around,

12:00 the benefit was that if anyone was wandering around then it could be the enemy.

**Right, so it was through a process of elimination?**

Yes.

**Did you have very many guards around the place?**

No just - I guess there were but you weren't aware of them unless there was an alert on. But in the compound there was a lot of soldiers there.

12:30 It just wasn't the hospital, there was all of the back-up for the hospital as well.

**If you needed supplies how would they arrive and how would you get them?**

Well, that would all be done through administration, you would put an order in and it would come by plane and then be delivered to your department.

13:00 **Was there ever trouble getting supplies?**

Sometimes but often if you couldn't get them in, then you would get them from the Americans. They usually seemed to have a good supply of things.

**How far away were they?**

Oh, not very far, it seemed like only about thirty minutes away by car.

13:30 I mean I did go up to 36 Evac once and it certainly wasn't a long journey.

**How were you greeted there?**

Oh good. Went into the operating theatre and everyone was chummy and pleased to see us. But then we were always pleased to see the Americans when they came over to our mess, it was more company and someone else to talk to.

14:00 **How often would you go and visit each other?**

I only went the once but often the Americans would come over to us and I imagine that a lot of the soldiers went over there too.

**Did you have a problem with boredom at all?**

The only time you would have problem with boredom

14:30 and maybe not as much work to do was if there was something political going on in Australia, like an election and then it was very little fighting. And if you had that then the motivation of people would go down because there is not much to do. That happened once there was a general election in Australia,

15:00 be it state or federal I can't remember.

**So there wasn't any fighting because -**

No fighting.

**Because nobody wanted to cause an uproar. That's really interesting isn't it? Just goes to show that it is all politics.**

Oh, it is.

**How about mail, did you get mail often?**

Yes, we got mail sent up.

15:30 I wasn't there but towards the end there was often mail held back because of people demonstrating against the Vietnam War. And that was pretty bad, that was really bad for the soldiers, I could never understand why people would do that, why the unions would do that.

**Why was the mail held back?**

16:00 It was just a part of their protest.

**Doesn't seem very fair. What sort of things would you get in the mail?**

Oh, just letters and normal things you would get, except I never got any bills. Just letters and that.

**How often would you communicate with people back in Australia?**

Oh, I don't know. Just normal letters I guess, I have no idea.

16:30 **Sounds like you didn't have a lot of time to really write?**

I can't remember writing but I guess I did. Its one of those things, if you ask me when I went overseas how often did I write, I wouldn't have a clue, but I always kept in contact so I guess I wrote a few letters, sent a few cards.

**Just what you said before, when the mail stops, so the mail is really important?**

Yes

17:00 and especially for fellows with families and children, you know they really rely on their mail, probably even more than what I did. I was just getting letters from friends or my sisters, but if you can just imagine a fellow there that's got some family or a wife and that and they want to know what is happening and they are not getting any mail, it is pretty poor.

17:30 **How many women were there around where you were in relation to men? Were you really outnumbered?**

Well, I think there was forty-three women that went to Vietnam and I think maybe it was ten at a time, so we were the only women there,

**Do you feel that the men actually took care of you because you were in a minority?**

Oh yeah they were fantastic.

**How would they show this care to you?**

I guess by talking to us, including us in things, taking us into Vung Tau if we wanted to go in. Taking us on an outing to the

18:30 hotel or the brothel or doing up our car. Doing a car up for us so we could get around the compound. There was only one unfortunate incident I had and I wasn't going to mention it but my husband said I should. There was, you were asking about doctors who went there, and there was one doctor who actually came up, a civilian doctor who came up

19:00 for three months and he was incompetent. -

**This section of transcript is embargoed**



**until 1 January 2034.**

- 19:17 He would try to corner me in places: I think he was so insecure that he just wanted attention,
- 19:30 thought he was passionately in love with me or, and that was a real hassle for me. Because in those days no one really paid too much attention to sexual harassment and even though people looked after me and laughed at it, you can imagine if you're busy and you just
- 20:00 go into the coffee room to get a drink or something and someone is trying to chase you around the table or catch you in the corner or something like that, up in the mess, it became a bit of a joke but it really wasn't a joke to me. And so much so that when I came back he was already, they took him off really doing any surgery and he swanned around for a bit.

**This section of transcript is embargoed  
until 1 January 2034.**

- 22:24 **I just find it interesting that these men who like you said -**
- 22:30 I found there was quite a bit of sexual harassment in the army.
- Just in Vietnam?**
- No, in the army,
- Well tell me about it because nowadays are different...**
- Well, it was just men trying to force their intentions upon you, I guess, one way or the other.
- 23:00 But I mean he was the only person that sexually harassed me when I was in Vietnam, but in other units it happened too, but not to that extent.
- I find it bizarre that other people that you worked with didn't bail him up in the corner....**
- I think
- 23:30 he was so incompetent, I guess they felt, I don't know, to some extent a little bit sorry for him. He was a bit pathetic.
- Where did his incompetence lie?**
- Oh well, he was not a general surgeon and it was the fault of the army to send him there. He was a specialist surgeon in orthopaedics and to suddenly be in that situation where you were supposed to be doing
- 24:00 abdominal or chest or brain surgery, I mean it is a bit stupid, isn't it? To send an orthopaedic surgeon there, when really virtually they're the only official surgeon, so that meant that our commanding officer was working non stop in the surgery because he was incompetent and they had to send someone else up.
- How about the commanding officer, what could he do about the situation?**
- 24:30 Which situation do you mean?
- If they guy that they have sent, they guy that is harassing you, is incompetent, and the commanding officer has to be in the operating theatre to supply the skill that the other guy was not.....?**
- I am sure he was doing lots and informing people and you know he eventually got someone else up to take his place.
- It just sounds like complete**
- 25:00 **disorganisation.**
- Well, I mean it was only civilian surgeons that came up and they came up for three months and I guess maybe they chose them well but they certainly didn't with this person.
- Was there no official means that you could personally complain through the army?**

Oh, people didn't do it in those days.

25:30 I mean it was not like, if someone had raped you, you certainly would have went through official channel, but harassment, that was just what happened in those days. I mean even outside of the army, but I guess because it was the army and it was mainly male, I guess it happened more in the army.

**I see your point.**

26:00 **Doesn't make it right though.**

No, it certainly does not. And they were usually all senior people who did it.

**Well, if they weren't senior, you would probably give them a clip across the head.**

Yeah, that's right or report them.

**Were there many relationships between men and women that developed because of the closeness?**

Oh yes. It was quite a number, I mean it was just, if you were there

26:30 and there were males and females then certainly there were some relationships that developed.

**How did they fare under the extreme conditions?**

Well, I think it was the very fact that you just needed someone. As I said before the people you worked with were really important, you just gravitated

27:00 to people.

**So were they short relationships that never led anywhere after?**

No, I know of several relationships, at least three or four relationships where they got married afterwards or the relationship continued, they may not have got married when they got back but certainly the relationships continued after they got back.

**I am just wondering if there was any time for**

27:30 **well, sex really, this is the sex question, was there any time for this sort of thing going on?**

I am sure there was, it's amazing where you can do it.

**Is this from personal experience?**

Oh well, I haven't reached sixty-seven, not sixty-seven yet but nearly, I mean, you know what goes on in life.

**I am just thinking well it was the '60s and the '70s so it was quite a liberating time?**

28:00 It was. But you looking at people that - it was a very emotional time for them as well. And it was -

**What sort of other things about your time in Vietnam really stand out for you as far as your experience is concerned?**

Oh, I suppose the things

28:30 I have already mentioned. What stands out to me was the relationship between people. I was pleased that I was there when I was there because I felt that I was doing a pretty worthwhile job. I remember how hard I worked

29:00 and how stressful it was. It is just so difficult to summarise it really. It was a very emotional time but we seemed to manage. I only stayed there for six months because I was medivaced out with hepatitis and I also caught a virus and got

29:30 pneumonia so I was - came back about seven stone eleven, pretty sick when I came back. I suppose that's something else I remember too. Coming back through Butterworth and I didn't find the treatment at Butterworth at all an enjoyable experience.

**So you went?**

30:00 To Butterworth Hospital. They thought maybe I could have a bit of a rest there before I got back to Australia, and because I had had the hepatitis they thought maybe I could have a little bit of R & R there. But then they put me in a nurses' quarters and I got sick and no one checked on me, and I was there for a

30:30 couple of days sort of barely aware of what was going on, and then they put me in hospital and the treatment was no better once I got into hospital. I mean I can't say anything good about my experience in Butterworth except there was one Red Cross girl who was absolutely great to me. All they seemed to care about

31:00 was where was my luggage and what was happening to us? It was awful.

**Was this some sort of transient place as well for nurses?**

Transient place for a lot of people who couldn't make the trip straight through from Vietnam to Australia when they were being medivaced out.

**Why do you think the duty of care was so bad there at Butterworth?**

Well

31:30 this is only my guess is that a lot of air force were not happy that they weren't posted in Vietnam. They were actually doing medivac duties but they never had the opportunity to serve in Vietnam.

**And you think they took it out on....?**

I don't know I can't imagine why they would but their standard of care was poor, terrible.

32:00 **Was it even a lack of staff perhaps?**

I don't think so. I mean they left me with pneumonia with no antibiotics or anything.

**That is astonishing.**

Yeah, it is astonishing.

**So you reckon that the original plan was to get a few days of R & R squeezed in there?**

Yeah a few days between, I think the medivac flights were a week apart and they thought maybe I could have a few

32:30 days there but I got sick, well I was sick there. My condition deteriorated.

**Could you not communicate with anyone at all?**

I was sick, I told them I was sick. I mean I was running a temperature, I could hardly sit up because it hurt so much to cough

33:00 I mean you can't communicate any more than that.

**And at the time, sorry go on.**

I mean at the time you, I don't know, you just thought - I remember writing a letter home, I just thought I was going to die and it is very hard when people start to feel like that, to start demanding your rights or whatever.

**Pretty much had enough?**

33:30 Well yeah, I thought I was going to die.

**Did you actually know you had hepatitis at the time?**

Oh yes, that was why I was medivaced out.

**What are some of the symptoms?**

Oh go yellow, jaundice, lost all of my appetite, loss of weight.

**Has it got other symptoms as far as damage in your body if it is not treated?**

34:00 Oh yes, it can damage your liver.

**I am just wondering if it was so potentially damaging it should have been prioritised as far as care was concerned?**

Oh well, it is a matter of time really. It is not like - with hepatitis because it is a virus they can't give an antibiotic but the very fact that I think my immunity was low

34:30 was the fact that I picked up the influenza virus and got pneumonia. And that has probably had more effect on me in later life than the hepatitis did. But I mean, as we talk about my experience post Vietnam you will realise that it did have a big effect on me later.

35:00 **So how long were you actually in Butterworth?**

It would have only been a week.

**A week too long?**

Yeah, a week too long.

**So you did finally get out and you were flown to where?**

I was flown to Sydney in the Hercules and there was lots of people being evacuated: they were very big planes. And I remember being strapped

35:30 down, you were on a stretcher and people were stacked up above you too, so you really only had about that much unless you were really ill and then of course they had a little bit more room, which was fair enough. But they strapped me down and then they gave me this, Seconal I think it was, a sedative to help me sleep, and because my liver wasn't working too well

36:00 and I wasn't used to taking any sedation, I remember waking up screaming and trying to get out of these restraints. But anyway I arrived in Richmond I think it was and was taken to a military hospital. Stayed there I don't know how long for, maybe a week.

**What was the treatment like there?**

Good. I came across this old doctor who you would probably pension off and he came to see me

36:30 and he said, "Now what's the problem?" and I told him and he said to me, "You poor little thing." And I thought that was the nicest thing anyone had said to me. Well, anyway they started me on treatment and they gave me antibiotics and physiotherapy. And I went on a flight, came to Perth, but it was a normal flight

37:00 with Qantas and there was another one of the soldiers travelling with me, coming back to Perth. We were both going to be admitted to Hollywood. So that was nice to be going home.

**What was his ailment?**

I can't remember but I can remember we became really good pals. He was a private and I was an officer, in those days the

37:30 officers travelled first class and the other ranks didn't and when I got on the plane I said, "I would like to go back and sit with - " I don't even know his name now. And they went away and they brought him back up to sit with me so that was really good. And we got to Perth, the family were there, they were waiting for me and took me to Hollywood and

38:00 put me in this ward in Hollywood. And I mean there was not many women at Hollywood except these senile old ladies and I remember waking up and thinking, "This is terrible." And then this creep of a man was standing over me when I woke up and I said, "Get me out, I want to get out of here." So my family took me home.

38:30 **Did you tell your family about this creep?**

Oh yeah.

**What was their reaction?**

I can't remember: I mean I know they thought it was pretty terrible. But it was sort of over, I was at home. I went home and about a week later I had to report to Karrakatta to see the doctor there and

39:00 he said that I could go back to work in Healesville. Which meant that I had to take my car over there, and get settled at Healesville. And I got there,

**Where is that?**

It is in Victoria. Probably four or five hours drive up in the hill area, just out of Melbourne anyway, a really lovely area.

**Well that's nice, about time.**

Yeah.

39:30 And then I was, I just couldn't work and so I took annual leave.

**The thing is wouldn't it have been, from what you have told me only about a month from when you had come out of Vietnam?**

Not even a month.

**That's an incredibly short time?**

Well, I kept telling them that I was ill. I couldn't work, I didn't feel well. I

40:00 couldn't even eat. I didn't even have enough energy to cut my meal up with. I mean you would think you are hungry and you start cutting up and you get so tired. And I went to some doctors and they just said it was hormonal or whatever. And so I took my annual leave and I was better, a lot better after I had taken my annual leave but actually

40:30 after I got out of the army and when I was down in Albany and I was having counselling by the Veterans Counselling Service, they helped me get my documents through the Freedom of Information [Act] and

that was when I became really angry about the whole system because my liver function tests were abnormal. When I left Hollywood I was to have supposedly six weeks

- 41:00 rest and then be reviewed. And none of this had happened. I mean I was working with abnormal liver functions tests, even at Healesville and I had so many problems because my health wasn't managed correctly. And when we came back from Vietnam it is hard to believe but people would not even talk to you
- 41:30 about Vietnam. Not even in the army. Like if you said, "I am sick," you might as well have been talking to a blank wall. I mean people in the highest of positions: it was just like it never ever happened. There was no counselling before you went to Vietnam and there was even less counselling when you got back. Nothing.
- 42:00 Not even someone to talk to.
- 42:52

## Tape 6

00:30 **Should we just continue where we stopped, Yvonne?**

About when I returned from Vietnam? Yes. There was no counselling, no one to talk to, not even the other Vietnam Vets because by that time we had all clammed up and we couldn't even talk to each other and there was certainly no one in the community that you could talk to

- 01:00 either, they just didn't want to know about it, they just wanted to tell you that you shouldn't have been there. And I think that's why I was so angry because after a while you began to think you were a bit of a hypochondriac and after I got my documents released, I realised that I had been sick. And if they had have been like a business or company that I had been working for I would have sued them.

- 01:30 They caused me – you know, that sort of treatment especially post Vietnam had actually caused me so much stress. And to also send people to Vietnam without any counselling prior to going and then to have all of that work where there was no one to relieve you and then to actually bring you back,

- 02:00 medivac you back or even just to bring you back and not have any counselling and proper medical treatment. That was very poor. Not even to have any support from the public.

**Why do you think that your needs weren't being met?**

I think we hadn't won the war. See I was working at 2 Military Hospital

- 02:30 when Vietnam finished. After Healesville, I got into teaching then.

**Before we move forward, can we just explore what you did at Healesville?**

I went into teaching, I wasn't well enough to go back into the operating theatre, so they put me at Healesville because they thought that that would be good for me.

- 03:00 **How did they think that that would be beneficial for you?**

Oh, I think probably out in the country, I don't really know if they thought too much about it but it was a nice place and there were nice people there and I was just doing a different job of getting into teaching.

**How were you getting involved in teaching?**

Well actually Healesville was the only school of health, so that's where all of the teaching, all of

- 03:30 the courses were.

**Were you training future staff for Vietnam?**

Yes. Medical assistants, yes. And then I worked there for a year and I did become quite healthy. I thought at that stage—I had become interested in teaching and I thought maybe I could

- 04:00 get involved in teaching in the operating theatre and I applied for a civil detachment for a year and I went to the College of Nursing in Melbourne for a year and did my diploma of nursing education there.

**Before we discuss that, can you just describe the kind of training you were giving the medical assistants?**

Well, it wasn't only to the

- 04:30 effect that they were going to Vietnam, medical assistants were in lots of the units. And so they all basically had the same training and then some of them went to Vietnam, some of them didn't. It was

first aid work, working in a ward situation of looking after people. They weren't allowed to

05:00 give injections or give out drugs except if they worked in a first aid type post. They were given pretty extensive training, very much like the old enrolled nurse training.

**Were you able to apply any of your experience to that training?**

Yes, I was able to because I knew what was expected of them when they went to

05:30 Vietnam, and by that time I knew what was expected of them when they went to the various military, like 1 Military or 2 Military Hospital. But then they had other people training them in what was expected of them when they went to their first aid posts.

**Were they curious to ask you about your Vietnam experiences?**

Oh yes.

**What did you share with them?**

Oh,

06:00 I guess what I had done in Vietnam. What they would do. I never experienced my emotions with them and I probably didn't feel as strongly as what I feel now.

**What did you do in Melbourne when you did your -**

Diploma of Nursing Education. That was

06:30 a year civil detachment, I did that.

**How did you spend that year?**

Studying and doing practice teaching in various hospitals. That was with a whole lot of civilian nurses, there was only one other army nurse at the college at the same time as me. We virtually had nothing to do with the army during that year, unless we

07:00 wanted to contact them. We were being paid by the army but we certainly weren't - we just weren't under, I mean, we just had to go to school and study and pass our exams, that was all I had to do with the army then.

**Did you enjoy that distance from the army?**

Yeah, I enjoyed the actual course because I really hadn't

07:30 done any study since I had done my obstetrics, and then I hadn't been too interested in study. But once I went to Healesville and then I went to the College of Nursing I started to do a lot more study and get good marks and understand things a lot better.

08:00 **Do you think that's something you developed with age, that maturity towards your profession?**

Maybe. I mean I think my whole life had changed really. My attitudes whatever. I mean in going for an adventurous person and then going to Vietnam, I look back now and I know that I changed enormously, because of that experience.

08:30 **You have mentioned naivety a few times: do you think that perhaps your inspiration was to travel to become a nurse?**

Do you mean why I -

**When you travelled the world as a nurse?**

Oh yeah, I knew if you did nursing you could do lots of travelling, it's what people said, you can get a job anywhere.

**And from your experiences did your attitude start to change towards your profession, how**

09:00 **you fulfilled being a nurse?**

I just think my attitude to life changed, it became a much more serious business of a career and there weren't as many laughs or whatever.

**Do you think your experience in Vietnam especially changed your perspective?**

09:30 Oh I think so. I became much more serious and I became almost a workaholic, because once I had been in Vietnam - because the most important thing when I was in Vietnam was work. Dedication to the necessity to work. And when I came back from Vietnam that was well and truly ingrained in me.

10:00 Do your job and do it well and that's it.

**So returning to Australia that didn't change?**

No.

**What happened when you came to the end of your study in Melbourne?**

I was posted to 2 Military Hospital then in Sydney and I was in charge of the medial assistant course teaching then,

- 10:30 you know, their course. I was lucky to get that position, actually, because I had only just finished the course and then I was suddenly in charge of teaching people, and all of those principles that I had been exposed to over the year, they were the things that, in my opinion, were important and had to be implemented. And so I was lucky that I had people in administration there that let me do all of those things correctly, set up a little model course, I worked hard, but yeah, there was a lot of satisfaction in it as well.
- 11:00

**Sounds as though it must have been incredibly satisfying to implement those sorts of changes?**

It was, it was great.

- 11:30 **What had motivated you to do that?**

Well, it was the posting that I got and I had just been through this course and to me it was the only way to go and I didn't know any other way really. Even when I was at Healesville I was fortunate to be working with a man who had been at the college and was interested in doing all the right

- 12:00 things in education.

**Were you actively trying to change the system?**

Not to change the system, certainly not to do that, but to implement knowledge in an interesting way so that people would learn better if they could see the relevance of it.

**Was that based on any deficiencies that you had experienced earlier?**

- 12:30 Maybe. You know my earlier sort of nursing. It just became interesting that you could control what you taught and how you taught it and how you could affect people. It was just the right thing to do, I don't really know if I thought of it in terms of, I suppose I must have thought about it in terms of
- 13:00 what happened to me. I knew that people couldn't learn if they were scared or frightened or harassed or whatever.

**How long did you spend implementing those changes to the course?**

Well after I had been there for a year in 1972, Whitlam got in. And one day

- 13:30 I was teaching maybe forty people in a classroom and the next day I was lucky if I was teaching ten or twelve. Just all walked off. Whitlam said, "National Service is over. Vietnam is over." And they were just discharged like that. So for the next, I guess it
- 14:00 was about a year, the job wound down and I was still teaching but it was a much smaller group. And by that stage I had become quite career orientated and the army said that they would have sent me to university to do further training but I would have actually had to pay back that time that I spent after I had finished the course and I didn't
- 14:30 really think in the army there was a lot of career opportunities at that stage, the type of career that I wanted. So I resigned and got out of the army in December '73 and stayed in Sydney and went to work at the Sutherland Hospital at Caringbah.

**Before we discuss the work that you did there, were you surprised to see that many students just walk out like that?**

- 15:00 Well, we were very much aware of how people felt about Vietnam and I suppose if I had have been a national serviceman I would have done the same. By that stage the public didn't want people in Vietnam. I can understand that as well. And so when Whitlam got in that was it. He promised them that Vietnam would be over
- 15:30 and the national service draft would finish and it did.

**Did you agree with is decision to end the draft?**

In retrospect I do. But at the time we were pretty staggered because we were still brainwashed into believing that we were doing some good.

**Did you have quite a different view at the**

16:00 **time to the general public?**

Probably. Yes, I think so: I believed in what we were doing.

**You mentioned brainwashed, do you think now that you had been influenced?**

Well, that's one of things that always concerns me in life is that you just don't realise how much you are influenced by the current thinking.

16:30 I mean once you have gone through a few decades and you have looked at life, you think, "Wow, did I really think that?" Or think whatever and then you realise how you have been influenced by the current issues. You become much more critical of what's happening.

17:00 **What were your politics at the time?**

I was a Liberal. I worked very hard to get Fraser [Malcolm Fraser - Prime Minister] in after Whitlam [Gough Whitlam - Prime Minister].

**Did you ever subscribe to Whitlam and the Labor Party?**

Oh no, not then. I was a Liberal Party person: I actually joined the Liberal Party to get Fraser in.

**So I am imagining you must have been quite opposed to the growing counter culture and -**

17:30 I mean, because we could only see it as something that created lots of problems for us, lots of hassles and people were being angry with us and it was just not pleasant in the community. I mean you would hide the fact that you had been in Vietnam: you wouldn't tell anyone. I didn't have anything to do

18:00 with anyone from Vietnam as such, unless they had been close friends, until 1987. That's a long time. And I went to the reunion, not a reunion, a welcome home for the Viet vets in Sydney, and it was my husband who organised that, and I didn't want to go but he just organised the whole thing.

18:30 And I think there are a lot of Viet vets who have probably never really spoken to any other Vietnam vets for as long, and I know now much longer: some of them are still in the woodwork.

**Do you think that they have perhaps adopted the kind of shame the public was placing?**

Of course.

19:00 **Were you surprised that opinions were so divided with regards to the Vietnam War?**

In relationship to how the public felt, that we shouldn't be there? I guess I was. It wasn't something that we really expected. It seemed to me almost unless you were in the army or defence forces,

19:30 you weren't thinking the same as everybody else. I mean I don't know how old you are but you probably weren't even born when the demonstrations were going on and they were pretty nasty demonstrations.

**They were supposed to be peace rallies?**

I know but they weren't. They weren't. I don't think there has been any rallies since then that have been anything like it.

20:00 **Do you think those rallies were hypocritical of what they were attempting to demonstrate?**

No. I think it is one time in society that people believed in something and tried to prove their point. They disbelieved in what was happening in Vietnam so they - I don't believe they did it in sort of the correct way but they certainly got the result.

20:30 I don't think when we came back from Vietnam, I don't think we should have been treated as we were and I think it was really cruel to stop mail going to Vietnam where people were relying on it. But I mean the politicians were as much to blame. I mean it occurred, we shouldn't have been there,

21:00 we know that now, but it is just such a shame that the aftermath had such an effect on Vietnam veterans.

**I think that the protests and demonstrations could have been a bit more sensitive towards servicemen or women who went as opposed to possibly the politics. That's probably something we might discuss a bit further towards the end of the interview.**

21:30 **Where were we in your nursing career when we went on that tangent?**

I had just left the army and I went to work at the Sutherland Hospital in Caringbah near Cronulla. Do you know Sydney at all?

**Not really. I have visited Sydney.**

It is a southern suburb, very nice area. I went to work there and worked in the education department. I worked with great group of people. And



- 22:00 there was changes actually occurring in nursing. There was a lady in charge and she had just started her degree at Macquarie University right out at Ryde on the other side of Sydney, and so I actually enrolled and started at Macquarie University and started doing my degree in education. And that took me
- 22:30 six years. So I would have to drive from Cronulla right over to Ryde, which, I don't know, I think it was twenty-seven miles or whatever, it was a round trip. A long way anyway. And the last three months of that I went full time: I took long service leave. And that took me up to '84. And in 1984
- 23:00 in New South Wales, they decided to put nursing into colleges, into universities. But they hadn't really had much thought in the way that they would do it. And it was obvious that our school was going to be closed down and we would have to get jobs in colleges or universities. And there were some other personal reasons why
- 23:30 I thought that it was a good idea for me to leave Sydney at that particular time and come back to Perth. So I came back to Perth at Christmas to see the family. And I went to Curtin University to see about jobs and they said that I could start whenever I wanted to. And they had been conducting a course here since 1975
- 24:00 and they were well organised and they believed in the same principles of relating theory to practice as what I did. And so I went back to Sydney, handed my resignation in, sold my unit and came back in the March of '84.

**That must have been quite satisfying?**

Well, I cried all the way out of Sydney.

- 24:30 I didn't know how I would ever manage without living in Sydney. I have to cough, sorry.

**Would you like to pause?**

Yeah, just until the tickle goes out.

**So you found it difficult to leave Sydney?**

Very. I had friends there, I had

- 25:00 lived in Sydney for twelve years. It is a very exciting place to live in: it is great.

**You did mention though that there were some personal reasons that you thought it was time to leave as well as the changes that were going on?**

So I thought it was better to leave. Just a personal relationship that it was better to be out of. So I came back to Perth,

- 25:30 worked at Curtin and started my life here again. I had a really great family but it was a matter of getting to know other people as well. It is a move I haven't regretted: it has been great.

**So how long were you at Curtin?**

I was there for three and a half years. I started there in '84 and left

- 26:00 in '87, about three and a quarter years actually. And I met my husband, about the middle of '85.

**Before I ask you how you met, can you describe what you were doing in Curtin for those years?**

I was teaching nursing skills, nursing studies.

- 26:30 And I taught obstetrics. And then towards then end of my time at Curtin I went back into the operating room and supervised students in the operating theatre. And that was probably when, in hindsight now, some of all of the problems started occurring. Me getting pretty upset,

- 27:00 or emotional I guess. But before that I just worked really hard. I mean even after that but I found that extremely difficult, going back into the operating theatre.

**How long had it been since you had been in an operating theatre?**

From '69 until

- 27:30 '86. A long time.

**Prior to going into the theatre, how successful do you think the course was operating?**

At Curtin? Great, well, I mean I left in 1987 but it was an excellent course. There was a lot of criticism of it but compared to what nursing was like before, I can't speak highly enough of the type of education that nurses have now.

28:00 **What do you think now of the decision to move nursing into university?**

Oh, it is the only way to go. I mean before you were only there to do the work, so you have made thousands of beds, if there was a bed to be made, you made the bed rather than do some other experience

28:30 that was very necessary for you to practice or learn. And no, I mean the education comes first. They don't get paid and therefore there is much more control over their education. It has probably to some extent gone a little bit too theoretical in the beginning, I do find nurses like to have a

29:00 little bit of hands on early on in the piece. And sometimes it is being taught by people that don't fully understand the application. I mean I suppose there is always something wrong with any system, and I mean a lot of the things they do criticise the system for now, it is not the

29:30 systems fault, it's because the - it is not say the universities' fault or even the nurses' fault, it is because the whole system had changed. For instance they might say, "Oh, the nurses these days, they can't make a patient comfortable in bed." I can understand that, because most people don't stay in bed more than a day.

30:00 I mean when I first started nursing, most people stayed in bed ten days, you know having sponges in bed and things like that and now the next day you're getting people up and they're showering. Or they say, "It is very hard for them to give injections," or something like that. Well, we used to find it hard to get injections from people for nurses to practice with because they are either given intravenously

30:30 or they use more tablet form these days. Or, "They can't give an enema these days." Older nurses would say, "Well, people don't have enemas these days." That is some of the criticisms and it is not the fault of the system, it is just the way nursing is going.

**It is interesting to hear you advocate today's nursing because we have spoken to a few World War II nurses and they would like to see it changed back to the way it was.**

31:00 **What do you say to them?**

Oh, I think that the world has changed and everything has changed in it and you can never go back. I mean nurses of their era and my era if I hadn't have done any further training wouldn't be able to exist in a modern hospital or the community centre.

31:30 I mean there is just so many different things. It is all disposable. How can you turn back time like that? I mean we would have people come in and have cataract extractions, I mean take the lens of their eye removed and they would stay in bed for ten days and they would have their heads between sand bags and you

32:00 would come and lift up their bottom and give them a rub and after ten days they would gradually be allowed to get up. These days they have it done as an outpatient, they don't even go to hospital they don't even spend a night in hospital. I mean I have got, we have got a friend who has just had open heart surgery, four bypasses and he was out of hospital in a week.

32:30 So you know, they have got to use the machines, they have got to have so much more knowledge and there is so much more technology and so many more drugs. You can't even learn all of the drugs these days you operate using a MIMS [drug reference tool].

**Do you think there is anything of value from the bygone days of nursing that would still be valuable to today's nurse?**

Oh yes. There is always the nurse/patient

33:00 relationship.

**Do you think that relationship has suffered at all with technology?**

It's changed because people don't stay in the hospital for so long. But certainly there is a good nurse patient relationship if you get more into community nursing, there is a lot of good things that will hopefully remain.

33:30 There are a lot of things that I am so pleased that have gone. I mean you could, a surgeon or a doctor or a nurse could not speak to a junior nurse as we were spoken to. I mean I think that's excellent.

**Yeah, I think that definitely needed some attention.**

34:00 **With regards to your story and when we left your story earlier, we were talking about the difficulties you had returning to the surgery: can you describe the difficulties you experienced at that time?**

Oh emotion. Inadequacy. I was just unhappy, when I had to go there I

34:30 just felt that my relationship with my students suffered too. I mean I wasn't able to give to them like I would have been able to give. But I didn't know what was happening then.

**Were you having [UNCLEAR]?**

35:00 I didn't really relate it to Vietnam or anything. But I know that was one of my unhappier times when I was at Curtin. I felt then even stressed at giving lectures and the whole system, a whole being started to change.

**Was it returning to the surgery that triggered that?**

That's the only

35:30 thing I can think back on it.

**I am wondering now if in that sense you found it difficult to confront surgery after your Vietnam experience?**

Maybe. I don't know. I mean it wasn't major at that time but I didn't feel comfortable at all.

36:00 **Maybe you had seen enough surgery?**

I think it was probably niggling at my subconscious.

**And you made a decision to leave?**

Well, actually Quentin and I were living together at that stage.

**Actually if I can interrupt, I stopped you before when you were going to talk about how you met?**

Okay, well once I got established at Curtin,

36:30 and then I thought it was about time I met other people besides my family and people I worked with, I joined a social club. Well, it was a singles club but it was a 'club 81' for older people. And I went there to meet people and we would go to places like the Windsor Hotel, you could arrive there on a Wednesday night and have a meal with people.

37:00 There was no commitment and people would arrange if people wanted to go to a playhouse or see a show somewhere, you would go, or to a restaurant. And I had actually been going for about a year and then Quentin came one night and I met him and I thought, "Oh he is quite nice," and it was just very gradual over the next six months, we got to know each other a little bit better and then -

37:30 **The romance blossomed?**

Yes, and then we started living together in the January of 1986 and we were together then.

**Sorry to interrupt, what was Quentin doing then?**

Well, he had actually worked in the oil business with Texas Gulf: he was a purchasing manager

38:00 for them in the North West. And then, it is an American company, and they actually sold that company and then he was retrenched when another company took over, and he had been interested in furniture restoration as a hobby and he wasn't really prepared to work for anyone again

38:30 and so he started up that business and that's when I met him. And he was doing furniture restoration up until the time we left Perth.

**When was your decision to leave Perth?**

Well, we were thinking that we would go around Australia on a working holiday and that I would stop work at Curtin and he would close his business down.

39:00 And so we got all of our equipment together, and we decided that we would do down to Denmark. A girlfriend that I had been nursing with right from the very start, one of the girls I did midwifery with, her and her husband had like fifty acres down there: it was just like a holiday place. And so we were going to go and camp on their property and we would try out all of our camping gear and then we would move around a bit.

39:30 Well, we actually fell in love with the area and by the time we had actually left we had bought a small farm at Torr Bay which is half way between Albany and Denmark. We didn't know anything about farming and so we actually then just went back to Perth and Quentin closed down his business and I had to work another three months at Curtin

40:00 and I came down and we set this little farm up. I was working at the Albany Regional Hospital because we didn't have a lot of money and we needed to build a house and things like that. And he was running the farm and then Curtin approached me and the Great Southern Regional College approached me because they wanted to start up the first year of the Curtin

40:30 course in Albany and so that's what I did. I moved into TAFE [tertiary and further education] and ran the first year of the Curtin nursing course down in Albany.

### **Did that take much persuasion?**

No I enjoyed it really. I mean it was only that little niggle about, but on the whole I enjoyed education, I still enjoy it. It was only

41:00 that little hiccup that I just pushed aside again. I mean it wasn't even there any more. When I look back I realise that it was an issue that I didn't even deal with at that stage. And so we shifted a house from Lake Grace onto the farm and Quentin renovated that house, it was really beautiful: when he had finished.

41:30 And I was working with the Curtin students and then the enrolled nursing course started in TAFE, that had gone out of the hospital as well, and I started that. But a couple of things happened actually because all of a sudden my career was winding up again. I was doing the Curtin course we were doing bridging courses

42:00 and we were doing the enrolled nursing course

42:06

## **Tape 7**

00:30 **You were telling Julian [interviewer] that you were surprised because suddenly your career was winding up**

Again yes. And at the same time there were other situations arising because I had gone to the reunion in Sydney and met a few Vietnam vets and then come back.

### **Which reunion was this?**

Oh, it was a welcome home,

01:00 in Sydney, yes.

### **March.**

Yes, that's right, most incredible experience, so I had met a few Viet vets from Albany. One fellow in particular he was going to counselling with a lady called Marcia Costella who is in the Viet Veterans' Counselling Service and he said, "Oh, Marcia wants to

01:30 meet you: she has never met a lady from that was in Vietnam before." And I said, "I might go and meet her one day when I have got a bit of spare time." But the other thing that was happening too, not only was my career winding up, when I had actually started teaching the enrolled nurses, TAFE had advertised this job and

02:00 it was for a certain salary and I got the job so therefore I was working now therefore officially for TAFE and not for Curtin even though I was still teaching the Curtin students. But when I came to actually get my pay, the salary wasn't the same salary that they had advertised: it was far less and so I went through the union

02:30 and I went through TAFE and I went through so many avenues and they said, "You don't have the qualifications, full stop, to get that money." And I was sort of pretty angry with this: it was just like banging your head against a brick wall, not getting anywhere. But before I had actually come down to Albany I had started to do my masters at

03:00 Murdoch University but I had stopped that when I met Quentin because I thought, "I don't want to do any more education, I want to concentrate on enjoying this relationship." So one day one of the fellows came down from Murdoch and he came down to TAFE because they used to run a little shortened teaching course for TAFE.

03:30 So that some people who came in for various things like carpentry and trades could get a few skills in teaching. And I told him about it and he said, "Well, give me all of your qualifications, all of your papers and like that, and I will take them back to Curtin and we'll go through it." Anyway Curtin contacted TAFE and they said, "Well, I don't know what the problem is

04:00 because this person is overqualified for the job." And so TAFE did a back pedal and had to back pay me. Well, they ended up after taxation came out back paying me twenty-three thousand dollars, not only that they had to pay me above the salary that was advertised because I had more qualifications than what were required.

04:30 But I mean that's sounds like a good outcome, but when you think about the years that it took, it took a lot out of me, but I was just so determined to win, because I knew that it was wrong. And I had people working with me that weren't receiving the correct salary so it went right down the line and all of their salaries were adjusted too. And like I said, my job was getting

05:00 really busy. And I started to see Marcia Costella and she said, "Look, I think you should come to counselling." And I said, "There is nothing wrong with me, I am all right." But as it progressed for another year I was getting really stressed and finding it difficult to cope. And so that was when I first

05:30 got into this situation which I am coping with really very well now. I had to resign from my job, I was outwardly - to everyone else I was coping very well. I had become like a workaholic, I would go home and work, making sure everything was correct and in its place.

06:00 Just perfect, I mean, work was first, Quentin was second and I was last and I had lots of chest infections, my physical health was very poor. And so we put in an application for a disability pension, Marcia helped me do that, she was excellent. I went to see some of the other counsellors who

06:30 were a waste of time. But a lot of people who have counselling and the counsellors are not up to scratch, really they were receiving money for not doing their job.

#### **What made this lady so good?**

She just helped me. She really attacked the problems and we just talked about them and she is excellent. A lot of them just want you to talk

07:00 and tell you your history, they don't offer anything to you. I mean she came down to Albany say once a month and she was right there for you all of the time. And you would go there and say, "I am coping now, Marcia." And she would talk to you for a while and say, "You're not you know, you're not coping." And she

07:30 would explain situations to you and why you weren't coping and what you could be doing, whereas a lot of the other counsellors I saw, I have been in counselling for ten years and they wouldn't give you that support. They would just want to listen to you talk and I would say, "Tell me what I can do so that I can cope." And so - but she was great. And I went to a psychiatrist up here,

08:00 didn't like her at all, wasn't going to go back to her. Marcia said, "Go back just one more time." She was absolutely fantastic, really good. And so I went to her, and I would say that it was between Marcia and the psychiatrist that helped me pull myself together. So we put in this application for

08:30 disability support because we thought even ten dollars a week is going to help buy petrol or something. And we had actually started up then a farm stay to give us a little bit more money. And low and behold I got the letter back because we had photocopied a lot of the - you know, highlighted all of the medical records and I had by that stage

09:00 a medical history as well and they gave me a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension] there and then. So I continue to, every now and again, to have counselling but I won't go back anymore. I mean I would go back to Marcia if it was really necessary but Quentin is great if I do get stressed, we know now what to do to calm me down, to get me on the straight and narrow.

09:30 And I have got a lot of other interests which is great: when I was working I wasn't able to do some of those things.

#### **Do you think that it's that constant twenty-four seven, the siren can go off where you have to go into action stations?**

The psychiatrist said that. She said, well, coupled with your nursing career, and then the

10:00 fact that you went to Vietnam and it was work, work, work. The constant, like you said, sirens, you just became really programmed. I mean I was always conscientious but after I went to Vietnam I worked hard in a career which

10:30 is important. I am not saying a career isn't important, but it was studying and having everything just right and etcetera. Had to be all perfect, felt guilty if it wasn't really bad.

#### **That just starts to wear you down?**

It does after a while.

#### **So you didn't go back to teaching at all?**

No. After we - we sold the farm,

11:00 and then we bought a house near Albany and we started a bed and breakfast. Quentin did a lot of the work, he is a good cook. I mean we did it together and so that was really quite good. But even then it was hard because I had some silly stupid lady ring me up from Veterans' Affairs and say, "Are you better, now that you can do bed and breakfasts?"

11:30 You know, this silly twit of a lady who didn't know anything, not even like a counsellor or anything. I was really stressed out, I got on the phone to find out who she was and Quentin wrote a long letter saying this is just ridiculous. Here you know my wife is actually doing something to help her and I am doing

12:00 most of the work and you're sort of saying she shouldn't have a life or something like that. And so we

got over that situation.

**Hopefully you never got annoyed with one of those phone calls ever again?**

No, I must admit Veterans' Affairs have been very good. Almost everyone you talk to is excellent and very supportive.

**Do you think that has changed over the years?**

Probably, I don't know.

12:30 Except for that one experience they have always been very good to me since I got my TPI.

**So how did you get to Mandurah from -**

Well, once we stopped the bed and breakfast we actually decided then that we needed better weather because we wanted to do some outdoor activities.

13:00 We looked around and decided Mandurah was good. We wanted to do some cycling, some canoeing, and just generally be outdoors and in Albany it is not good weather for that sort of activity. And we came up to Mandurah and that's precisely what I have done—some cycling, some canoeing. Actually after

13:30 arriving here too, I mean I am speaking here reasonably recently, we were here and our house was burgled, and my medals were taken amongst a lot of jewellery.

**From this house?**

From this house. And so I was really upset that my medals had gone and so I contacted the newspaper because I thought maybe if there was a little article in the newspaper someone would think,

14:00 'Well, the medals aren't that valuable to me,' and at least if they return them to the paper anonymously or something like that then at least I would get my medals back. I didn't have much hope of getting anything else back and the local Viet vets actually saw that in the paper and contacted me and said how sorry they were about my medals going. And about a couple

14:30 of weeks later, all of a sudden they rang and said, 'Well, if you come down to the Mandurah Mail, we have had a replica set of medals made for you and we would like to present them to you. So that's what they did. And so we have had quite a lot to do with the local Viet vets since then because they are such nice people.

15:00 We go cycling with them, there is a group of them that goes cycling, and we go cycling with the over 55's and some of the Viet vets go with the over 55's too. Also Veterans Affairs gave the Viet vets the Mandurah Viet vets a grant and they bought some kayaks with that and we have formed a group and we go kayaking with them

15:30 and Quentin and I have also got our own kayaks and we use those as well. We just take them across the road and put them in the water.

**Well, that's interesting, it took your medals to be lost to find -**

A group that we were really compatible with. But another thing that has also happened to me is that

16:00 five years ago I had a bladder tumour diagnosed and I went to Hollywood and had that removed and the urologist says one of the reasons that occurred in his opinion was because I was smoking, and so that was attributed back to my heavy smoking in Vietnam and I continued to smoke for nine years. And then it reoccurred

16:30 again last November and I had another one removed. Fortunately both of them appear to have been caught very early. But the Hollywood hospital, I couldn't really speak highly enough of them. They were absolutely magnificent. Compared to the treatment that I had in 1969, bad news, but now

17:00 they're just great.

**Can you tell me what it was like to be a part of the Vietnam veterans welcome home seeing that your arm was twisted to go to that?**

It was one of the most emotional things that I have ever been involved in. We were just marching along and there were streams of people and it was absolutely incredible. And that gave me the opportunity

17:30 to have the support of Viet veterans in Albany who I had never met before. I think it was beneficial for all of us actually.

**How did the actual march start? Can you step me through what happened to you at that time?**

We started off, I think it was at Hyde Park, and we just all marched as a group. All of the nurses together

18:00 and we just marched down the streets and it was a long march and there was all of these people on the

side of the streets and up in the buildings. Just incredible, all of these streamers and flags and music, it was

18:30 overwhelming really. And then we all went out and had lunch together as a group and it was just nice. I haven't seen some of those people for – I don't know, it was eighteen years. And then we had a big reunion at Twin Waters in Brisbane

19:00 with one [UNCLEAR] hospital, and I met some people, that was only about three years ago, and I hadn't seen some of those people for thirty years.

**What was that like to go through a reunion?**

It was good, some of the people you just start talking to them and it is just like yesterday. It is amazing seeing all of these

19:30 people you were so close to and you suddenly start talking to them and it's just like time stood still.

**Do you find that they had similar experiences of, well, the kind of stress you developed later as a result of Vietnam, do you find that is common amongst the nurses?**

Yeah, some of the nurses that I know, some still don't talk about it.

20:00 Some of the nurses that I have talked to have had those experiences and others just don't want to talk about it at all. I wouldn't have a clue how they are feeling at all, some of them.

**How much did the attitude of Australia when you came home contribute to that shut down?**

Oh, I think it had an enormous

20:30 effect. I can't imagine what else would have caused that really. I mean when I went for an interview at the Sutherland Hospital after I got out of the army, the matron there, an old matron, Second World War, she asked me what I had been doing. And I said, "I have just got out of the army: I have been to Vietnam." She said, "I went to the real war."

21:00 That was it, nothing else. I mean that was – you just accepted that. People didn't talk anything about it.

**That's a hurtful comment to make.**

Of course it is.

**Do you find it difficult being a female Vietnam veteran, because**

21:30 **I mean you're in a minority, aren't you?**

The Viet vets that I associate with know; they just treat me like I guess something special. They're nice to me and they seem to want me around. They have accepted my husband really well. They rib him like they rib anyone else. So when we leave here we are going for three days with them

22:00 so in the letter it said you might need some counselling, but you know I will go away with these people and I know that I can actually talk to them. And it is extremely good being in the group because suddenly you're in a group where you don't have to pretend or avoid saying something or whatever.

22:30 Like when I went to hospital to have the latest bladder tumour removed everybody knew and everybody wanted to say, "How are you going?" and, "It's okay." You don't hide anything from them, they are just like good mates.

**How long did it take for that Vietnam vet mateship to catch**

23:00 **up with you?**

I had nothing to do with the Vietnam vets, even the nurses that I was working with, until 1987. And then I had a little bit to do with them when I was in Albany on Anzac Day or something. I used to hold the purse and they would

23:30 do a pub crawl [a drink at several pubs in succession] and I would pay for their drinks and things. They were a nice group of fellows. Then when we came up to Mandurah I didn't have anything to do with Viet vets until just last year.

**Why do you think some of the fellows have such trouble with alcohol?**

I think it helps them cope

24:00 but it is just absolutely amazing how many Viet vets don't drink alcohol at all. Quite a lot in our group don't drink, you know they have their stubby coolers and they have got diet Coke or something in it. I think it's also a lot to do with the support they have from their spouses.

24:30 The group that we are associated with have very supportive spouses, very nice ladies, extremely nice. I think it must be very hard if you don't have someone there for you. I think it is hard for anybody as you

get older but I think that the Viet vets

25:00 that we associate with now have coped so well because of their partners, and the care that they have had over the last few years has made a lot of difference, a lot of them have been on uni courses, and if suddenly someone has a problem like the fellows that have recently had problems in our group, they might

25:30 go to Hollywood but they know that won't affect them in the group, they will just be able to come back and you know everyone will say, "How are you going?" they don't baby them or anything like that, everyone will just say, "How are you going, Joe Blow?" or 'How are you coping now?"

26:00 **Do you feel different to the rest of the population, having been in Vietnam?**

I guess I do. I tell people now that I have been in Vietnam I never told people that before. I told people that I was being interviewed for the archives, if they don't like it, that's it. We recently went on a cruise

26:30 and there was one couple that we were talking to and it came up that I was a Viet vet but it was just in passing conversation and so that passed without any comment. And then five or ten minutes later she got on her high horse about all of these soldiers that go off to war and then they come

27:00 snivelling for pensions and they you know, it's their job and now they come crying saying that they couldn't cope with it all. You get people still today that think like that, not many people now, you just walk away from them. I mean they know what they

27:30 think is right and it is no good talking to them.

**Do you think the welcome home parade was the beginning of the tide turning of people attitudes towards the Vietnams vets?**

I am sure. I think it is a major thing that affected it. Well, people suddenly became aware I think of what had actually happened. And that's what I hope will

28:00 not happen to soldiers that have been to Iraq. I think the general populace now is far more educated but it is still, "I don't agree with them going." I think that, you know I mean it's a terrible situation that has occurred and I just hope that they are

28:30 treated properly, I don't think that they probably will be. I know people who have been to Rwanda and the peace keeping force, they had some terrible experiences and the support that is given to them - you have got to fight for what you want, and that's the

29:00 really bad thing. And this person has got a family and young children, can't even work now. And it is all very well for the Prime Minister to actually say, "Oh, we're going to look after you," and give garden parties for the wives and rally while they're away, but what happens when they get home and they do have problems. Because it is not in the public eye:

29:30 often they are ignored or they have got to fight. Because the Gulf War with the situation - the Gulf Syndrome, it's not right.

**It's interesting, you made a comment about Iraq and there was quite a few anti-war protests at the time. Did you feel that that was some sort of a similarity to what**

30:00 **happened with Vietnam?**

No, because they weren't nasty protests, that was protesting against a war, to the individuals who were at the war. I think you know people have a right to protest against war as long as they don't involve the people who actually

30:30 went to war. I mean if you are in the army and a decision is made by the politicians that you go, well you go. I mean if we didn't have an army to defend the country it would be a pretty poor thing and I think politicians abuse the situation sometimes. I don't think there was any reason to send our soldiers to Iraq.

31:00 **When you came back from Vietnam and recovered, what sort of press was going about at the time in Australia in regards to Vietnam?**

You mean before I got out of the army? When all the protests were on? Oh crap, terrible.

31:30 **It must have made you feel pretty angry?**

I don't know if angry is the right word but withdrawn. I don't know if I experienced anger amongst people who had been to Vietnam, we had nothing really because we didn't talk about it. It was just a non issue.

32:00 **I find it odd that everyone just clammed up, we hear that a lot from Vietnam veterans, they just shut up, it was like somebody just turned off the light, that can't be beneficial?**

No, it was ridiculous really. But I mean we clammed up, it is not only the general populace, but it



clammed up within the army itself. So no one even asked you how did your Vietnam tour go or whatever.

32:30 Not to us. But I have spoken to a lot of the fellows and the same thing happened to them. It was just like a part of their career that was non-existent, except in their own memory. And a lot of them have turned off all of that as well. I mean a lot of people who went to Vietnam had worse experiences than me. I mean nineteen-year-olds

33:00 out on patrol, and no preparation for it. I mean it was a terrible time for them.

**What would you say is your worst experience of Vietnam?**

33:30 I don't know if I could define one worst experience. When I think of Vietnam, I think of blood. That's almost – I think of the horrific injuries. When I think of Vietnam, I think of a lot of the stresses that it caused me later

34:00 on in my life. I guess I am to some extent angry about that because I know that it could have been avoided.

**If you had your time again, would you still do your tour of Vietnam?**

Yes I would, see if we were at war

34:30 and I was in the army I would still go to Vietnam because I think that it was an important thing to do. But I hope that if anyone has to do that again then they go with a lot more preparation than what I did and they have a lot more counselling. And I think that happens now.

**Do you think your Vietnam experience changed you in a positive way in any way?**

I think it changed me. But I wouldn't really say it changed me in a positive way. It certainly made me aware of the importance of people, of relationships.

35:30 I mean I have a lot of nightmares still. Quentin wakes me up. I mean the other night I was apparently thrashing around in bed and he woke me up. And I said, "Why did you wake me up? I was a ballerina, I was having a lovely time." But that is just unbelievable because I have these terrible nightmares that I am being attacked

36:00 or whatever, sometimes it is worse than others. Sometimes I might go for a while and not have them and then they come back. I am always being attacked by someone when I have my nightmares and a lot of people have them. Quentin says, "I can't imagine anyone, why you have such terrible nightmares

36:30 when you think positively about things." That always terrible thought comes out and haunts you at night.

**What do you usually do on Anzac Day?**

Well, when we came back from Vietnam, when I was posted

37:00 to 2 Military Hospital, that was in about '71, we went in an Anzac march, we got all dressed up in our nurses' uniforms, it was in Liverpool and we marched in a group and we got to the RSL [Returned and Services League club] and there was a few nurses there and they locked us in this little tiny room, we weren't allowed to go with fellows.

37:30 And every now and again they brought a plate of something in while we were there: we didn't last very long. And I never ever had anything to do with Anzac Day again until I went to the welcome home in Sydney. And so when we came back the Viet vets that I actually met on the welcome home, we used to then go to the Anzac march and I

38:00 have gone almost every year since then.

**And how may of you march in Mandurah?**

Quite a few actually, quite a lot of people. I always go to the dawn service: the dawn service in Albany was the most incredible thing. I suppose it would be as good if you went to somewhere like Kings Park but it is a long way to travel from here.

38:30 In Albany you have got the lovely memorial and it overlooks the whole city and the harbour. Here it is very nice, I mean the service is nice and it is nice being with the group, but it is not as an emotional thing as it was in Albany.

**What do you usually think about during the dawn service?**

39:00 I guess mainly about the people that have lost their lives in war, that have been injured and it had affected their life. It is nice to just see the old soldiers

39:30 that come to pay homage.

**Do you think it has got more popular over the years?**

Oh, definitely. I mean you see a lot of young people at the Anzac services these days. That's the one thing too, you asked me about the welcome home, there was a lot of young people, little kids with flags and so on.

**Did that really surprise you at the time?**

40:00 I guess it did but I didn't really have any expectations of what was going to happen. It all surprised me, we were just amazed that there was so many people there: it was just mind blowing.

**Well Yvonne, I just want to thank you so much for talking to us today for the archives.**

Thank you.

**It has been very interesting to see the nurses' point of view**

40:30 **which we haven't really had from Vietnam, so thank you very much.**

Thank you, is that it? What's the time?