Australians at War Film Archive

Beryl Daley - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:43 And I grew up in Griffith, which is a pioneering town, as you know. My two brothers went to Scots College and there was no money left for the girl, you know the old Australian

01:00 story. But I think my parents respected the fact that I topped the class you know, at the primary school so they carried me over to the Hay War Memorial High School at Hay. And the churches had just started. The Presbyterians had set up a boys' hostel so that the country boys would have some chance from the outback.

01:30 And the Anglicans were, because the Bishop of Riverina was domiciled in Hay, centred in Hay, so they decided to start a hostel for the girls so they too could get their Leaving Certificate and their Matriculation. So they bought a house and put a little lady in charge of it, you know. I still remember her name – Miss Peters. And the girls came

02:00 from all over that western, you know, hundreds of miles apart. And they had found this little lady who is clear in my mind still to be the matron and the maid of all work in this little hostel. The Bishop of Riverina, of course, was domiciled in Hay and he kept an eye, you know, remotely on us. And I remember him coming and taking us for a walk in the gardens a couple of times.

02:30 But little Miss Peters, our matron, was the maid of all work. She looked after the whole of the student group. I think there were twenty-odd girls living there from all scattered places over western New South Wales. I came home from school one day and Miss Peters was ironing the pyjamas and I was shocked, I said, "Miss Peters, there's no need

03:00 to iron pyjamas." I said, "Nobody sees pyjamas." And she put down the iron and she said seriously to me, "But Beryl," she said, "God sees the pyjamas." That was the atmosphere in which we were domiciled when we were there. The Bishop of Riverina, poor man, was also domiciled in Hay, which was terribly remote and still remote, God knows.

03:30 And he use to come down. Occasionally he'd take, I remember him taking me for a walk in the gardens opposite one day, you see, "Silly me, some Anglican scheme." I think I was already a little cluey about being sold you see. Yes, now.

So how did you end up in England?

Oh, all right, that's a long way ahead. Well I got my, did my Leaving Certificate with 2 honours

04:00 at Hay War Memorial High School, and then what? It was decided that I would have a commercial education and we were in Griffith, my father being a pioneer from the First World War and in that irrigation area. So he carried me over to, I think he respected the fact that I came top of the class you know. And he took me over to Wagga where there was a

04:30 small business college, Commercial College they call it, Wagga Commercial College. I think there were 6 students, and enrolled me there. Now the Anglican Church had made provision for boys from that outback area, so they had a boys' hostel but there was nowhere for girls. So they set up a Miss Peters, I still remember her name, with a

05:00 hostel for girls.

After the commercial college, where did you go from there?

Well I had an uncle, my uncle was the optometrist in Wagga Wagga – my father's family were all eye people – and he was there and he said, "There's a business college in Wagga where Beryl could go," you know. He said, "It's very small, half a dozen students, but she could live with my family," you know.

05:30 And so that was what I did. I went over to Wagga. Have never left it actually, in a sense. And I went to this little Commercial College, run by a Mrs Joys, and then my career took off from that because I was a good shorthand writer, you see, and my background, although it was Hay War Memorial High School,

was nonetheless

06:00 fairly broad you know. Yeah.

You got a job after that? What was your first job?

Well it was really working for Mrs Joys, the principal of the Commercial College. And I bought the Commercial College with its half a dozen students from Mrs Joys and so I ran the Wagga Commercial College. It still exists and has trained many, many girls since that time.

06:30 **We'll come back and talk about that a little more, but in 1939 you travelled overseas to attend Pitman's College in London?**

Yes I decided that I wanted the PCT [Pitman's College Training], the qualification, teaching qualification, which was only available then in London. What an excuse to have a look around the world. And so I went to London, did that. And now

07:00 London was very interesting for me because I was a good shorthand writer at a time before the voice recorders were the way they are today. And I was sent from that college to work for Lord Lloyd, chairman of the British Council he was. Now this was just on the brink of war and we were bringing evacuees, particularly pregnant women across the [English] Channel from Europe,

07:30 you see. And I don't remember being short of work at any time and of course then suddenly the war was upon us and the whole world changed.

Where was Lord Lloyd based in London? Where was his office?

He was right near, I have a photograph of the place really because he was, as Chairman of the British Council he was doing a lot of travelling around and of course things were hotting up, you know.

08:00 I can't tell you what his brief was at this stage. You know, I'd have to sort of read it up. But you know, a good shorthand writer in the days before voice recorders was pretty valuable and so I found myself never without, you know, work.

Where did you live in London?

I lived at, ultimately at East

08:30 Finchley with an Australian friend of mine who was one of my assistant teachers at the Wagga Commercial College, and we found a place to live. I don't know that we realised when we took this place, that it was a historical place out at East Finchley. I should have taken a moment or two, if I had known I was facing this, I would have ordered my thoughts about it. It was where Oliver

09:00 Cromwell lived for a time because he bought this house for his sister, and I think women were a pretty chancy sort of a situation at that time, but I'm rather to think that I slept on the floor of the cubicle in which Oliver Cromwell once slept. Now…

Tell us about your friend. Who was she, your Australian friend?

09:30 Yes, her name was then was Betty Furze, and she too was a good shorthand writer, having come from the Wagga Commercial College you see, and we were never short of interesting jobs to do. We also, of course, because the war came upon us, we were driving ambulances around London during the [London] Blitz, which was rather a busy time.

10:00 **What can you tell us about?**

Oh, it's getting remote…

What can you tell us about those ambulances? What sort of ambulances were you driving?

Well we started off on the buses and then, I can't tell what kind of vehicle it was, but, of course, it was the Blitz and therefore it was all hands to the deck in London. A very exciting time, of course, really, but busy

10:30 with all… It's getting a bit remote in my mind.

Well it's a long time ago, that's fair enough.

It's a long time ago. How did I get to work for Lord Lloyd? Of course, I was a good shorthand writer and that was before the days of voice recorders.

We'll just take a short break for a second. Talk about London some more.

11:00 **What…**

You see I'd bought the Wagga Commercial College when I was sixteen.

And you were working for Lord Lloyd in London?

That's right.

And were also driving ambulances?

At night.

At night?

Yes that's right. Well it was all hands on deck, you know, in London when the war broke out, you know. The women were swimming across the Channel from the Low Countries, you know, and it was a very busy place. And I was a good shorthand writer, you see.

What did

11:30 **you see of evacuees? You mentioned evacuees in London at the time. What did you have to do with people?**

Now evacuees in London, you mean from Europe? Where were they living, I don't really know very much about that. I was concerned about getting them across the Channel, you know. And it's interesting here at the Garrison

12:00 there's a Polish couple. He was in the Polish navy, you know, the navy. The Poles have only got one port, Gdynia, and I think they had three ships or something, but they were using them to evacuate people from that part of Europe and, of course, they were coming around into the English Channel. And so it's amazing how things tie up a bit, you know, in life. Right.

What happened, you mentioned the Blitz [German bombardment of southern England] was all hands on deck,

12:30 **can you tell us about an air raid in the Blitz or what you were doing with your ambulances?**

Yes, indeed I could. We were on a constant state of alert, you know, because, of course, it might happen anytime, but working for Lord Lloyd, right in central, I've got some photos of that somewhere. And we were a good

13:00 target, you know, because it was the British Council, which I think is still extant, is it not? Well he was the first Chairman, Lord Lloyd, of the British Council. And that kept me busy, especially as I was driving an ambulance at night. We were all sort of hands, and as far as I was concerned my route was along the Thames, the north coast of the outline

13:30 of the Thames, and that was a busy sort of business. It's getting pretty vague in my mind.

You're doing very well.

It was a long time ago.

On the north coast of the Thames, what would you do along this route with your ambulance?

Oh well, of course, the Germans were bombing, you see. From the Albert Bridge was it, you know? Do you remember your geography of London?

14:00 What were we doing? We were bloody busy I know. Goodness. All right, well we had to do some first aid lessons and, of course, I was working for Lord Lloyd, Chairman of the British Council, you know, right in the heart of London while all this was going on. We were all pretty busy in London at that time.

Was Lord Lloyd's office

14:30 **a target?**

I've got, if I'd known that we were going through this I would have looked up some of my old notebooks because I rescued a few.

Were there air raids at Lord Lloyd's office? Were you ...?

Oh well, yes, because it was central London, but it was pretty well protected, you know, with what we had. You got rather accustomed to that, you know. The siren would go and you'd make for the downstairs under where the shelters were and

15:00 oddly it's not a very strong memory in my mind so it couldn't have been as much of a worry as one would think. Yeah, and meantime my Australian friend and I, my friend from the Wagga Commercial College, we rented a flat, as I say, had been occupied and, yeah, before through history. So we took the underground

15:30 out to East Finchley after work, you know. At least we got a good night's rest, you know. Except for an intervening bomb or two.

What did you do for entertainment in London during this time? What did you do socially?

Damn all. Drove an ambulance, went to work, you know, just that. Lunches we,

16:00 Lord Lloyd insisted on us taking lunch, which we did, you know, and so I suppose we took an hour off in the middle of the day. It's all getting rather vague, but mind you I've got a bit of literature and I should be going through that, you know. Why would you be interested in that?

Oh, this is very interesting to record this for the history, for Australian history and for the history of Britain as well.

Yes.

Well we'll move on, you became a trainee nurse

16:30 **after that?**

Yes.

At Aldridge Hospital, can you tell us about that?

Tell me the hospital again?

Aldridge?

Oldchurch.

Oldchurch sorry, my mistake.

Oldchurch.

Oldchurch Hospital?

That's right.

What was happening there?

Well there was a cry went out for nurses. They were looking for trainee nurses because, of course, the bombing caused an awful lot of havoc, you know, in London, and so I went out there. God, it's getting a bit vague, you know. If I'd known I was coming to you I would have had a

17:00 look at my old notebooks, you know.

Any memories from Oldchurch Hospital with the trainee nursing there?

Yes that was what it was. What else, it had another label? Sorry, memory after all these centuries gets a bit vague.

We'll just stop for a second.

And that..

What were we saying here?

So why did you go back to the British

17:30 **Council that day when, because Chris [interviewer] was asking for something from the British Council?**

Well, I've probably got a few notes.

There's a story about a man who'd gone to Dunkirk at the British Council? Remember, when you didn't turn up?

The man that went to Dunkirk from the British, yeah? Yeah, very vague, aren't I? But I'm vague. Then again, London was in the thick of it, you know.

18:00 There wasn't too much peace and quiet in London. And actually that's why we looked for a place a bit out of London. And damn if we didn't land up in this place where, we were on it a minute ago.

Yeah, we talked about where you live in East Finchley. We want the story about the day you turned up to work and Lord Lloyd wasn't there?

Ah, he'd gone to France to pick up the

18:30 evacuee soldiers that were quitting [Europe], you know. Well, of course, you lived in a time of crisis so I it was always one thing. Later on they all sound like historic incidents, but at the time it's just a case of day by day, you know. Living though, which, of course, we did, damn it.

What happened that day that Lord Lloyd wasn't there?

Oh well, I suppose the

19:00 work went on because I don't remember, you know, it not going on. And we were coping a lot, you know. If I'd known I was coming to face some of these questions I'd have tried to dig out some of my, because I don't throw away notebooks and I might have a bit of gear, you know, from those times.

We might be able to look at those a bit later.

Why do you think, why are you interested in that time?

Well this is, the project's been created

19:30 **for future Australians who won't have the opportunity to talk to you, to have an idea about what you did during the war, so it's being put away for fifty or hundred years' time.**

It sounds awfully boastful to me.

I think it's not boastful at all. It's very important that we record this.

You see, we were all in it up to our necks, you know, all the time, every minute of our time we were involved in someway, had to be, you know. It's a wonderful feeling to have a whole city, you know, on the one bent as it were,

20:00 you know. Everybody was everybody's friend, you know. You'd sit beside somebody in a bus and they'd share their bun with you, or it was a time of camaraderie, you know. Which is rather nice to remember, you've reminded me.

Are there other nice memories from London that come to mind when you think about the war and the Blitz?

Well, I don't know that most Australians feel about London the way I do.

20:30 I think it least if they're British derived, you know. It was our city as well. It was the British's city, you know. There was no question about loyalty, you know. Australia House or among the Australians in London we were just part of the show. No questions either, which is rather good to be reminded of.

21:00 Goodness you're taking me away, you know, it's a long, long time ago.

I'll stop for just a second. We'll just stop the camera for a moment.

You see, like everybody, I felt I wasn't doing enough, you see, and they were calling out for trainee nurses, you know, at the hospital because, of course, you know, the war was going on and there were a lot of damaged people. And so I went out to Oldchurch, I can't even remember

21:30 where Oldchurch Hospital… I'm vague about where it is now. And then on Lord Haw Haw's [German propagandist broadcaster] show from Berlin he said, "And you people from Oldchurch Hospital," he said, "Don't think you're safe. When we come over on Saturday or whatever we'll have a few bombs saved for you at Oldchurch Hospital," which was an odd sort of thing. At

22:00 the time, of course, it didn't, there was so many things going on that it doesn't sound as important as one can make it sound now, you know.

So did it make you frightened to hear Lord Haw Haw say about the bombs coming over for the trainee nurses?

Yeah over the..

What was the reaction like?

"And you people at Oldchurch Hospital," was the way that he put it, you know, because it was a well-known, well-established hospital, you see.

22:30 Thanks for reminding me, see I'd forgotten. Had I know we were having this and had I had access to my papers because I've got quite a diary, really.

Again, we'll just stop the camera for a second.

In a way, God, call me up in a fortnight and I'll put a bit of concentration in.

All right.

Not that I think

23:00 I can dig up any records so much, but, you know, in the mind, but what a busy time, see I was working for Lord Lloyd, not all that time and then there were, of course, the raids at work, this, that and the other. And I haven't thought about it purposely for a long time, don't want to live with it.

We'll move on from that, we'll keep going with your

23:30 **story and we'll come back and talk about that again if something else comes up. But after that you became part of the Commonwealth Overseas Reception Board?**

Yes. I suddenly had a letter from Australia House. They were looking, because I had the education qualifications, you see, the teaching qualifications, and for that matter by that time a certain amount of experience. And inviting me to be an escort on this shipload of children they were bringing to Australia.

Oddly, I come here and

24:00 there's a Polish couple that know all about the Batory, which was the Polish vessel that escaped Gdynia, came through the North Sea and down into the English Channel. And, of course, I think the Brits had to be careful of the loyalties of the, was the staff inclined towards Hitler or blah, blah, blah?. Anyway they decided to use the Batory to bring a shipload of evacuee children to Australia and suddenly I had a letter from

24:30 Australia House because I had those particular teaching qualifications, you know, "Would I be an escort?" So how could you say no. So that was a whole new experience about which a certain amount has been written and I even have some diaries about that, you know. You know, I haven't thought it for years, but we took over 13 weeks to get to Australia, zigzagging all the way.

25:00 Longer than Cook [18th century navigator, Captain James Cook] took to get here under sail, actually. Now you've heard that somewhere before?

I know that's what you did, but I don't know much about the journey, so anything you can tell me about what happened, I'd love to hear?

Well I'm still in touch with two people, two of the English evacuees, you see it's so long between reminders that here I am juggling for names. Oh, what's

25:30 his name up here? He's in a retirement village up north as I am here. And from time to time we get in touch with each other, but now the Australians did very nobly by those English children coming out. The boys, some of them verging on 16 and military age, you see. Instead of incorporating them into the Australian forces they sent the boys to

26:00 India so they could train with British forces in India who were, of course, quite numerous, of course, in India. And this fellow – whose name I can't believe it's escaping – is in a place like this up north and we're in touch occasionally. He was one of those, that when we was 16 he was sent to India to train and then the rest of his war, of course, was with the British troops,

26:30 you see. And the Australians have nothing to be ashamed of with the treatment of those English children. For a start they were billeted with good types, you know, and finished their education off and so forth, which was good. I've even got a bit written down somewhere. I'll have a dig.

What was your role on board the ship in looking after these children?

I was an escort, amongst the escorts.

27:00 And Doctor Kilby, I think, was the name of our leader. Oh dear, but I have got some written stuff and I could probably find it. The roof of the house is, oh, dear God.

What else happened on that 13 week journey?

Oh, we zigzagged all the way, taking longer than Cook did under sail to get here, you see. So we knew each

27:30 other pretty damn well, you know, by the time we got to Australia. What did we do to entertain the kids? Everything, you know. And they all remember, those that I've been in touch with all remember with affection, you know, the... Especially the Polish crew. And I come here and there's this Polish couple here, you see, who know at least theoretically about it.

28:00 **Where did you stop en route?**

We came down the Atlantic. We came in underneath the bulge of Africa there and then we came on out again and down and into Capetown. And I might even have some notes of my own about this. In fact, I think I have, but the problem is to find the damn things now.

Who else do you remember from that

28:30 **journey?**

The doctor who was, of course, invaluable. I'd say a man in his fifties because, of course, he'd be beyond military age or he wouldn't have had the job. It's a long time ago. I ran a shorthand class for the girls, which worked out very well because they found jobs, you know, shorthand

29:00 and typing, when they got here. And some of them were a bit young for it, but still they were interested, you know.

These were the other escorts?

And their language was pretty good, you know, they were English kids.

These girls were the other escorts on board that you ran a class for, the escorts travelling with you?

Did I what?

Did you run a class for the escorts travelling with you?

Oh no, no, they were all pretty experienced and qualified

29:30 people, the escorts. There were so many of them, you know, but we had no trouble with the children, of course. Our impression at the time was if they'd been Australian children we would have had a lot more trouble with them than we did, you know. And, of course, they were in a certain psychological state, you know, having left parents, you know, and survived a certain amount of, you know, danger and so forth. God, it's hard to remember.

30:00 But mind you, I do have some written stuff. If I'd known you were going to ask me these questions I would have looked over it, you know, if I can find it.

Who else did you meet en route?

Anybody who became famous?

They don't need to be famous.

I don't think so, the escorts were a fine lot, they were well chosen, I think, you know.

30:30 I'll probably think of a dozen things after I leave you, but we were pretty damn busy on that trip, you know.

Where did you meet your first husband?

Oh, I'll have to take a moment to remember him, won't I?

John Drysdale Stevenson?

Well, John Drysdale Stevenson, I have some nice… John, our son, has collared most of my photographs

31:00 and has them back in Canberra. Our son John is in charge of the committee that's talking to the Iraqis, I might tell you, today. And, you know, they're coming to certain conclusions and what all. So he's responsible. Turned out to be a good type, yes. Anyway that's in his mother's opinion. Probably his sister's as well.

Again, John

31:30 **Drysdale Stevenson, what comes to mind about him and how you met?**

Now see what a rotten, you know, if you'd given me a moments warning I've just started remembering things. Well we came to Australia and he came to Griffith. Wait a bit, this is all later.

32:30 He was in the Manchester Regiment, a Lieutenant in the Manchester Regiment. That meant that he was in Malaysia [called Malaya at that time] and he was on the Burma-Thailand Railroad and went through all that hell. Now how did I get him back, can you remember? He decided to come to Australia, you know, rather than go back to England and so by that time I was a bit busy. Should have given me, you know, there's so much of a crowded, a crowded experience.

We'll give you a moment to think about it. We'll just stop the tape again.

Because we had those hundreds of children, you know, and so forth, but there was this lieutenant from the Manchester Regiment, they were the fortress troops at

33:00 Singapore and had he'd been on leave? I'm very vague about that. God, that's shocking isn't it? Yes, well anyway it meant that I headed back for Singapore as soon as I had the children organised, you know, here.

So tell us about the story of meeting Steve on the Batory?

About what?

About meeting your husband on the Batory?

Oh,

33:30 it would have been hard not to, I think, really. It was a ship. And he was busy because he was a lieutenant, therefore he was responsible for a certain coterie of troops, you know, and so forth. And I've got a few photographs which you probably haven't seen. Oh, you've got them. She pinched them.

What

34:00 **impressed you about this young lieutenant?**

What had he been doing? Well I suppose, you know, there was a certain amount of socialising on the ship because, you know, what do you do on board a ship, you know, a nice young man. Then of course, look I'm getting terribly

34:30 vague about the historic, you know, continuity because, of course, I had to wave, it became a habit of

ours to wave each other goodbye at Singapore because, of course, he was in the Manchester Regiment and they were responsible for the Malayan campaign, you see. And so I waved him goodbye at Singapore and brought the children back to Australia. And got organised, but, of course, we were organising to

35:00 get together again as soon as we could. Finally I managed that.

In?

I'm getting awfully vague about this?

Were you married on board the ship?

We married on board the ship and I had some nice photos, most of which our son has gathered together and robbed of me, I might say.

We'll have a look at the photos later, but what can you tell us about the wedding on the ship?

Well, of course, it was the, everybody that was on the ship remembers of our wedding

35:30 because much was made of it, you see. This young lieutenant from the Manchester's, you know, and blah, blah. And so, you know, there's not too much goes on a ship and they're rather glad, I think, of some kind of episode, too. Oh God, it's a long time ago darling.

What kind of ceremony did you have?

Oh there was a padre of course, a soldiers' padre there. I've

36:00 still got some photos somewhere, I think I have, you know, when you move around to old people's homes and blah, bah. And God knows.

So the padre married you?

Hey?

The padre married on board?

Oh yes, there was a, you know, the forces' padre, yes that's right. And the women, of course, had me dressed up as a bride, you know. You've seen those photos. Yes, so

36:30 it was quite an occasion on the Batory.

What did you use for a ring?

I've still got it somewhere, I hope.

Where did the wedding ring come from?

It was made on the ship. That's the sort of thing, those people, you know… What's the use of a ship's engineer if he can't make a wedding ring? God, you're making me think back a long way.

What on earth did the ship's engineer make a wedding

37:00 **ring from?**

Well it's a silver… It's not silver and it's not gold, so what is it? I don't think I… It's a metal. Oh dear, dear, you know, I wasn't expecting to be reminded of all this ancient history.

What was it like to be married…?

James collared all those photos I had, you know. I was rather pleased that he wanted the photographs, yes.

37:30 **What was it like to be married and then have to wave your new husband goodbye at Singapore?**

Of course, we decided, it became a bit of a habit of ours waving goodbye at Singapore. Because, you know, that first time was I had to bring the children back. I had my responsibilities. I had to bring the children on to Australia and he, of course, was an officer of the Manchester's and they were the fortress troops of Singapore, so that

38:00 it was necessary to just roll up the sleeves and get on with it, really. Now he's going to ask me about the next time I… You should have given me warning. I could have raked around in the old memory.

We'll give you a bit of a break. We'll stop for a second and change our tape.

38:25 **End of tape**

Tape 2

00:33 **Tell us about your wedding dress and how you were (UNCLEAR)?**

Oh, my God! A wedding dress! Well, of course, it was an evening dress. We wore long evening dresses. I think you still do.

And what did you use as a veil?

A baby shawl it was. There was a baby on board.

And who was with you

01:00 **at the time?**

That was my best, she was the mother of the baby. Steve is looking grim standing there. Who the parson was, I don't know. I didn't look too bad in the baby shawl really, of course, one was slim in those days.

What celebration went on afterwards, there's a menu?

Oh well they put on a show,

01:30 of course, on board a ship, especially when you're zigzagging from England to Australia, you know. We took over 13 weeks to get here. Zigzagging every inch of the way, you see, with that load of kids. So it was a long, long voyage. Steve looks a bit like Hitler. It's the military stance. That was the mother of the baby who was my matron

02:00 of honour. I haven't looked at these for many, many years darling. That was the…

Who was in this photo?

Commander, that's my husband and that's Commander Simmons who was, it was a Polish ship and they couldn't trust the codes to a Pole, you see, so the Brits, the British Navy put Commander Simmons on board to take charge

02:30 of the communications. And I suppose they had to do things like that, you know. You couldn't make your codes free to any foreign, you know. And even the Poles, who were not likely to be disloyal to our side, yet, but it was interesting, that business. At least one got to know some Poles, you know, and that was something. And, of course, that Polish leatherwork

03:00 on the album there is unusual, isn't it?

This came from the ship, this album that we're looking at?

Hey?

That was from the ship itself?

Oh yes, that was, well the Poles, well somebody was a worker in leather and made me the album, which is rather nice, isn't it? Probably one of the sailors. What the devil's that?

I'll show you some other things from this album and maybe you can tell me about them? I'll take that for the moment.

03:30 **What about this announcement here?**

Fancy this coming up. Miss Beryl Speirs, and they misspelled my name, reversing the E and the I as most people do. Mr John Drysdale Stevenson of the Manchester Regiment in the First Class Dining Salon on the moat,

04:00 what does MS stand for? Not Motor Ship. Batory. Yes, I haven't looked at this for years darlings.

I'll show you some other things in there, but you arrived at Capetown?

Oh yes.

What can you tell us about that?

We were remarried at Capetown because the captain was worried about the fact that he was a Polish captain, you see, and he didn't think our marriage was, it might not have been legitimate, you see,

04:30 so he insisted on us being married again in Capetown, which was our first port of call. So we went through all that again. Yeah.

What was the second wedding like in Capetown?

It was very formal. There might be something about it there. There's Commander Simmonds who was the… He was aboard to look after the codes. The Brits would not entrust their naval codes to a Polish officer

05:00 and so they had to put Commander Simmonds on board the ship to attend, you know, take care of the codes. That sounds like sense, but I haven't heard of it before. Who signed that? I haven't looked at that in half a century.

What is this that we've got there? Who has signed that, sorry?

That's my passport. There we were on deck.

05:30 God, I never looked like that again, did I? What a lot of hooey. Why are we doing this, darlings? My veil was the baby's shawl. There was a baby on board, on deck, and so I was loaned the baby's shawl for a veil. That's the baby's mother, my best, my matron of honour.

06:00 Strike a light folks, I haven't thought about this stuff for many a year. What have I got there? That's Steve's card, British officers always had to have cards and I had to have a card. Principal of the Wagga Commercial College, after all. And, of course, they had fun at the reception. If you'd rather have it in (UNCLEAR), you see.

06:30 That was the invitation to the wedding put together by the Jewish officer on board. What the hoy, hoy, hoy is. I don't know. Is it hello, hello, hello, or hi, hi, hi? They made the most of it, you know. You can tell that. Be it known unto all men in general

07:00 and that old so and so Commander Simmonds in particular, they've only put his initial, that there will this day be celebrated in the Dining Room, hash house or whatnot of the good ship Batory the nuptials, wedding, marriage or what have you of our dearly beloved Beryl and our not so dearly beloved Steve, watch your pockets, the quartermaster. They had a bit of fun, didn't they? Oh dear.

Why was Steve not so

07:30 **dearly beloved?**

Oh well, men don't say dearly beloved. So they had a bit of fun with us, didn't they? The quartermaster, watch your pockets. Therefore, meet right in our bounden duty that we rally round and make the welkin[?] ring, clang, resound and vibrate practically to the point of complete rupture or disillusion

08:00 according to the best of the several abilities with which and all wise providence has endowed us. Who signed this? The victim. Therefore, do you each of you present yourselves sober and properly dressed clothed and in your right mind or minds at 5 of the clock in the afternoon. Didn't they have a lot of fun? Two bells to you, you old salt,

08:30 not to say you ancient mariner. After the tying of the HB of M, Holy Bond of Matrimony, there will, we trust, be a modicum of wassail passed down the various hatches of those present and in this childish ploy your friendly cooperation is sought. Don't forget now, 5 o'clock. That will be all for now, right turn, dismissed.

09:00 We had a shipload of soldiers, of course, going to Malaya. It's just as well they had a bit of fun, you know, cause Malaya was a tough war, you know. They went right through to Burma, you know, and there it was. I've got some other material of that campaign, of course, because I was working for the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, and so I was in a position to have that. That's a rather nice photo of Steve, isn't it there?

09:30 Yeah, I haven't looked at this in fifty years. Landing pass at Gdynia, Gdynia, misspelled my name, Stevenson, they spelt with a PH, (UNCLEAR) that was Capetown. Have you been in Capetown?

No, tell us about Capetown?

(UNCLEAR)

10:00 Capetown. Well Capetown, of course, was during the war, an important port of call. We had a great time in Capetown, made free of the officers' clubs and this and that. The landing pass in Gdynia, it must be Polish. It's rather good that I've still got them, isn't it?

It's amazing.

10:30 Rank, lieutenant, name, has permission to be absent from his quarters from 1300 hours to such the hours. I can't read that. That's from Alexandria docks, Bombay. We took 13 weeks

11:00 to get from the UK [United Kingdom] to Australia, zigzagging every inch of the way, so it was a long, long voyage, you know. That's Capetown with Commander Simmonds at Capetown. Do things happen like this? They must happen today. I don't hear people telling me

11:30 stories of it.

Like what? What are you referring to there?

Well, you see, it was rather fun. You see, there we are at that time on the deck, Steve and I. My mother's fur coat – she gave me before I left. Wasn't that lucky? I had something lavish to get into. I

don’t know who those are. Pass them back and I’ll see.

Those are signatures of people on board?

12:00 At the reception probably, with the best wishes of all CORB, Children’s Overseas Reception Board, which was organised in Australia to receive the children, you know, from these cities that were being so badly bombed in England. And it’s the CORB personnel on board who are listed here. I have no idea

12:30 about them now. I remember them then. That was rather nice, wasn’t it? You’ve made me look at it.

Where were the children on board when you got married?

The what?

Did any of the children see you get married?

Oh yes, they were all on board. We had to walk down while they were having their dinner. We walked down and said hello to them, “Look, those silly Scotsmen,

13:00 see? Doing a dance, jig on the deck.” We had a mixed lot. They were reinforcements for Singapore and they left us, as Steve did indeed, at Singapore, you see. I’ll never look like that again, will I? And they couldn’t entrust the codes, the British naval codes to foreigners and, of course, the ship was a Polish ship manned by Poles and that was

13:30 why Commander Simmonds was on board, to take control of the British naval codes so they could communicate. You can’t tell much from that photograph of the ship. I didn’t look too bad, did I, in those days? Long, long ago. Wars are sad things, you see. That was when

14:00 we were about to be married or perhaps, you know. Good looking bloke. But I had my son John and John is in charge of the committee that is talking to Iraq at present.

Mmm.

So that’s rather gratifying.

Yeah. We’ll stop going through that now. I’ll have a look, another look through some of it and maybe bring it up later, but

14:30 **after you left John at Singapore you went back to Australia?**

At where? At Singapore?

At Singapore.

I, of course, had a job, I was escorting children to Australia and so I came to Australia and we were busy for a time, you know, allocating them to adoptive parents in Australia and so forth. So I think in a way I was very lucky that it was such a busy time

15:00 because we didn’t have time to think about much else, you know, looking after the children. It’s some time since I’ve heard from any of them now, but I have a collection of letters through the years from those girls, you know, that I happen to bring out.

We might just stop again for a second. So Beryl after your voyage on the Batory, what happened when you got back

15:30 **to Australia?**

Well, of course, I went straight back to my business college in Wagga Wagga and because, of course, we had a lot of students in those days. And I worked there with the woman I’d left in charge, whose name was Kathleen Ferguson, and we got, rubbed along very well, but nothing much, you see. Where was John the baby? With me in Wagga Wagga,

16:00 yes.

So you had a child when you got back to Wagga?

You see I had started the Wagga Commercial College long ago and I had put a manager in, a Scotswoman, Kathleen Ferguson, while I had my trip abroad, you know, and everything. She stayed

16:30 with me and there I was in Wagga Wagga.

I understand you returned to Poona, you went back to India to rejoin Steve?

Yes, yes.

Tell me about that trip?

Oh dear, she’s making me think. I’ve got some papers, you know, in a chest which I should be refreshing myself with before talking.

How did I get there? Yeah, but, how did I get there? I'm trying to remember. I must have flown. I'm getting very vague. It's a long time ago, darling.

Yes, yes, you went by KLM [Dutch airline] plane?

Oh, I suppose one did. Kuala Lumpur was on the route.

And then you took a train from Calcutta up to Poona?

You're going to have to give me time to think. I haven't thought about it for years. Yes, how unkind, but I've been busy bringing up five kids, you see, you know. One hasn't sort of lie back on all that past history, you know.

Well you've been

separated from Steve for a little while. What was it like being reunited with him in India? Can you tell me about that?

Oh, oh darling, what a terrible thought. I can't remember the circumstances. Of course, I had a busy war working for the commanders in chief, you know, so I think, you know, my mind was not distracted too often

you know, thinking about my personal affairs because there was a war to be won. Oh well. And, of course, we did win it, didn't we?

Yes. When you got to India, Steve organised for you to have a meeting with Robert Brooke-Popham?

Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, who was the Commander-in-Chief, Far East and of course… Did he arrange that? Who arranged that? Of course, a good shorthand writer in those days was a vital thing, you know. I'm getting… Well, when he's not in Iraq, where he is at the moment?

Well can you tell us what Sir Robert Brooke-Popham,

the Commander-in-Chief of the Far East, can you tell us about that? What was he doing?

At the naval base at Singapore. Oh well, of course, he was the big boss of the war, you know. You know, I've probably got some memorabilia that I ought to be reading before I even talk to you about it. Because, you know, one tries

to put it out of mind. It's not something, you know, to cling to.

Well, tell us about working for Sir Robert?

At the naval base. Goodness, you know, I hadn't thought that my memory could ever get so… You should give me a chance just to go through my drawer in my filing cabinet

and then I'll be fresher, you know, on some of the stuff. Where did she file them, for God's sake?

Try the hat on again. Let's see how it looks.

What do you reckon?

Very good fit. Very smart.

Oh dear, oh, how cruel.

I think I was the only Australian, wasn't I?

You were, that's why your story is so important.

How did it come to you, how did you know about me?

Oh well, you are pretty famous.

Hey?

You are pretty famous.

Oh for goodness sake, you know, I've probably got a lot of inside stories

in my mind, which you hope I have. Oh God, I'd have to be reminded of a lot.

Tell us about the difference between these two hats?

Oh, that's summer and this is winter. The winter uniform was this kind of dark khaki and the summer uniform was khaki drill, so that's simple. This has been had a nip at in the years between. Where did you get them from?

I do have some notes.

I think they're looking for your notes now. Where did the children end up? The children you were escorting.

Where what?

Where did you take the children to eventually in Australia. Did they go to families or…?

Oh, the children?

Yes.

Yes, they were posted to families and I'm still in touch with two of them.

22:30 A boy and a girl who, he was adopted by a medical family up at one of those country towns, but I've still got some of his letters. And the girl, yes, it wouldn't be hard for me to get in touch with some of those people.

They'd be very interesting for us to talk to as well, the stories of evacuees.

She was the musician, I remember her as.

23:00 She use to play the piano for us. I think she was probably an escort, as I was.

And what's the book there? What's this singing ship book?

What, what?

What is the book you've got there?

This is amongst my stuff.

Yeah.

Oh good, I'm glad I kept a few things. Oh, could I read this?

Yeah sure, go ahead.

It might remind me of a lot of things.

23:30 Lisa Maclane, she played the piano and was therefore very valuable. And oddbit of an oddbod, but she's written it up at the time, you see. Isn't that good?

It's a story of the evacuee children, is it?

Yes, so

24:00 her first sentence: 'The day at which Great Britain first asked for help in taking children to Australia was one of sunshine and calm in London.' I've read this before. Is it my book? Yeah, Lisa Maclane.

Mrs Bruce?

Well, she was the wife of the ambassador, the High Commissioner to Britain.

24:30 Damn it all, where did you find them? Down at the house?

Looking around.

Oh, darling, I should have had a look myself.

Been searching high and low.

Well listen, before you give them away. Respected the fact that I topped the class, you know, consistently. Drove me over to Hay War Memorial High School at Hay where the Presbyterians had been thoughtful enough to

25:00 establish a hostel for boys wanting a high school education. All that western, wide western area of New South Wales where there were no high schools. And the Presbyterian church gave the hostel building – well, they established a place for the boys to go. Now this must have inspired the Anglicans to try and do something for the girls. I don't

25:30 know how my father knew, but, you see I'd topped the class right through primary school. And at Griffith, which was very much a pioneering place because my father was a pioneer after the First World War, it's a Returned Soldier's Settlement, you know about that. All right, then well he drove me over to Hay where there was the bishop's… The Bishop of Riverina had the Bishops Lodge at Hay.

26:00 It's a, there's nothing at Hay virtually speaking, you know, but the Bishops Lodge was there, a sort of country estate that the Anglicans sort of put the Bishop of Riverina. Anyway, so through those channels we had a bit of information. And the Anglicans, because the Presbyterians, I think, had set up a college for boys so they could go to the Hay War Memorial High School which had been set up by the returning soldiers

26:30 from the First World War, which I've said. And there was no place for the girls of that whole wide area of New South Wales, you see, to matriculate so, but the Bishops Lodge for the Bishop of Riverina was at Hay, and I think he was moving spirit, you know.

And what did you know of your father's involvement in World War 1?

Oh, he wasn't in

27:00 it. Because I think my mother wouldn't let him go, or something. She had two brothers that were killed in World War 1 and they were at Anzac and all that kind of thing, and I think that when I was imminent she persuaded my father that he shouldn't go to World War 1. But I do remember my uncles – my Uncle Frank was killed at Anzac, and Arthur,

27:30 he did a bit in France and he came… I can remember him picking me up and tossing me in the air when he came back from France, you know, after Gallipoli and all that. So they're vague sort of childish memories, but nonetheless I'm glad to have them. Arthur, though, was decorated at Gallipoli. So those two uncles of mine were, more than those, because my father had a brother

28:00 who was there. So I suppose the war was in their consciousness probably.

And what did they, your mum and dad, think of you going off overseas?

Now how did I get into that? Remind me. Oh, going overseas. Well everybody was sort of having a look overseas, you know. And I wanted to get a

28:30 qualification I couldn't get in Australia, you know, it was in the commercial education field and that was why I went to London. And, of course, took in all the sidelights as I was going. Wouldn't anyone? And then when the war broke out, you know, it's all getting a bit sort of fuzzy in my mind, but I do have bits of diary, I hope.

29:00 And right, so I think the first job I took was working for Lord Lloyd. I had fast shorthand and one thing leads to another.

And then you got married on the Batory and came back to Australia?

Yes.

And then went to India to rejoin Steve?

Yeah, that's

29:30 right. So look at it this way, I've had a taste of a good part of the world, really, one way or another. Especially for my vintage, because it wasn't as easy as it is now.

Well what was it like working as a secretary for the Commander-in-Chief of the Far East?

Well, of course, I was working at the naval base, the famous naval base at Singapore, for the Commander-in-Chief

30:00 Far East. And so I was, okay, you know, with what was going on. Now, you know, I'm scandalised to find how I've got to rake around in my mind to remember, you know. We quit Singapore.

30:30 Give me time to think.

You might've had to leave in a bit of a hurry because the Japanese came into Singapore?

Oh well, the Japanese were very much on our trail, you know. They were coming down the peninsula and they came just across the strait, you know, the Johor Strait that separates the mainland of that country from Singapore Island.

31:00 And isn't that dreadful, but I'll tell you what, I've got diaries of that time. You might prompt me to look. That was long after this stuff, of course. Some time after, because I was a good shorthand writer, I was writing 200 words a minute in shorthand, which is, you know, extraordinary. So I found myself working for Sir

31:30 Robert Brooke-Popham, who was the major general in charge of the whole show, you know. How dreadful that one leaves one's notebooks behind, you know. If ever you find yourself doing a job like that, keep the records, you know. I don't know what I've got left, but I've got something. I ought to go down to the house before she burns the lot.

Well what was it like leaving

32:00 **Singapore in a hurry?**

Well, of course, that was when the Japs, well, of course, I went north, you see. Isn't it dreadful to rake around in the mind like this? Of course, my mind's deteriorated, no question. And I was always working for the big-shot general, you know, because of my fast shorthand.

32:30 **And what was he like?**

Sir Robert Brooke-Popham? You'll send me home and I'll have a dig around, darling. Because it's a long time ago and there was a lot of war after that, but I was working for the top shot every time.

That must have given you a sense of satisfaction?

Well, I was commissioned by the

33:00 Americans, of course, and I ended up as a major in the American air force, decorated with the American Legion of Merit, which is a high decoration. The Americans are very decent about things like that, you know. I think they're more accustomed to having to cope with intelligent women. I've got some notes, which I haven't treasured because, you know, the war is over.

33:30 You recover, you grow a family and where are you, the crown jewels, yes. They were the evacuee children. Whose book is this? This is mine. It has to be.

33:49 End of tape

Tape 3

00:31 **So this is Beryl talking about Poona.**

But, you see why haven't I got it.

Just start from the top.

Yes, right, all right.

Can you read it?

Yeah. The opportunity came, Steven accepted an officers' training course in Poona, India. No

01:00 prohibition about Army wives in India as there was in Singapore. I was in Singapore too, you know, oh dear. I flew KLM to India. Seven weeks mooning about India. Where was that? Five days in the air and five nights in exotic places and then a day's long train journey from Calcutta to Poona.

01:30 Seven weeks of learning about India that was under my own steam. How to behave as an English army officer's wife abroad. It's not bad as far as the language goes, is it? Wangled 2 passages from the drafts on a ship where only one was possible. I didn't write down, oh yes. Sir Robert Brooke-

02:00 Popham. They were awfully short of useful people, you know. Where did you get this from? That's not the start.

Just start.

All right what are you going to do with it when you've got it on?

02:30 **We'll just record it while you read.**

Oh, I see. I continued to hope it would be possible to rejoin my husband. The opportunity came unexpectedly. Steve was accepted into an officers' training course in Poona, India. And there was no prohibition against army wives in India as there was in Singapore. I flew KLM to India. Am I doing the right thing? Five days in the air and five nights in exotic places. Then a day's long

03:00 train journey from Calcutta to Poona. Followed 7 weeks learning about India and how to behave as an English army officer's wife abroad in what turned out to be the last days of the British Raj. We wangled two passages from the draft on a ship where only one was possible. Met a staff officer from Fort Canning, Command Headquarters Singapore,

03:30 where I use to work, who called star flag red tabs to take me to meet Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Commander-in-Chief, Far East at the naval base. Sir Robert was out of a secretary and I had reference from Lord Lloyd, famous everywhere the world, was painted red and 160 words per minute shorthand. Suddenly I had both a job and the right to stay in Singapore. It was May

04:00 1941. Singapore, January '42, Japs pouring down the peninsula. I left in a little lopsided ship, the SS Anking with the GHQ [General Headquarters] records and assorted staff. Interject something – I don't talk about my experiences in Malaya. I left in a little lopsided ship, the SS Anking,

04:30 with the GHQ records and assorted staff headed for Java. Leaving Steve standing alone for the second time in our lives on the Singapore wharf. January 1942, I'm sorry I'm repeating myself. First Batavia ramshackle, urgent and high-ranking staff meetings, then Lembang on the heights of Bandoeng

05:00 and the headquarters of the grandiose ABDACOM, the American British Dutch and Australian

Command, commanded by General Wavell. Field Marshall Viscount Wavell, he was GCB [Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath], GCSI [Knight Grand Commander of the Order of Star of India], GCIE [Knight Grand Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire, CMG [Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George], MC [Military Cross] for whom I worked, with whom I dined, although most of the time I worked for his Chief of

05:30 Staff, General Playfair. Stenographers were very scarce in Lembang. 15th of February, '41. You know, I'd forgotten this paper completely. The fall of Singapore, everywhere the collapse of empires. Retreat approached panic, courtesy of the American General George Brett, Deputy Commander ABDACOM, I, together with an

06:00 English woman who had escaped Singapore with me and two American women, took the last civilian plane out of Tjilatjap, the Qantas Circe, she was shot down on the return flight to Java after delivering us to Broome the day before a Japanese raid laid it waste. Refugees, Melbourne, General George Brett,

06:30 by then commanding all Americans in the South West Pacific, met us at the railway station offering jobs. Thanks, no doubt, to General Wavell's pre-eminence, I became private secretary to the general himself and my wartime lot was henceforth with the Americans. General Lavarack, the Australian commander at ABDACOM, later to be governor of Queensland, had brought me a letter of introduction to

07:00 General Sturdee, CGS, Commander of the General Staff during the scramble out of Lembang. Asking him to give me a job, I had no need of it then, but it is good to have it among my souvenirs now, a reminder that in emergencies great Australians look after their own. I continued to work for General Brett when he became Commander Allied Air Forces, SWPA

07:30 South West Pacific Area. Following US General [Douglas] MacArthur's arrival from the Philippines on the 17th of March 1942 and for his successor, General George C Kenney, from July 1942. The following year I was commissioned in the American Women's Air Corps, Army of the United States, which made it possible for me to work

08:00 with the air forces in New Guinea, stationed at Seven Mile Strip near Port Moresby at Nadzab and at Cyclops Strip near Hollandia in Leyte, at Fort McKinley, Manila, in Okinawa and Japan. At the end of the war I was decorated with the American Legion of Merit,

08:30 rank of Legionnaire for 'outstanding service'. I hold the rank of major. After a devastating war and the loss of my husband I return once again to the Wagga Commercial College and in 1948 remarried. I have five children and nine grandchildren. I had the good fortune in 1955 to be asked to establish

09:00 the Women's Session for Riverina and North East Victoria on 2CO [radio station], broadcasting from the ABC's [Australian Broadcasting Commission] new regional station in Wagga. And on a few memorable occasions, on the national network. Twelve years later in 1966 I handed over the session to my good friend and fellow teacher at Wagga Commercial College, Alderman Elda Heard.

09:30 A 1965 student, Judy Griffin, is presently making fair copies of my tatty old broadcasting scripts, hoping we might find a use for them. Where are there?

I'm sure they're with your things.

Judy is still alive. Since coming to Sydney

10:00 to live in 1967 where my two eldest children were attending the University of Sydney and two others boarding schools, expensive. And after graduating myself, I taught Australian and English Literature at the University of New South Wales. Then cadet reporters at News Limited, Mr Rupert Murdoch's base. I established and became a director

10:30 of an alternative living community near Port Macquarie. Locally in 1986 I convened a new citizen's action group concerned with the environment. Now I spend much of my time celebrating reunions, among them the POOL[?], the students the commercial college at Wagga have on my heart still. After all the years it catches me up

11:00 in astonishment, simply to read down the list of names. The names we remember each other by is to resurrect a past I thought was lost forever. Nothing is possible to be lost; everything is with us still, good and bad. It's what we have grown on.

Thank you.

Gusis galug [?].

Thank you, that was really good.

Oh darling, is it?

That was fantastic, that told us

11:30 **quite a lot.**

You're an unexpected pair, you two.

You were saying, you were talking about…

Kenney, General Kenney, a little ugly man who commanded the Allied

12:00 air forces of the South West Pacific, succeeding General Brett who had been another type altogether. Tall, imposing, you know. And what do you want me to tell you about Kenney? How he won the war?

What sort of bloke he was? What did he get you to do?

Look, I've got a diary, you know.

Anything that you can recall about him?

12:30 Well, of course, I was a very good secretary, remember, and I had very fast shorthand and therefore I was very handy in that kind of position, you know. You really need to give me a little time to revise my own diary. In my book, this ugly little man, Kenney, won the war because he knew about air warfare and…

13:00 **Well what did you know about air warfare?**

Only what I learned through my bosses because I'd been working for some interesting people, you know, who knew their business. And Kenney was a master of the various arts of air warfare, no doubt. I've got a diary. What happened to my diary? They've got it. All right,

13:30 Kenney unlike most of the commanders, once he's photographed of, was a little ugly man, but he had to use his brain perhaps, you know, and to jolly good effect, really. You're asking me to remember stuff from many years ago, aren't you?

So you can

14:00 **tell us.**

Well, of course, I'd been working, you know, for eminent people in London and for Wavell and, you know, I was accustomed to recording the stuff that they had to say and perhaps enhancing the circumstances so I got the story, though I had. Now you want me

14:30 to tell you about what, which one?

The day General Kenney strode into the office and….?

You remember the story better than I do, evidently. Well, you see, the first American I worked for was General Brett. He was a tall, imposing general type, you know, and in their wisdom

15:00 the American air force, because it was an air appointment, had appointed to succeed him a little ugly man whose name was George Kenney. A contrast could not have been greater in the personal appearance of these two men. Or perhaps

15:30 one could not criticise Kenney's method of work, of course, because he won the war, you know. But two different men personally, it would be really very difficult to imagine.

And how did things change for you when Kenney took over?

I think the work at the office became much more efficient.

16:00 The personnel appointments became more impressive. I don't like to criticise. They were both top flight, you know, American commanders. And, of course, it was America that won the war. And in my book I hope continues to do so.

We don't necessarily need to criticise, but

16:30 **you have said that things did change once Kenney took over, so…?**

Oh I see, that's possibly, that's true enough because he was a workmanlike, General Kenney, less impressed with appearing at functions looking general-like and that kind of thing. So less time was wasted under Kenney with that kind

17:00 of show really. Not to criticise Brett, far be it from me, but it was General Kenney, in my book, who because of his expertise with not only air forces but military forces, won the Pacific War. What are you going to use this stuff for?

17:30 If I had a few minutes to think about that I might have dug up some tasty little stories, you know, about episodes during the war.

Well, what about Kenney's diaries? What can you tell us about his diaries and how you came to have them?

Do I have them still? Good. Well I kept them. I made them

18:00 for him.

And why did you have them?

Well the war ended, the general's mind was on the next stage of life, I suppose, and everybody threw up their hands and quit. I knew or I suspected or perhaps I treasured my own work in the diaries, so nobody minded, objected to my taking the diary. So I have them still I hope, do I?

18:30 **Why were those diaries important, what were they…?**

Because it was an air war. In the South West Pacific, don't let's kid ourselves. It was an air war and this was the brilliant commander of the air forces who won the war.

And those diaries were fairly top secret intelligence information?

Oh I don't think that it was

19:00 necessarily top secret, but it was the day by day record of how the war was won. And that's surely enough.

And you mentioned things changed when Kenney took over and he had a different way of working?

You only had to look at the two men, Brett who was general-like, tall, fine figure of a man, well dressed,

19:30 and Kenney, who was short and forgot to salute or something, you know. Two utterly different commanders.

Well how did your work change? What did Brett, General Brett, how did he work with you?

Well it was more orthodox, day by day operations, more orthodox. Kenney was likely to confound the

20:00 Japanese by trying something different and so it was very different material. Where are those diaries?

We've got a couple here.

I think so.

I understand Kenney dismissed the idea of writing things down? Did that, what did…?

I think under regulations they had to keep a diary. The commanding general of anything, I think, is expected to keep a diary.

20:30 No. I don't care. We had to win the war. My husband was a prisoner of war of the Japs. Yeah. Now have you looked at those diaries?

Briefly, yes.

Briefly. What about you? You haven't looked at them? Yes, well you'd have a pretty good idea

21:00 about what they are. And I wouldn't mind having a look at them myself. Where are they now?

We've got them and we can have a look at them if you want.

Darling, how wonderful!

What about the day that Kenney committed the whole air force?

Yeah.

Tell me about that.

I don't think I can remember the details. Have I written anything in the diary about it? I think so. Give me a look at my diary

21:30 about that and perhaps I could talk about it.

Okay, well we might just do that. Did you like Kenney? What did you like about…?

Oh yes, how could you dislike somebody that was winning the war when your husband was a prisoner of war and all your friends, you know? Yes indeed. And, of course, that quick brain, you know, if you work for a quick brain it's a great godsend, you know. Other people struggled

22:00 and patch up, but it was a wily little man.

And what did you know of your husband being a POW [Prisoner of War]?

Did I have something, did I say? I think there was a card once, eight words, or six words or something they were allowed and that was all I got.

22:30 Yes, of course, I had and still have some, you know, photos and that, you know, of our days on the Batory

and that kind of thing.

And was Kenney as easy man to work for?

He was a very satisfactory man to work for because he had a brilliant mind, you know. It comprehended everything, you know, Instantly. And everybody respected that, you know, in the armies and air forces and

23:00 navies for that matter you get a lot of stuffed shirts and it's good to encounter a mind that is, disregards that stuff, gets on with the job which one would have to credit Kenney with from the word go. What happened to him in the end, do you know? You don't know? I don't know. Who does? I don't know.

So he ran a

23:30 **more efficient…?**

Have I got any letters still from Kenney? I have got a few? Oh well, let them stay where they are.

And what about Brett, General Brett what, how…?

Wonderful, a soldier to the core, you know, tall, well built, well dressed, commanding, you know. All right…

And who did you admire most out of Brett and

24:00 **Kenney?**

Well they were both good generals, but it was Kenney that got the victory which, of course, in war time is a pretty important thing. Not that Brett didn't, but, you know, if I had to chose between Brett and Kenney as a Commander-in-Chief I'd chose Kenney because he had an original mind. Brett's was more military trained, you know,

24:30 and ingrained. They were both successful types. Why compare them? You don't strike two of either of them in real life, do you? No.

And what did you like about working with Americans?

Oh, they were winning the war and won it.

25:00 Did you need another reason? The dear old Brits, oh well, they had their virtues, but I think that if I was, I had a team of the one and the other and I had a war to win, I think my money would be on the Americans. Not necessarily

25:30 go one with you love – that's a lot of tripe.

Okay, what about the Japanese threat and you leaving…?

The Japanese what?

Threat?

Threat?

The Japanese came into Singapore, what about you, you just read out a good story of how you came to leave Singapore on

26:00 **the SS Anking?**

Oh well, it's all getting a bit far away, darling, and if it's far away from me, it's far away for a lot of people. It was a busy, I was… Being a good stenographer is a very important thing, you know. Today you'd say well you've got the tape recorders and you've got this and that, but it's

26:30 not quite the same as talking to a private secretary, you know, dictating to a person. And I think that probably counts. Oh well, come on, we've finished with these inanities, surely?

Very interesting.

It's honest and it's real.

Yeah absolutely. And what about attacks

27:00 **by Japanese Zeros? Were you…?**

No, no. I speak and spoke no Japanese and I felt sorry for them because there they were in a swamp of people questioning them, you know, everything. Well I think you feel sorry for anyone in that position, don't you? Now that was just sort of personally and

27:30 you know, not remote. I mean we had to win the war for reasons which, you know.

And the Japanese did come and take over Singapore and there was an occasion where you

might have jumped from your staff car into a paddy field?

Did what?

Jumped from a staff car into a paddy field?

Oh yes, but that's a lot of tripe, isn't it, really?

28:00 No good trying to make that a heroic episode because, you know, there was a lot of that going on.

What happened that day?

I can't remember. I don't think I know. No, I haven't got that. Well it's all far away. I wasn't very much there when the Japanese were there. You want some episodes

28:30 of encounter with Japanese, I think you've got to ask somebody else.

Okay, well…?

If I think of anything, I'll tell Runa.

Not a problem. Well you went to Batavia after you left Singapore?

Batavia?

Yes. What was going on there and….?

Java?

29:00 **Oh well of course; I went to Lembang where the British set up their headquarters, you see. And worked there until we had to escape. And then, of course, we went, as you know, to Timor, you know, that bit of the, yes, I wonder if there's anything of that? I do wonder today what happened to the little eight-year-old girl? Did I tell you about her? Well, when, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham**

29:30 **moved his headquarters, am I talking about the right person? It must be getting late, I think. We went to Lembang, do, you know, where Lembang is? My son John went to have a look at Lembang. Up on the northwest corner of Timor and the one of think of most often is the little girl. I was always the first to get, to open the office for these generals and**

30:00 **a little girl from the Ceylonese village down below me, you know, and always waiting for me because she wanted me to go for a walk with her. And so we walked over, you know, we'd walk over a ridge of hill. Those mountains of that island are so magnificent, you know, very beautiful looking down on her village and the ocean on the way to Australia, you see. But I think of that little girl.**

30:30 **Of course she'd be a great grandmother probably by know, but I do wonder what happened to those dear people, you know, on the island. Nobody writes up, you know, what happens to the civilian population during the fighting and immediately afterwards, you know. It must be dreadful putting life together again and I do think often of that little girl walking with me over the ridges of**

31:00 **the island. Oh well, it's all a lot of hooey. I don't know now what was interesting, what happened at that was there…**

At the headquarters of the American, British, Dutch…?

I've got some diary notes, you know. I might just for your sake look over some of that stuff. Working for all the generals as I was there,

31:30 yeah, doubt if I'll find anything, but I shall and I'll tell Runa if I find anything.

That would be excellent.

Now you'd like some sort of… What are you looking for? An original story or two?

Your story, yes.

I wouldn't want, I don't even really want to go over it in recall, you know, because you realise it was a pretty

32:00 lousy time, you know.

Why do you say that?

Oh well, husbandless. Where was my family? Where were we fleeing to next? Having to listen to the stories of the generals, you know, because they were all, had personal connections, you know. And so there was a lot of misery about, you must remember, at that time.

32:30 Yeah, I'll think about it, darling, in case our paths cross again.

And what would the generals be talking about?

Well, of course, they were there to win the war, you know, and they were, which port, you know, which yes, where would we go next, you know, by the time, I'm talking about what I'm talking about now we were at Timor, you know, at the

33:00 end of line of the island, you see. There was nowhere else to retreat to so it was pretty grim times.

Were you scared?

I wonder if I've got any of the notes I kept because it's a hell of long time ago. I might have a look and see because my shorthand, I was a shorthand writer and I was taking notes, you know, not much of my own observations,

33:30 it was too busy. Yeah, but I'll have a hunt for your sake.

Well you say…?

Even if it's an occasional vignette, you know, of this moment or that.

And life was pretty grim as you say, you had to escape…?

Well I mean, you know, I've left not only my husband, but my, all my confreres behind, you know. And

34:00 scampering from point to point in the Netherlands East Indies. And I wonder if remembering that does any use to, is any use to anybody. What's going on in Lembang today? I don't, my son went and had a look at Lembang, but, of course, utterly other.

And what was going on in Lembang when you were there?

34:30 Oh well it was the general headquarters, you see from Wavell on down and there were plenty of generals, but I'll tell you what there weren't many shorthand writers. Yes in fact I'd say none but me. And sort of scampering day by day, you know, because the Japs weren't staying still, they were coming on, you know.

35:00 You make me realise that you think it sounds exciting. I wonder if I've got those notebooks? Where would they be, Runa? I've probably pitched the lot when I took a little boat and got home to Sydney. Mighty glad to turn south from Colombo, no the whole place, yeah.

Well after Timor, where did you go? Where after Lembang?

35:30 I got back. Well I went to the capital city and I got on a boat and eventually I got home and very glad I was to be here. I'd come to the end of that island chain remember, you know, and the Japs were still harassing us everywhere, yes. I might have some notes, honey. If I have, I'll tell Runa.

What about air raids from the Japanese?

Where? Well, of course,

36:00 when we were in Lembang we were still subjected to air raids. And, of course, Singapore and all that, all that previous stuff. I wonder if I've got anything? I'll have a look through my old notebooks darling, and see if I saved them. I think I was glad to walk away, or row away as the case might be.

36:30 Yes I'll have a look. If I can find something, I'll tell Runa.

There were air raids?

What would you be interested in? Would you be interested in the little 8-year-old girl waiting for me in the morning before I opened the overnight cables to walk on the ridges? You'll make me remember, won't you? All right, I'll have dig around now and then I'll tell Runa what I've been able to find. What's your name?

Kathy.

37:00 Kathy, oh well, that's nice. And your name?

Chris

Kathy and Chris, that's a nice sounding pair. I'll see if I've got anything darling, of course, I wont have anything at the Garrison, will I? I think…

Well when you got back to Australia, what happened? You got another job?

Oh well, I was jolly glad to be home. I still, of course, own the Wagga Commercial College into which I put an acting

37:30 principal, you know. And the country and what is more I owned a rice farm at Griffith and employed some Italians there to work the rice farm and that kind of thing, you know, doesn't leave the rest of life behind.

Yeah. Okay, well.

That's stuff is no use to you, what are you aiming to do with this stuff?

38:00 **We're aiming to collect your story, but we might stop for lunch now I think, because I think you're going to have lunch very soon.**

What a good idea. My story?

Tape 4

00:30 Brisbane

Yeah.

What did you call it, Marbo?

No HQ, headquarters in Brisbane.

Oh, headquarters in Brisbane.

What can you tell us about headquarters?

Isn't it shocking? I had no idea I'd go like this. All right, Brisbane.

General MacArthur was there?

Yes well I worked, of course, for two American air generals.

01:00 When did they end? Brett and Kenney I worked for.

And Kenney was in Brisbane with you? And so you worked with him there for a while and then I think MacArthur wanted you to go up to New Guinea? Tell us about…?

No, it wasn't ever MacArthur. It was always the air generals that I worked with. And

01:30 isn't it dreadful? You should have given me a tip off so I could sort of read a bit of something, you know, to recall. All right then. Now Brett, I always thought of him as an English general, you know, he was the English type, you know, beautifully mannered, everything right and proper and Kenney was more of a maverick,

02:00 but he was the one that had bright ideas, you know, for air campaigns and that kind of thing. Two completely different gentlemen, yes.

And what can you tell me about New Guinea?

New Guinea?

And Port Moresby?

You have given me a tip off, you know, before about this. Now Port Moresby. Isn't it dreadful? I'm

02:30 having my worries, you know, putting my mind back. We went to Nadzab, of course, which you know about, something about. Drawn a bit of a blank. When did I go to Port Moresby, tell me?

I think it was pretty late in the war or about '43, 1943?

03:00 **And you had become the first WAAC [Women's Army Auxiliary Corps]?**

Oh yeah, that's right, put on the first WAAC uniform. Yeah, that was rather good. By jove, I'd forgotten all about that.

And were you proud to be wearing…?

What?

Were you proud, how did that make you feel to be wearing a WAAC uniform?

Very good because it was the Americans that were going to have to win the war obviously, you know, I'd been working for Brooke-

03:30 Popham in Singapore, well he wasn't going to win a war, you know. But the Yanks were of a different calibre, you know. Isn't this, you see if I'd had some sort of warning of you and I'd done a bit of background reading to remind me of this and that, I'd have better than I am because this is digging it out of a long dead past, you know. Right

04:00 well, of course, those American generals were very different in character, Brett was like an English

gentlemen and it was very easy for me to make the transition therefore. Now Kenney was a lively spark and quite of different character from Brett, but full of bright ideas and, of course, in my book won the war.

And what was it like

04:30 **for you as a woman working amongst mainly men, what…?**

Oh, it was never entirely men, you know, but oh well, they were all erudite and old as far as I was concerned, you know, and they were after all winning the war which was my war because I'd already been in quite a bit

05:00 of it. And, of course, they were very bright and one appreciates that kind of thing, you know. Especially I suppose when fighting a war. Two very different men, Brett and Kenny, Brett was more of an English gentlemen kind of man and with English manners, so I suppose in a way

05:30 that was an easy transition for me. Kenny was more on the bean every second, you know, and quite a different character. What else can I say about them?

I'm very interested to hear about your time in New Guinea and whatever you can remember from Port Moresby or Nadzab?

The country,

06:00 the people. All right, I called her Runa, which was the name of the falls on the Laloke River where I lived with the American air nurses for a time. You know about that.

Tell me about the nurses?

I didn't have terribly

06:30 much to do with them although I lived in the same camp, but we were all very busy people. And so as far as the working situation was concerned mine was quite other. I run into two men at the Garrison here who were on the river, you know, in the Kokoda trail really, and

07:00 their memories, of course, are quite different from mine and they walk around wounded still, you know, hobbling around, yes. What the devil can I say about it? I always lived with the American air nurses. That's why I called her Runa because, you know, that was the place where the American nurses were camped

07:30 and I spent a good deal of time, you know, it least, you know, when I was off duty.

What was your hut like?

My what?

Your hut where you lived?

It was a tent, yes. Just makeshift, you know, everything, of course, was makeshift, goodness.

08:00 If I'd known your questioning was going in this direction I might have looked up, you know, some diary material because I did do a bit of recording on the Kokoda Trail.

Did you have anywhere to shower or go to the toilet?

Any what, dear?

Did you have any showers when you were up there?

Showers? Well you hardly needed it with the river beside you because it always was, because we followed the river

08:30 you know, and the trail, the Kokoda Trail followed the river, but all the same Americans always make themselves comfortable, you know. So I suppose, or as far as I remember, there was always showers. That's not very interesting, is it?

And what about the latrines?

The what?

The toilets?

Oh toilets, oh well they were always provided, there was always toilets

09:00 yes, didn't have to live any more primitively than that. Well damn, you know, if I'd know what you line of, I might have done a bit of thinking about it and remembering, you know. Because it's one hell of a long time ago, yes.

09:30 Of course the story's a legend, you know, about the Australian men particularly, you know, sort of

chasing the Nips [Japanese] up there. There weren't many women at all, of course. I mean we were really exceptions and I had to live with the American air nurses because where else was there, you know? There were no Australian women that I remember, you know, pressing on

10:00 up along the trail.

That's why I'm asking about the bathroom facilities because it wasn't really set up for women, it was set up for men, so I was wondering…?

Oh well, the Yanks make themselves comfortable, you know, and we always had showers and, of course, sometimes a dip in the river. What else? And always

10:30 worked, you know, because it was, we were all the time pretty much on the job, you know, there were no, you know, dinner parties and things of that kind, it was just a case of pressing on.

And what were you doing during the day?

Oh well, I was doing normal secretary work, of which there was a ton because there was the keeping in touch, you know, with

11:00 everybody and particularly with the forward commanders. And, of course, the Kokoda Trail was very primitive, you know, and there had to be some means of communication. I don't want to put you on the wrong track because modern communications were pretty hard to come by in there.

Did you have a typewriter?

Have I?

Did you have a typewriter? What were you using?

Oh yes, yes, of course I had a typewriter and, of course, I was and am

11:30 a very good shorthand writer and for a long time, as a matter of fact, it might, it would not be surprising if any of my notebooks turned up, you know, amongst the delving that Runa's been doing, but of course she wouldn't recognise what the material was about. Very handy skill, shorthand, because you carry it with you all the time, you know.

12:00 What are you trying to get at? What it was like on the river?

And the camps, the different camps that you were at?

Yes, well I didn't vary too much with the camps. I was always, because of course I was living with the air nurses and so they made themselves pretty comfortable. See I haven't even got a map in front of me. Now, of course, we went on there

12:30 and where did we go from the Kokoda Trail? You tell me…

I think first you were at Seven Mile Strip?

Seven Mile yeah, Seven Mile Strip. Yes I remember that well enough, but they're all positions along the river. Now I've run into men in the Garrison who, you know, recognise the names of the places because they were sort of crawling along that rotten trail and, you know, but, of course, I

13:00 was made pretty comfortable in the commander general's set up.

And what contact did you have if any with any of the local native population?

The native population? Virtually none. I think they gave the men going on the Kokoda, they were pretty primitive, you know, probably still are. So I had no contact, you might say, with them. Mind you

13:30 one worked around the clock as it were because, you know, the war had to be won, the trail had to be covered, you know, and recovered and so forth. It's not much to remember about it, is it? If I'd known that I was going to talk to you like this I might have looked up a bit of material, you know, my own, but I had no warning. So what, New Guinea's a pretty primitive land, you know.

14:00 **What was the landscape like that you remember?**

Well round the trail it's very rugged because it's mountain country, you see. The Bismarck's I think is the name of the range [actually the Owen Stanleys] and there's nowhere really to go for, head for, you know, that's off that primitiveness that we were living in. It's funny that, you know, I suppose there hasn't been much

14:30 written and I've certainly have read damn all, you know, about what it was like. In fact when you asked me, where did we go when we came to the end of the trail? Tell me, it might…

I think you went to Nadzab?

Yeah, well there was Nadzab. Nadzab was relatively civilised, a civilised camp at Nadzab. All right, and what after Nadzab?

15:00 **Well, what do you remember from Nadzab?**

Yes, you see.

What was there?

Well wherever we were, I live with the air nurses so I was very lucky because they know how to fix themselves up, you know. And so as far as living conditions were concerned, and of course we were fighting a war, you know, not that one had much to do with, although I had a

15:30 rifle on my back all the time.

Did you ?

Yes indeed, because you never know when you were going to be confronted by a Nip, you know. I never was, but I didn't want to be either, so.

And what sort of rifle was it? Was it a .303 or…?

What kind of rifle was it, she says? How would I know what kind of rifle it was?

Had you learnt to shoot?

Oh yes, I had to go

16:00 through a training course somewhere, it was pretty brief, you know, but I could use a rifle. It's a bore darling, I'm trying to think of something to liven the situation up. Of course, it depends on the moment, about where we were along the north coast, you know, and that kind of thing. Because there are some wonderful stories about that.

16:30 But I was always safe because I was with the American air nurses and they were pretty well looked after, you know. And I shared their amenities, which was good.

Are there any names that you can remember of those women? It doesn't matter if you can't.

I might have in my diary, but you know the war ended and the world changed as far as I was,

17:00 everybody was concerned.

And when you say you, when you worked you worked with a rifle on your back?

Yes.

I don't, does that mean literally, or…?

Actually, yes actually. Well, you know, you might stumble into a Nip any time because they were spaced along that trail. And every now and again you'd hear shots fired.

Well I'm just wondering if you had bullets

17:30 **in your rifle because I've heard that some women weren't allowed to have bullets in their guns. Did you have any bullets?**

Oh, course I did, yes I was really fully set up, yes, and I was taken through a training course so I could use a rifle, but I never had to use it in earnest. So, but of course the Kokoda Trail didn't go on forever, you know, we came to the end. Give me a map. Have you got a map?

18:00 You've got nothing?

Unfortunately we don't, but that doesn't mean to say that we can't keep talking. So when you were in Port Moresby there were, I understand there were open toilets along the side of the road. Can you remember those…?

Open, no they always managed to hessian them in, yes as far as I'm concerned, especially the women's bits

18:30 you know. Civilised race the Yanks, you know. Have a look at that map of the Australians, oh dear, it's all trivia that we're talking.

Well not really, because I understand that General Kenney had to go to some extent to get a flushing toilet up there?

Had to go to some, yes, yes, he like a flushing toilet, General Kenney and he did, now isn't that ridiculous

19:00 that that little thing survives in the records? Dear, how ridiculous, yes. Yes it was really quite an occasion.

But these are the stories that we're not going to be able to read in a history book.

No, that's right.

So we're relying on people like you to tell us these little stories.

I should have, if I'd known I was going to be confronted by this, I would have look through some, you know, written stuff, diaries and things, you know, to recall

19:30 what happened. Because it was a pretty primitive life, you know. I mean New Guinea is pretty primitive still.

Well what was shocking for you why....?

Well, of course I was always well protected in amongst, you know, there was a coterie of women and I lived with the air nurses time and again, you know, that's why she's called Runa and

20:00 well it wasn't all that damn primitive, you know. The Yanks know how to build toilets and did, wrapped in hessian always, and yes, so.

And what sort of food could you get?

Well I had no complaints about the food. I suppose it was mostly, steak – grilled stuff, you know. Don't make it too primitive. The Yanks make themselves comfortable, you know.

20:30 And so I should have done a bit of revision or at least some thinking before I talk to you because that was also a long time ago, isn't it?

Well you say that you were working around the clock, it was very intensive work that you were doing?

Oh well, I was working pretty well all the time, you know, because I still am a fast shorthand

21:00 writer and I was, I had a lot of practice, you know, at that time. And I didn't do much of the actual broadcasting. It was the typed material that I usually was called upon because, of course, then you could keep your carbon copy and know what you'd said. It all sounds very gloomy and dull, doesn't it? What can I think of that was brighter than this?

21:30 **Well the stuff that you were typing up, did you read it or did you just type it and not read it? I mean, like what I mean is...?**

Well it was usually correspondence of one kind or another or reports on something or other or request for armaments, you know, and things of that kind. Yeah. Pity I don't have some samples, isn't it, dear?

22:00 No and, you see I'm having to rake around in my mind. When we got to the north coast, you know, I have to do a bit of a revision course in my mind where were we, where we were crawling to, you know, further along the coast. And, of course, the wonderful air, which was what I was working for, you know, it was an air war,

22:30 especially along that north coast of New Guinea.

And how did you get from [Port] Moresby up to the North Coast?

Well usually flew in the commanding general's plane, you know, to the next airfield, that was the newest airfield, you see. Yes. Oh, go on, we've done enough of this stuff, agonising over New Guinea. Now where did we go from New Guinea?

23:00 Well up through the islands, but my next centre was in the Philippines, you know. When we got there. That was very interesting too. And then the landing in Japan was interesting because I was the only woman in the generals' plane and we went ashore to this mess reception. Was it Imagawa

23:30 airstrip that I'm talking about? Yes, I think so. Imagawa, where we went ashore in Japan. It was all very civilised by that time, you know.

That's at war's end?

I have got a bit of material, but it's in filing cabinets, you know, and I'm away from the filing cabinets.

That's okay, before we talk about Japan can we just go back to the

24:00 **Philippines for a minute?**

Yes.

You mentioned that you stopped off in the Philippines?

Well we were centred in Manila for a time and that was, of course, relatively civilised, in fact civilised. And it's hard for me to remember any, I mean I wasn't out there with a rifle although I was mixing with people who very often were, but not I

24:30 you see, so I haven't got that kind of rip-roaring stuff to tell. And even if I had my records in front of me then I would be able to give you some juicier stories, you know. Because the air was always the first in, you see and I was working for the commanding general of the Allied air forces and therefore, early on

the scene, relatively speaking.

25:00 Well, in a way what I'm talking is a bit misleading without my, the depth of my records, you know, and the place names. Yeah.

So you were at Leyte?

Yes.

Tell me about Leyte?

Oh, how can I remember Leyte?

25:30 You know, you've already gathered it's all a bit of a blur, you know, because we were on the move all the time and if I'd even known that we were going to talk, engage me in this kind of talk I might have been able to do some revision, you know, especially I could get at my filing cabinet, yeah, or even the books because, of course, I've

26:00 you know, had a good look at the books, especially Kenney's, you know, which is informative and true. But things do jog your memory, you know. All right, now listen, I'm going to be no more use to you.

You're being really good and what you've just told us about New Guinea is fantastic, so…? You mentioned that you…

New Guinea's still pretty primitive, you know.

Why do you say that?

Have you been to New Guinea? Should

26:30 go up and have a look. Well it wasn't, you know, life at the Ritz or anything like that, but I was always well protected and I never went anywhere where there weren't other women actually, as far as talking about the, usually the American air nurses because

27:00 they, of course, were on every plane and, of course, we were the air force.

And do you recall, you've mentioned that you were working a lot and very hard, but what about when you weren't working and had time to relax?

We didn't go to cocktail parties that I remember, at least not outside the cities, but there were always the messes, the officers' messes, you know,

27:30 so there was always somewhere to have dinner or a drink, you know, if you were there at the right time or something. And of course, well the American air force is a pretty, you know, civilised lot and I had friends here and there, so. See you're asking me questions that I should have confronted myself, what I should have done is read up my own diaries and

28:00 things before I talked to you, which would have given me a little more material.

Well you've mentioned that there were officers' messes and you did have some time off work?

Yeah.

What about things like setting up a Christmas tree and celebrating?

Well there was always plenty of GI's [US soldiers] to do that kind of thing, you know, the officers didn't do it themselves. And, of course, if I were going

28:30 into this properly I'd be going step-by-step up through the Pacific, you know, because each place was a little different from the last, you know, but

It doesn't matter we don't need to…

Of course there was always air nurses, you know, so it wasn't as if I was an isolated female, you know. Usually as where, Runa Falls where I stayed with the American air

29:00 nurses and became very fond of the whole area and so forth. Named my daughter after that. But there are those places, you know, and goodness knows what it's like now. It would be nice to mount an expedition, perhaps.

Was it a happy time for you?

Oh no, I had a husband in a Jap prisoner of war camp, which I didn't always know, you know, from the beginning. And

29:30 all my friends, you know, I'd been living in England for a time and so I had, and then the regiment, you know, they were all over the place. And no you couldn't call it happy. And the Americans I've been talking about were the commanders, you know, this and that, and in the main we kept our heads down, not too much gallivanting, in fact no gallivanting, you'd get shot at.

30:00 That sounds like an awful bore to me what I've been saying. I should have done a bit of, you know, thinking around to bring up something more interesting.

What about things like getting homesick?

What, dear? Homesick? Oh dear, have you been in New Guinea?

30:30 Should go. I'll come with you. I'll pay the bill.

Fine, lets go. I'm just wondering if you kept in touch with people back in Australia while you were away?

Oh, there was a good mail, trust the Yanks, no problems, you know, there was always a good mail service so I was always aware of what was going on at home, what was going on with my brothers in the war in Europe and all that stuff.

31:00 My younger brother was killed as a rear gunner – is there a rear gunner of an aircraft? Well he was killed over the Scilly Isles, you know that. And of course those stories we all were suffering through, you know, because it was a real war. It was no game, you know, and of course most of the Australian men, as far as the airmen were concerned they went to Canada for final training and then they went to

31:30 England and over there I knew quite a number of them and yes. The sad part is that people die, now those people particularly because I think they had a tough time and last Christmas, you know, a year ago, my friend Betty Hibbert, who shared England with me, you know, England with me and she died

32:00 in a place like the Garrison up in Brisbane and I miss her most damnably, you know. We had some interesting times together in London because we were both driving ambulances after work that was, you know, we finished our day's work and then we went and drove. And we decided that we'd like to occupy a house out of the, you know, the ambulance driving and the pressures of central London

32:30 and the railway line to East Finchley opened up and it was a new station, you know. We decided to go out and have a look there and that led us into an experience and it's something that you might be able to keep your eye out for me. The upper floor of a house at East Finchley was for rent

33:00 and this house had been, it was just right where the new underground station, it was… The house we were living in had been lived in by Oliver Cromwell. Have I said this to you before? Well, of course we were very interested in this. I've never been able to work out how Oliver Cromwell and what his relationship was to the vicar's wife to this day, you know.

33:30 But one day I'll find a library that has a full history of Oliver Cromwell and I'll know.

And did you find it difficult driving those ambulances?

No, I was a good driver, you know. In Australia we drive and I'm a country girl, you know. So, no, no, never had any problems. They gave you an instructor at the beginning, you know, but I didn't have trouble driving the

34:00 ambulance. I'd be surprised if anyone did, you or Runa. There, yes. It's all, you're making it all sound extraordinary and at the time, of course, it wasn't because everybody was doing something in London, you know. We were all in it to win the war and so Betty and my experience was not exceptional. She died

34:30 in a retirement place like this last Christmas up in Brisbane, which has left a big gap in my life.

I'm very sad to hear it. Coming back to Australia after London, you were posted…?

Wait till I get my mind there. When did I come back to Sydney?

35:00 **You would have been posted, I think, or you met up with**

Steve?

I think you left him in Singapore.

Yeah, that's right.

You came back to Australia and you were working for a time in Melbourne and in Brisbane at headquarters?

Yes, well I got a job where I applied for. My shorthand was and is very fast and, you know, educated in English at university

35:30 standard. So no problems as far as that was ever concerned, you know.

I'm just wondering whether you actually got to meet General MacArthur?

Oh yes, oh yes. On many an occasion. The meetings that he chaired, supervised, organised, yes. And the same headquarters, you see, the air headquarters

36:00 in Brisbane were in the same building. I've just been reading a letter that Bill Benson, who was my offsider in Kenney, the commanding general of the Allied air forces office, and Bill got energetic and wrote up a yarn and I'm only half way through it now because I think it's about a year ago that he published it up in Brisbane.

And what was General MacArthur the man like? What, tell us about him and…?

Well I

36:30 respected General MacArthur. In fact I don't know anybody that worked for MacArthur who did not respect him because he was a very practised and highly intelligent general – his planning was marvellous, you know. And I haven't heard a criticism of that from anywhere I think in all the years. So we thought the world of MacArthur really. There were people, of course, who thought

37:00 he was a big bully I suppose, but in fact you can't command a winning military outfit without having some critics, I would say. Yes, now listen I don't think we're getting anywhere, are we?

We're getting a long way because I hadn't heard about your meeting General MacArthur before, so perhaps you can tell me a bit more about him?

Well, of course, MacArthur's

37:30 office was on the floor above ours in Brisbane, you see, and therefore it was a daily occurrence that, you know, you coincided, you know, meeting or something or another. Yes, everybody respected General MacArthur, you know.

Was he an intimidating figure?

Oh, I wouldn't say intimidating, no. He was tall

38:00 and had quite a presence, of course, but that was, one respected him really and I think his soldiers respected him. I never ran into an exception. Even General Kenney, my boss, commanding general of the Allied air forces – he was a small shortish man and without that commanding presence that MacArthur had.

38:30 But somehow or another they all earned their place, you know, if they were competent at the job. And my God those Americans were competent at the job. How do you people feel about our getting closer and closer to the American armed services, which we are doing day by day right now? I don't think we could manage without them really.

Okay well…

39:00 Now that assistant of mine, Bill Benson who worked beside me the way you two are working now in General Kenney's office, he published a book only a year or so ago and I'm still gloating over it, you know, great, Bill Benson.

I'll just make a note of his name and we'll just change…

39:23 **End of tape**

Tape 5

00:29 **Okay.**

00:30 Not that at the time I realised the case, but I had gone in with the commanding general of the Allied air forces, you see so that I was the only woman on that plane that landed at Atsugi Airstrip and that was quite interesting. It was interesting enough to be indelible in my mind yes, in fact I might have even written it up. I'll have a dig around.

01:00 **And when did you hear about war's end? The atomic bomb? Do you remember…?**

I think we were part of it because Kenney was always the organiser, the author of the papers, you know, and that went through his office to MacArthur's office and was usually the official pronouncement. I might have a bit of that in,

01:30 because Bill Benson, the chap I've been talking about, he wrote a book only within the last year and sent me a copy, bless his heart. So I might be able to find something about that.

And…

How much of this stuff can your broadcast stand, you know?

As many, as much and as many stories as you can tell us.

Yes I see, all right.

Yeah, well what, the news of the atomic

02:00 **bomb and the end of the war was pretty big and devastating?**

Oh yes, I knew that we had it, we knew that we had it, but whether it was going to be used was another thing, you see. And actually the time when it was decided to use it and was used I was horrified, well damn it all, you know, it's such a sweeping calamity, you know, on the people

02:30 on whom… But then again how are you going to win? How are you going to end a war like that? And if you've got a weapon that will end it like that I suppose they decided that they had to use it. I might even have some notes about that business of that Atsugi. I think I have. I'll have a dig around. Of course I'm in the different living quarters now so I may or may not have something there.

And where

03:00 **were you when you got the news of the atomic bomb?**

Oh well, I was always in the general's office and I knew about it, you know, from the staff, knew that we had it. And, you know, there was the debate about whether we'd be using it and so I was pretty close then, you know, to what was happening. If you had an atomic bomb that could stop the war, would you use it? Of course, because our men

03:30 were still being killed off, you know, dribbling, dribble by dribble as it were, you know. At least it was a decisive end, wasn't it, to the war?

And what was the debate about whether to use it or not, what…?

Well it's such a horrendous weapon, you know, a single bomb can wipe out a city, you know, all that sort of thing. There is a moral question – do you use

04:00 it? The moral question was seriously debated amongst the American command. MacArthur was a decent type of man, you know. If I can find anything, I must have a dig, but, you see I'm separated from most of my material so, but still I might have a bit of that stuff. At least I knew about what was happening all the time in General Kenney's office

04:30 you know, because the bright ideas came from the airmen, because of the delivery of everything came from the airmen, you know, so I was privileged in that respect. I don't remember even ever being concerned about the morality of using an atomic bomb. I wonder if I even understood, you see, because there hadn't been

05:00 an explosion of such magnitude, you know. Darling for your sake, I have got diary notes somewhere, you know, I'll have a root around and see if I can find anything that was written at the time, you know.

Well I'm very keen to hear about why you were on the plane to go to Japan at the end of the war? How did that come about?

05:30 Oh well I was a major in the American air force and I was aide to General Kenney who was the commanding general of the air force, and therefore I suppose it would be… I wasn't the only one on that place, but it seemed to be, you know, as his aide a place I should be. Anyway, I was there.

06:00 I'm, surely I must have kept some notes of that time, but where, God only knows at this juncture, you know, I'm split about even the stuff I've got down at the house. Has the house been sold yet? It's been sold. See, there goes my last source. What about my papers in the attic, you've got them? She's got them.

06:30 **And when you got off the plane in Japan what did, you see…?**

At Atsugi, well there was of course, I have even some photographs of that. There was, of course, the agglomeration of the few American officers, you know, that had gone in and the Japanese officers. It was a very proper sort of meeting.

07:00 But I do have some photos, if I have them still, yes. And then there was a gathering at the officers' mess at the air force. Can you remember the name of the airport in which we landed? Atsugi, was it?

Atsugi, yes.

Atsugi. And there was a, you know, a formal small gathering though and I imagine

07:30 that there must have been some sort of refreshment on, but I can't really pin that down. And I know we just got back in the plane and went back to wherever we come from. But it wasn't long before we were all in Tokyo, you know, around Tokyo. And it was really I think very well stage-managed. See it could have been a terrible

08:00 mess, but it was not. Oh darling, I'll try and dig out some stuff about that. Because we were all glad, I

was glad to see the end, that's the end of the war, you know, and I suppose that most everybody would have had the same reaction, you know, that's over.

And did you attend ceremonies? What ceremonies did you attend?

Well there wasn't a big,

08:30 you know, a big end of the war ceremony in Japan, not that I know of. It was as a matter of fact, the part I remember was in the officers' mess, you know. I suppose we got in the plane and went back because I can remember nothing else. But eventually, of course, we lived in Tokyo for a time.

And did you…?

You've inspired me to go and have a dig somewhere, and a think.

What about Hiroshima, did you visit…?

The what?

Hiroshima. Did you visit Hiroshima?

Oh Hiroshima, they say up there Hiroshima. Yes I did, yes. At the end of the war none of it seemed like a big

09:30 deal, you know. There wasn't a big ceremony – it was almost makeshift, you know. You've inspired me to resolve that. I shall look up and see what I have and let you have it, because at least I was there on the spot and I kept on being reminded that I was the first woman into Japan

10:00 so I suppose that's a plus.

And you lived in Tokyo for a period of time?

I can't even remember, you know, after that. Can't remember. But of course I must have some sort of a record, if only it's on my official record.

I'm just wondering what sort of contact you had with the Japanese people?

None, I would say none, except the bobbing geishas

10:30 you know, serving us food and drinks and that kind of thing, no nothing else, of course, I wasn't there long. Darling, I'll see if I can find something. If I can I'll see if through Runa I can get it to you.

And why did you visit Hiroshima? Why did you go there? Was it…?

Well I was after all an aide to general,

11:00 the air general. and I was there as an aide to the air general.

What did you see?

See, she asks me? Hordes of men, the American officers that were taking the, what, the defeat, the, you know, and

11:30 there was this ceremony that I've just been remembering, you see, told you about in the officers' mess at that Atsugi Aerodrome. And Atsugi might be worth looking up, Atsugi. If I come upon anything that's interesting.

And what signs of the atomic bomb did you see?

Oh I didn't see it, I didn't see where the atomic bomb had exploded,

12:00 I heard about it. And at the time, of course, there were legends of photos and that kind of thing. But no, because I wasn't too overjoyed that we'd dropped an atomic bomb, you know. After all, it changed the era didn't it? Yeah.

And you mentioned that you were told many times that you were the first woman,

12:30 **the first Australian woman and first women to be setting foot…?**

I was the first woman because I was on the commanding general of the Allied air forces plane, you see, that was how I happened to be. Yes, it really did me no favour in that, you know. There was a reception at the airport, you know, at the officers' mess and I was part of that and then when that was over

13:00 we flew back. And so.

I'm just wondering did you tire or get sick of hearing that you were the first…?

I was a lot younger, you know, and of course there was a certain satisfaction about, you know, having finished the blooming war. Remember I had a prisoner of war husband all this time and, you know, it had been a long war.

13:30 Darling, I'm being a bore. If I find something that's of interest I'll see that you get it through Runa.

Well I'm very, very interested to hear your story. When you got back to Australia…?

I was, of course, the only woman.

Yes.

You see, yes, when I got back to Australia… Can I remember? You know, when the war was ended, it had been so long and so intense

14:00 and I'd have to sort of think hard, I think

What was your rank by this stage?

At the end I was… The highest I ever was was a major, decorated with the American Legion of Merit which is a high award, but that's as high as I went. It would have been scandalous to have a woman colonel, surely. Come on, we've done enough

14:30 girls and boys. If I think of anything interesting… What are you going to call this subject or this chapter.

Well this is your story, this is…

My story? That's not a bad thing is it, yeah?

And what about getting news that your husband had been released?

Yes, that's hard to remember, you know. As it all is really after

15:00 so long. He decided to come to Australia. Well I couldn't get released so he came down and stayed with my parents in Griffith. There were lots of others. There were Australian soldiers, you know, all kinds getting freed and so he was there until I could get out of uniform. And he had… During the war he'd written to me and said that after the war he wanted to farm in Australia.

15:30 Now I come from the Murrumbidgee Irrigation area, you know, Griffith, Leeton area and I couldn't get permission to get a farm, because women and nationality both were involved, but [Prime Minister] Ben Chifley could and did. So thanks to Ben Chifley I acquired a farm so that

16:00 I had it by the time my husband got back, you know. And I put an Italian farmer and his family on it, which I referred to before. Darlings, lets call it a day. What time is it? Half past three. The Italian chef… But you see Steve didn't like it, you know, when at the end he comes back to the farm that had caused me and Ben

16:30 Chifley a certain amount of angst to acquire. He was too lonely away from home, of course. He was, you know, so far from England and all that stuff. People aren't very welcoming. I don't know whether they've changed, but here was this rather cultivated Englishman, you know, and of course I couldn't come because I couldn't get released, you know,

17:00 soon enough. And anyway he decided finally to go home, so he went home to England. And I was left with this rice farm, expensive rice farm with an Italian share farmer and his wife on it, you know, which I had run for some years before I could get free of it and which one of the factors was that Ben Chifley had helped me to

17:30 get it, you know, and he was still in a position of power, you know, so it was rather a sad story in the end.

And why did you want to leave the services? Why had you had enough?

Oh the war was over darling, what would be the point? No, so I was demobbed [demobilised] as where the great majority of the service people, yes.

18:00 Can't even remember it. It wouldn't have been much of a ceremony – it would have been more of a paper thing, I think. Yes, but here I was stuck with a rice farm in Griffith, 400 miles west of Sydney and expensive investment. Yeah.

What did you miss?

Hey?

When you quit, when you were sorry not quit, when you were demobbed?

What did you miss?

18:30 Well I suppose you're looking for, well the friendships I suppose that one developed, but they weren't terribly intense, you know. But mind you a fortnight ago my assistant in general Kenney's office sends me a copy of the book he's just managed to finish and here it is, you see, but of course we worked together in that GHQ, you see, for

19:00 years. And anyway he's finally scraped himself together and got a bit of a yarn together, you know. In which I do not, thank God, feature. And of course… But if it's not untimely for him to produce a book it may still not be untimely if I can find the energy to do the same sort of thing, you know. I doubt whether it will happen.

And how do

19:30 **you think you changed from when you first enlisted to being discharged? How do you think you changed during those years?**

Oh, we grow up darling, don't we? What experience have we have as girls, you know, especially in Australia where the woman, you know, is a lower rank automatically, you know. That's one thing the Yanks got me out of, yanked me out of you might say, because they don't

20:00 accept that, you know. And if you were a major you were a major, you know, and so yeah.

Well Australian women weren't committed to be in the services to begin with?

Oh, not every service, no. The Americans are pretty enlightened in lots of ways, you know, I suppose, you know, and it was remarkable really. I'm trying to remember

20:30 the name of my fellow major in the headquarters of the American air force in the South West Pacific. Marjorie Hugo. And Marjory was elevated to the same rank at the same time as I. And we shared quarters, you know, through the theatre of war and so forth, and many letters – I hope I still have them. It's time we quit.

21:00 **But I haven't heard you mention her name before.**

Marjory Hugo? Oh well, there were other women, of course, in the, I mean I wasn't the only woman, nor was Marjorie Hugo, but she was an intelligence officer in the headquarters of the South West Pacific. And she and I, oh, we shared diggings [rooms] and lives, you know, and, you know.

21:30 A nice, highly intelligent woman. Yeah in intelligence, which I say, which takes a bit of nous.

And how important do you think it was for you to have another colleague like that, like her?

Well, you know, I didn't notice it I think because Marjory was there, you know, and Blanche Klein, who commanded the WAAC, the American women's force, we were all very close, you know. I suppose we were all

22:00 living through the same kind of difficulties, you know, one kind or another. And so we kept in touch for many a long year. And I had a letter only yesterday from, not one of the women, but the chap who sat beside me in Kenney's office, you know. So, you know, you develop beyond a friendship I think.

And it does get you through some… I'm just wondering if there were any

22:30 **times that you got very low spirited during your air force days?**

Oh yes, of course, I think, you know, I had a husband, a prisoner of war of the Japs. I had a brother killed in the RAAF in England, you know, and your friends were being whittled down. Where did that come from?

I'll just get to leave that, no just

23:00 **sorry, yeah just try not to touch it.**

Oh I see. Yeah, righto.

Well the reason I ask is because there were a lot of pilots who were killed during the war.

Oh yes indeed, including my brother. He was one of those that went to Canada to do the finishing training, you know, as we sent them. And he only lasted a few weeks in Great Britain. And he was gone and in war you live with death

23:30 you know, and near or far and probably both, you know. So it's a pretty rotten business that one would not recommend. If there's any way of avoiding it, honey, avoid it I would say. Now Betty Hibbert was my best friend. We shared that place of Oliver Cromwell. And her brother

24:00 was in the air force and he and I keep up a regular correspondence, you see, because we, you know, similar sort of experiences at the time. He lives in Queensland and I had a letter from him only a couple of days ago, so it's an ongoing correspondence, you know.

And what do you think was the, I guess the high point of your air force days?

The best what?

The highest point do you think?

Oh, I see.

24:30 Well I think it was a high point when I was decorated with the American Legion of Merit, which is a high decoration, and MacArthur decorated me with that. There wasn't another woman that I know of, at least in our circle, who had the same sort of experience, so I treasure that still.

And what was the award for, why did you receive that

25:00 **award?**

Oh, the Legion of Merit for some sort of service which, of course, wasn't derring-do in my case – it was service. Let's go, let's call it a day.

Well you were talking before about missing your friends when you were discharged.

Yeah, well, of course, they were mostly Americans because I was in the American services

25:30 and, of course, they went home, you see. But when I say lose them, I have two letters that came this week from American friends, one my fellow secretary to General George C Kenney, you know, commanding general of the Allied air forces, and we've kept in touch with each other right through. And the other one, one of the women that was in the Women's Army Corps, you know. So it's not all quite dead and we're not quite all dead,

26:00 you know.

And I guess just to kind of finish up for the day. This, your story is going down for future generations to have a look at. What kind of message would you like to pass on?

Oh my dear, you know, that's very difficult because life's circumstances always catch you on the hop and you have to decide, don't

26:30 you? Will I just fold up and go home and let the world solve it, or will I do what I can, you know. And I'm quite certain that you as I decided to do what you could, you know. And I think there are many thousands of women in the world who would say the same out there. How many would give up and throw in the sponge in a case like that? Not any I know.

27:00 Well…

What about war, just some last words on your feelings about war?

Such a waste of time, treasure, people, isn't it? War. We should be able to… We have become advanced enough to talk it out and compromise, surely to God, you know. I think we're not doing too badly at the moment really,

27:30 yes, but to live your life having lost a husband, brother, brothers, people, you know, that you grew up with, it's a miserable process. I encounter it every day down at the Garrison because the women there, and they're primarily women, you know, have all had this kind of story to tell, you know, the men were off in the islands or New Guinea or

28:00 some damn thing, you know. And the woman has had to live life without the man, you know. Not to be recommended, I don't think. But how are you going to educate the male of the population, not to want to go to war? You don't want to go to war, do you? No, certainly not. Let's go.

Well thank you very much for speaking with us today, Beryl. It's been a real pleasure. Thank you.

Oh, darling, you're a sweetie. Tell me your

28:30 name again?

Kathy.

Kathy, all right Kathy, that will do.

Thank you.

Bless you.

INTERVIEW ENDS