Australians at War Film Archive

Catherine Bryan (Cathy) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 3rd March 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1557

Tape 1

00:39 **So if you would like to start?**

Righto. I come from Ireland. I was born in Ireland in the 8th of February 1922. I lived there until I was going on nearly seven and in December of 1929, oh 1928 actually

01:00 we left Ireland and we came out to Australia on the Oriana which was the P & O [Pacific and Oriental] line, took six weeks to travel. We arrived here in Australia and we landed at the wharf in Brisbane - I'll have to just refer to that place so that - oh sorry New Farm Wharf. It now no longer exists, it's been moved. From

01:30 there I went to, my mother died when I was eight, she had TB [Tuberculosis] and they didn't know how to treat it in those days. My father then was left with three little children. I was eight, my brother was five and the other brother was two. From thereon we were taken in, the boys were boarded by a wonderful English family

02:00 and I went and joined them later. This was the depression years and things were very tight. I went to the Convent at Wynnum run by the Nuns of the Sacred Heart. I spoke very, very perfect in those days, not Australian at all. And we used to do quite a lot of stage work, recitations and all

02:30 those sorts of things. You've got to realise that things were very tough then and people had to make their own amusement and every Sunday night the neighbours would gather around and they would come to this home who had a piano. Jimmy played the drums, a mother played the violin and Daisy played the piano and we would have all these lovely songs Maid of the Mountain, Gladys Môn Crete stuff and the big excitement was, like when the young people of

03:00 today get a new pop record, we would get this pop music from these various stage shows. I know it sounds a little bit you know old hat but to us it was wonderful. From there I left school at 15, I won a scholarship but in this time my father married again and his wife was expecting a child and it was to go to All Hallows Convent in Brisbane but because of the same again, I mean the shortage of money,

03:30 I couldn't take it. Then I wanted to go and become a nurse at the Martyr Hospital but the first two years you got no pay, you had to buy your own uniforms and I thought Daddy can't afford this. So I then went and worked at the Catholic Weekly and I did a few years there, I was round about 16 when I started there. And then when the, then the war broke out and in 1942

04:00 we knew we were going to be invaded and I decided I would join the army. My father had been a captain in the Irish Free State Army and he knew how hard it would be, but then I hadn't been pampered, I hadn't been a pampered child. I had been almost a mother to my two brothers. I get a little bit emotional about this. Anyway I went into the army and the first port

04:30 of call was to - I'll have to just refer to this.

That's fine.

We were in Brisbane here and we went to Ingleburn and as we marched. We came down on troop trains and

05:00 I've never been so damn cold in all my life, coming out of Queensland and arriving here in July 1942. We all met at the park next to the railway station at Central. And of course the New South Wales girls were there and their first words were, "Get a load of those Queenslanders. Look how slow they are." Anyway

05:30 we went to Ingleburn and as we marched in the troops were in there and they were hanging over the fences and of course these were the first lot of women to come into the camps. They did have AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] in Victoria Barracks but there'd been none in military camps. And we come into the signal core and they were yelling out, "You'll be sorry." And that was a famous phrase that was said all over the time, anybody new that had came in the troops would hang out and say, "You'll

be sorry." Anyway from Ingleburn we did six weeks training

06:00 and I then came up to Chermside in Queensland. And I was, I was only 20 at the time and a pretty innocent naïve girl, but I was called into the office and they said, "From today you are a lance corporal." I couldn't work out how it made us a lance corporal but anyway I was. And the other two girls were ex-Guides ladies [Girls Guides], you

06:30 know, which would have been about 25 or 26 which I thought was as old as God you know at the time. Anyway from there we, I was trained on the switchboard section and we worked at the switchboards in the main camp at Chermside. From Chermside I was then transferred to Redbank which was a very big army camp. We had three big hospitals there and a,

07:00 and a section of ambulances. The girls in the ambulance there were the ones that went to the Archerfield Aerodrome at midnight to take the wounded that were flown down from New Guinea at the time. Why it was done that way, they didn't want the ordinary citizens to know how many troops were being hurt and so we were working there. Three hospitals, they'd be operating

07:30 all through the night. Amputations that would be in the hospital straight across from us, then we had the bomb happy hospital, that was poor devils that came back out of their mind, and then we had a general hospital for ordinary soldiers that were sick. From there I became, when I was there I was made a corporal, full corporal and from there I was then transferred to – I'll just refer to this for a moment,

08:00 I was referred to, to, oh golly, it's where the university is in Indooroopilly – Indooroopilly. I'm sorry. And from Indooroopilly it was General Blamey's headquarters in the university [University of Queensland] and I was a sergeant there. We had over a thousand girls and we were manning four ships. Three ships

08:30 were operational and third ship was general duties. We were all, everybody had a week at a time on this. Whilst we were there some of our girls slept beside their posts. They were operators on the Morse Code and we had a Z Special Force [Services Reconnaissance Department] were on the run and they were taking their…

Sorry can I just interrupt for a second,

09:00 **when you're sort of playing with the notes there, it's sort of rustling onto the microphone.**

Oh ok, good.

So we might just, I know you need to refer to them from time to time but if you sort of leave them through them like that it will be better, ok.

Oh yeah ok, it's more being nervous that's all.

Are you? Don't be nervous, we've got all day. So.

Anyway we, these girls were very dedicated but they'd three days continuous night

09:30 and day duty sending signals to these boys that were on the run because the Japs [Japanese] were after them and they had to be pulled out for rest. We sent in another group and the first signal that went out, the boy that was on the other end said, "Do not recognise," and what we realised is that on the Morse Code everybody has a signature, it's just like writing and they knew it was a new crowd and they thought it might have been Japanese that were feeling them so we had to

10:00 put those girls back. We also serviced all the army camps around the area and I was there until the end of the war. I was a sergeant at the time and I did administrative duties in the later part of my army service. Now I left, the war finished. Oh firstly I went down to Keilor in Melbourne to do a course

10:30 on administration of discharging people and what they would want to do, what type of career they will want to face and whether they had the, whether it was available for them. From there then I was discharged in December 1945. In the meantime I had met a man who had come back

11:00 from the Middle East, my husband Ben. I came down to Sydney, flew down in the January and reported to the PMG [Post Master General] at the time it was known as. Now what you've got to remember and this is what I want young girls to know, in those days married women weren't given work and I'd come out of the army and he'd come out of the army and all we were getting was

11:30 a deferred pay which we were getting in about 12 months time and it was imperative that we could work and I was a very skilled person in switchboards. So I reported to the PMG, gave them my maiden name, which a lot of other girls did, and I worked for the PMG until - in the Engineering section, which was called the Complaints Department. You used to dial double '0 'and tell them your telephone was out of order and you would try to appease them,

12:00 and you've got to remember that there'd been no work done on any of the cables or anything through the war so there was always breakdowns and problems and of course you had to be very, very diplomatic. I can give you one instance, they used to put two pennies in to make a phone call, and if they lost their pennies they could dial double 0 and make a claim. Anyway, and two pennies is less then two cents today, and what had

12:30 happened was, and I said, “What is your name, Sir?” And he said, “Bas Tard.” And I said, “Will you spell that for me please?” He said, “Yes, B.A.S.T.A.R.D.” I said, “Thank you Mr Bas Tard, thank you.” That was just one little funny thing that happened. But these boys that were in the PMG at the time, they were all ex-service personnel and we had a great feeling for one another, helping

13:00 one another because we were all in the same boat. Nobody had any money, we were all trying to make a buck. From there I then went and took some long service leave after 10 years and I went and learned to work the comptometer, which was a very top job in those days. And I then applied to the Department of Defence, well actually it was the Department of Supply, to be a comptometer operator. I worked in the finance section and from there I

13:30 was transferred into the other section where all the accountants were, which dealt with all the contracts for army. And of course it was our job as comptometer operators, we’d go through the contracts, break them all down into the costs structures and from there it was then starting Space Track. President Kennedy wanted us to put a man on the moon. And I had

14:00 also been on the auditing section of our Credit Union, we were one of the first people to start a Credit Union and I had worked with these accountants so I was part of the team. And once a month we would go up to Canberra and then we would go out to Tidbinbilla, Honey Suckle Creek, Orroral Valley. Our job was to oversight all the finance that was being spent to make sure that all the Labour Laws were

14:30 applied to. And from there I did, I was there until ’69 when the man on the moon was actually landed. It was then Wynnum and then I came back and I came back into headquarters. I were then transferred to the Inspectors Office and that was were they used to go

15:00 over all you’re the particulars of a position and grade it. From there I had sat for what they called a Third Division Exam. I had been studying for that and I passed the exam and then the chief out at, the chief scientist at, at – excuse me I’ll just have to look at this again –

15:30 Alexandria, it was research and development at Alexandria. I came in there as the costing officer and then we had the administrative officer then transferred to another position and I put in for the position, put in for the position and I had to have an interview and I became the administrative officer of research and development. That made me a class six, there were very

16:00 few women in those days that were in that position. I ran that, ran that laboratory until I, until my husband died. He died in 19-, in December 1971. I had taken three months half pay to look after him and it was a result of his war injuries. He had emphysema very bad. He had been in the Western Desert in the

16:30 recovery section where when the enemy retreated, they went in and salvaged all the equipment that was left, that’s how bad it was. How bad it was that these boys had to fight with, half the time with stuff they captured, there wasn’t enough to go around. We were in very poor circumstances in Australia. But even as then while the war was on, we fed and hosted people from Holland,

17:00 Philippines, England and America. They were with this group which a lot of people never knew anything about, it was a section on the Brisbane River, a little bit away from Indooroopilly where the Japanese prisoners were brought down for interrogation. In that section we had lasses [women] from Japan who’d been brought out by submarine

17:30 and Major Crane was in charge. He was a very tall Japanese man, he came from the north of Japan and he had been a secretary to a millionaire industrialist. I know very little about his background but I have a feeling he had been working for the British government for a long time. These people were brought out by submarine and brought to this section. Now from there, those prisoners were then brought down to, I think

18:00 it’s Cowra, but a lot of them didn’t realise that they were under interrogation, it was catching them while they were still in a state of shock of being taken prisoner and it was casual conversation among them and these people spoke Japanese. We had another, another a brother and sister, Maria and, Maria and Phillip De Costa, half Portuguese half Japanese, and we had another little girl, her mother was a Japanese and her

18:30 father was an Englishman, and they did splendid work. I ran into Joyce Crane who, her father had been a major after the war. He had died at the end of the war as his heart gave out. Very interesting point here, a lot of people don’t know about this. The young Japanese people who were born in America on the west coast, their parents had been interned and a lot of them wanted to serve America, they felt

19:00 they were Americans. So they formed a special group and they brought them out and they were put up into New Guinea to do infiltration work and a lot of them died. Anyway getting back to Joyce, I ran into her after the war and I was so delighted because she had gone up on that first hospital ship when our POWs [Prisoners Of War] were in, were being picked up because

19:30 she spoke the language, because she knew the areas. Now she took her life into her hands because for the simple reason she would have been a traitor to the Japanese and that’s the way they looked at it, but a very cultured girl. And I said, “What are you doing Joyce?” And she said, “I’m a receptionist at the

hotel in Katoomba." Anyway and I said, "How's the family?" She said, "Mum and my sister are ok," but she said, "You know Dad died." But for their work

20:00 that they did for this country they were given Australian citizenship. Now I'm, where am I up to? I'm up to the, that's right. When Ben died, I'd had long service leave and I didn't want to go anymore. Then one of the reasons I was still working was my husband went before repat [repatriation] at the time and he was knocked back, he was almost called a bludger. We had a,

20:30 a government in power at the time that didn't want to be spending money on ex-servicemen, they were the thing of the past, and anyway I was determined that he was going to not want and that's why I continued working. Now I know that later on it became ok for married women to work but I had all my secret work and everything else that I did was all under my maiden name and when my

21:00 seniors, I spoke to them on the quite and they said, "Cathy, we don't want to know about it." They don't want to know about it, because I think I had a clearance, I had a very high top secret clearance at the time because I had in some of my time I was doing the expense accounts of our listening posts on Cambodia when the French were fighting in Vietnam and the French banks were charging us black market rates.

21:30 That you know these men were getting, we had to pay black market rates and I went to my chief and I said, "This is the black market rates." And he said, "Cathy there is nothing we can do about it, we've got to look after our boys up there." That was one section. I then knew that we had, working on very highly technical and secret things over at Woomera and I used to have to do all their expense accounts and everything like that, and of

22:00 course you never even went to the toilet that you didn't pick up your files and lock them away. It was very highly secretive because we, you know it was the political climate at the time. And I see some of the news today and they are having a go all the time about our Secret Service, you can only work on supposition half the time. If you don't do it, you're in the tin, if you are, if

22:30 you leave it, you know, I mean these things can happen, so you've just got to take the risk, you've just got to take the risk. And you've got to advise, these people have got to advise their members. And they have to weigh this up, it's not done lightly.

I'd like to go into that in more detail a bit further as we go along. I wonder if you could start in your childhood and tell me about

23:00 **growing up in Ireland and moving to Australia?**

Well growing up in Ireland. My father was away and he was an army officer and that didn't sit very well with some Northern, Northern Irish people because bigotry was terrible in those days. Protestant and Catholics and we were Catholics. And I remember one evening something had broken out and I was only young, I think I may have been about

23:30 five at the time, and it's not terribly vivid. But we were at Grandpa's and I remember walking out onto the landing it was, the bedrooms were up stairs and it was a brick sort of, not flash [fancy] like we've got now, you know it was just a brick sort of a cottage in the city, in Belfast. And I went out and here was Grandpa standing at

24:00 the top of the stairs and we had this heavy door and we had a big bar across it and he had a big gun. Now I don't know whether it was a big gun, but it was a gun but in my childish eyes it looked enormous. And so my mother grabbed me and pulled me and put me to sleep. But that sort of is on my mind because that was sort of a terrifying thing because we could hear the thumping of the doors they were trying to get in because we were the target.

24:30 Then another time there, we didn't have heaters like we have now, this girl with this beautiful long hair had washed her hair and there was a little gas thing and she was trying to dry it near the gas and it caught fire and she ran out and I remember my uncle, Michael who was with us when Dad had gone, came to Australia ahead of us, he rushed, he grabbed a blanket and he rolled her in the blanket.

25:00 Being young they keep a lot of things away from you but that was the sort of life, life was very hard even though, you know what I mean. And we came out then to Australia and Dad had had, Dad had had a house built for us but we were only in it a very short time when my mother died. Now if you could imagine a man, and I know, I know, oh that's right I was going to school one day and

25:30 because I spoke with an Irish accent these kids got me and gave me two black eyes. So when you hear about kids knocking one another about it's happened all, it's like in the farmyards you know your strange and their different. Anyway I remember my mother being so very upset and telling Dad and with that he sent me to elocution classes. And I remember mother coming home one day and I'm standing at the sink

26:00 washing up the breakfast things because she had to go to this hospital or somewhere and they had to get away and she looked at me and said, "What is going to happen to my little girl?" She knew she was going to die and all these years I still remember it. And you know, I mean, I've seen many things in my life but that brings great sadness to me.

26:30 When I was at school I, as I say I went and learned elocution and I used to recite and sing and that was the sort of thing we did to entertain ourselves.

Do you remember any songs?

I can't just remember at the moment

27:00 but I know the English couple they used the have me learning Rudyard Kipling stuff, you know, Gunga Din and all those sorts of things. It was a very different world it was, some of the songs were you know from the Maid in the Mountain and the White Horse End, remember Nelson Eddie and that Janet McDonald, it was all that sort of singing. And

27:30 you know I remember too, things were very tight you had to pay some school fees and the nuns were living very hard, the life was very hard for the nuns. And I had shoes to go to school but my brothers didn't, there was - no boys wore shoes, no boys wore shoes, they didn't have them. If you were lucky you had a pair of sandshoes, that was the sort of thing, that was how hard life was.

So

28:00 **tell me about the trip out on the boat?**

Well out on the boat what, this is very interesting. We came first class and it was the part of the Irish Army or whatever it was that must have paid our fares. But when we were coming out we had a group, we were calling into India, we went through the Suez Canal and then we were going

28:30 on to India and that was when India was part of the, part of the British territory. And we had these Indian people on board who were going home after studying in London. And this lady, we were on the deck and this lady was knitting a pair of socks and she got to the heel. Now I don't know whether ladies knit socks today but they knitted a lot through World War II, I can tell you. And

29:00 anyway she was having difficulty and my mother said, "Could I help you?" And she said, "Oh thank you." And when she was, my mother was showing her how to do these socks she said, "You are the first white woman that has spoke to me." And my mother said, "Why is that?" And she said, "Oh," she said, "Most of the ladies here are British army officer's wives first class and they don't consider us good enough to talk to."

29:30 Anyway that was one thing and her brother had been a doctor and they had studied at Oxford and everything and they were capable of very extremely wealthy familles, but you'd have to do it to, you know, to have this education, and that was, that was say in the 1930s you see. That was how bad things were, so you can understand the resentment that the Indians had against the British, they treated them you know,

30:00 with beneath dignity. And then I remember finding a wallet and it must have had a lot of money in it or something I can't remember and my mother gave it to the captain and I had my actually had my seventh birthday on the boat, on the 8th of February and this man paid for a big party for me. You know,

30:30 this sort of thing, little things that you remember. When I first arrived it was February and it was so hot and my mother found me with all my clothes off except pants, I couldn't stand it, the heat. When we moved to the Camp Hill Dad had bought, you know paid for this, when I say he was paying for it he got it through the bank.

31:00 When my mother died he brought in a housekeeper, but the housekeeper, she was working for Dad and I mean the money that she was earning was all that was coming in because there was not such thing as Social Service in those days. And anyway, so see what she was doing, she was ordering all the groceries but she was feeding her own family and of course the bills got so large that my father found it impossible to, you know, carry on.

31:30 And so he, that's when he decided that he would give the home up and the bank said, "Oh please stay on, even if you only pay five shillings a week, we'd rather the owners stay on." And Dad said, "I can't, I can't even afford that." Now that was the Depression years. And when I think of it this family that we were with, he worked for the meatworks and he was a Union Representative and he was treated very

32:00 badly but they managed to save up and buy an old car and it used to have side runners on it you know and the windows were made of sort of like, not plastic, but a clear sort of stuff and they used to clip them on. But every time we went out, you'd have to earn it, so we had to gather wood you know, kindling and all that for the fires. Everything had to be you know make it,

32:30 make it pay. But what happened was in the six weeks school holidays and in the Easter we went to, to Point Danger, now that's up on the boarder just over the boarder of Queensland in New South Wales and we used to have camp there for the school holidays. And there was a lot of Aborigines lived there and they lived in a sort of a camp. And they would go out every morning,

33:00 and I suppose it was early, and they would catch deep sea mullet. And they would bring it around on a tray, and I don't know how much there was a tremendous lot but they were all cleaned, you know scaled ready for the pan. And for a shilling, and that was a lot of money in those days, a shilling, that's ten cents today, but a shilling, they were able to give us, we lived on this for the day. Now

33:30 that was a wonderful diet, you know, I mean, good fresh fish. But that was the Aborigines that lived up there and of course they were living in pretty primitive condition the poor devils. So that was just one part and then another time we went to Maroochydore which is the famous Noosa later on and we had this old Willy's Knight. And coming home we got this tropical rain and the road got flooded

34:00 but because the Willy's Knight wheels were very high we were able to get through. And of course there was some cars got stuck and they yelled out, "Could you tow us? Could you tow us?" So always ready to make a bob the boys had a rope in the car, in the Willy's Knight, and they got it and I think they got 10 shillings and they said, "Gee this is pretty good." So we stayed there all afternoon and towed, not me but the boys, towed these vehicles out for 10 shillings,

34:30 so we came home very rich after that run. Now that's the famous Noosa and that, and when we were living in tents so it was pretty primitive you know, but we had a wonderful time. And later on when Dad got more established we used to go up to Noosa and we had a family cottage up there and we were able to buy mud crabs, beautiful mud crabs for a shilling can you imaging a shilling mud crabs,

35:00 you know what they'd cost you today? Something like $35 a kilo. So that was, that was sort of my life as a girl, as a child. We still felt that even though things were hard there were other people that suffered harder than us. And when I talk at some of my friends and they said, "Cathy, we never had a holiday like that, we never had that." They used to have to go to places at Broadway

35:30 and they would get shoes and clothing and sometimes the shoes wouldn't fit properly and that's why women had such bad feet because as children their feet were cramped into shoes that didn't fit them. And then they used to get meat and they'd have vinegar, they'd have to rub vinegar over it because there was no refrigeration and it was a little bit, not quite off but you know a bit slimy, and they'd have to use that to feed their kids.

36:00 And that was the depression years, very hard.

And tell me about your education?

Well I, I won my scholarship. I was very good at maths and English and I actually wrote a story once and the head nun said, "You copied that." And I said, "No I didn't." And well you know, I really did very

36:30 well in my scholarship, but as I said I couldn't go onto secondary school because my father couldn't afford it. And so I have been, I have gone back to school, I went back to school when I was in the army, when I came out of, with the PMG, I'd been 10 years and I was able to get some long service leave. And I went to a Business College and learned how to work a computer, not a computer, a calculator, they didn't have computers

37:00 in those days. Computers came into being when I was working for the Department at Supply. And that was very fascinating and but all my - And then I went back to school again and I used to go to night school and I never had a book out of my hand. And I did what they call the Third Division

37:30 Examination, which lifted me up from fourth division. Fourth division was just general clerks, you know, there was sort of you were the bottom of the ladder in the public service. But you know I was the top of the third, of the fourth division in my grouping. So I did the third division and then that lifted me up and I became a class four when I went to the laboratories. And then from there when I went took up the job I applied for the job as the -

38:00 I hate this, you've got to forgive me for this – administrator and I had a lot of competition but I won, I got it. And I have, when the Queens Jubilee was on first I got, when I left Space Track [space tracking program], I

38:30 got a citation from Washington and then when it was the Queen's Jubilee I was honoured with the medal on her Jubilee and it's from Buckingham Palace.

Fantastic. Now we are nearly at the end of the tape so we are going to stop Cathy and change over. How are you feeling?

Oh, a little bit emotional.

Tape 2

00:35 **I'd like to just spool back a little bit, you had quite a relationship with the family over the road from you when you were growing up?**

Yeah, they were wonderful. Now we were Catholics, they were Church of England. It was the Depression years. They were moving from

01:00 Camp Hill down to Wynnum, back to their old home. My mother and father they used to go over occasionally in the evenings, they might have played cards I was only a little thing so I don't know what they did but they formed a lovely relationship. Now there was a lot of bigotry in those days.

Hang on a sec. Alright Cath, we'll

01:30 **go back again and start again. Tell us about the relationship you had with the family over the road.**

Well he was, they were an English family and they had two boys and a girl, teenagers at that stage when we knew them. And anyway when my mother died and Dad you know had to give up the home and the housekeeper because he couldn't meet the costs. They took the boys and I went with

02:00 Dad but it didn't work out because he was working and I was getting, I got a very, you know I was missing my mother and I became probably a little bit difficult so they decided that I would go down and have a family, sort of like a proper family life. And this man, this is the interesting thing, this man was a Mason and you here about these

02:30 Masons and Catholics that don't get on. Well, this was a lot of baloney, you know, he was a real good-hearted man. Well they came out from England and they came out what they call from the Bowbells in London which is a very underprivileged part of England, the Bowbells. He came out under contract to work on the railways when they were putting the lines down up in North Queensland. And they used to live in a

03:00 tent and the wives would live in a tent and they were telling me that even then some of the Aborigines were marauders and the men would be away, like they had those things that sort of go backwards and forwards up on the line, they'd be away and they'd come in wanting food but sometimes they'd want everything they could see. And some of them had to, they had a rifle to protect them, their kids. Anyway that

03:30 apparently, I don't know whether it finished I don't know all that part of it at all, I just know about that what they told me. And they must have made enough money to buy this house at Wynnum and it was two blocks of ground and it ran down to the railway line and the second block they had this mulberry tree, which as kids we used to get up and eat the mulberries, and we used the have more mulberries on us then we had on our clothes and everything. But we used to make mulberry pie

04:00 and mulberry jelly and all this, you never wasted anything. And he worked at the abattoirs and as I said he was a union man, he was very strong and of course he would get all the rotten jobs, you know, like into the freezer and all this sort of thing. And that's what killed him in the end, he died of, you know, he had the lung problem, you know, because of the fact you know of being at work like that. But he was a pretty wonderful man

04:30 when you think of it, like you know he would have us sing songs and everything and the poetry and that. So even though he came from the Bowbells as I say that part of London, you've got to remember that it was after World War I too and everybody was very poor again. And people who'd had some sort of substance they'd lost everything, so I think he had a fairly great background. And then she used to tell

05:00 me about they'd go to the music halls and Florry Ford now people, not my generation the generation before me, the 1800s Florry Ford was a famous star. You know a bit like our pop stars. And she'd have all these, you've seen these gaiety nights they had you know same sort of thing.

05:30 Anyway we went to school there and I've got to tell you about this, this was funny. There was bush beside us and we used to play a game and we had…

You were going to tell us about the game that you were playing?

Oh yes we used to play in the bush. And these people they were Scottish and they had two daughters, and

06:00 one their Nancy McAlister Hanna, there name was Hanna their surname, and Nancy McAlister Hanna and Hannah Armstrong Hanna. I always remember those names and apparently it was their, you know they were associated with that group in Scotland you see that's their group, the Hannas. Anyway we used to play this game and we'd have a torch and we used to call it 'Dickie show your light' and we'd run around

06:30 and you'd have whoever got you know caught had to get the torch and then we'd run and play hide and seek, that was one of the games. Another thing was I got these, these are very funny. At the back of the place was the railway line and then past that was the showgrounds and under the showgrounds was the big pipe, the water pipe which led into this side of the property, not

07:00 on the property but up to the property and then into the showgrounds on the other side. And the boys, my two brothers used to sneak in, you know go in through the pipe and get into the show for nothing. Anyway this time they had these, there was ladies cakes you know for prizes and the boys were eyeing these cakes off, they looked very you know I don't know whether they were sponges or what and George ran up, snatched it

07:30 and ran. And he got up, he was up the pipe, Tom, my brother's this side, you know, the property side and there was the guards up the other, "Come out you little b…" you know and Tom's saying, "Don't you eat it all." And another time there we had, they managed to get away with it. And another time there

the Fire Brigade, now the Fire Brigade wasn't a bit like the

08:00 Fire Brigades, it was horse and cart and they used to have like you know like the things up and down you know like that and it was filled with water. And these boys would deliberately set up a little bit of the bush to get the Fire Brigade out because you know these follows were all locals and you know they were all dressed up, nowhere to go and they'd be pumping up and down like this doing these sort of, it was like a tank you know and they were pumping to get the water.

08:30 So they were sort of funny little things that happened. And then they had a policeman called Snaky and he was after all the boys and if they didn't do as they were told he'd give them a kick in the backside. And there was a theatre and I forget the name of the man but he was a sweet old man and the kids used to go down and they'd have a bit of bread and jam and they'd stand outside, no shoes and socks you know.

09:00 And then they'd be at the door of the theatre and he'd so, "Oh righto go on inside," and they'd get in for nothing. Not only them, there was other kids that did it, they were the sort of little things that went.

How was the discipline for example at school?

Very strong, very, very hard. I remember one time, we had boys and girls and this boy his father was a Pieman, he was

09:30 trying to make money as a Pieman, and it was seemed to be, when you think of it kids were stupid you know, because he was a figure of scorn you know, I think he had a horse and cart. But anyway he used to suffer a bit this boy and something happened and the nun, oh he might have been playing up or something, but she hit him with the edge of the ruler and anyway he punched her. Well you know and when

10:00 you look back on it and what happened was, it was like a big room and it was just sort of like things that you draw back you know to make the single room for teaching. And Father Kenny he was a young priest and they had the whole class assembled all the things back and the whole class assembled and the Sister Mary Editha – I'll tell you something more about her later – and she,

10:30 she demanded that he be punished and he had to whip him with the cane, and it was dreadful. And you could see poor old Father Kenny he was every stroke he did it was hurting him as well, and you know it was, it was really so sad. Now when you consider it I mean, he was poor, and poorer than us, and that was the sad thing you know.

11:00 **How did you get on at school academically?**

Academically I think because I was the youngest, the oldest of our family I have always been a fighter and I wouldn't take crap from anybody. And I know that Sister Mary Teresa was beautiful, she was a lovely girl and we'd do anything for her but Sister Mary,

11:30 Sister Mary Editha, oh God she was cruel. When I look back these girls were put into the convent by their parents you know what I mean. They had no dash life or, no wonder they were frustrated and you know short tempered. But anyway she was a lovely, lovely person and academically I did very well and I was very good at maths. When I got into the next class which was

12:00 pre-scholarship or leading up to scholarship this nun, she wasn't a very nice person either, and I was probably, I was probably minch. You know what I mean, I wouldn't stand, I would cheek back if I thought it was an injustice I would cheek back. Anyway one particular time we were doing maths and she had her favourites of course and anyway we did all this paper

12:30 and it was the answers used to be in the book and I got the answer, but the others, her favourite didn't get the answer but she got the same answer, and she said, "You cheated." And I said, "No I didn't." And she said, "Yes you cheated. You looked in the book and got that." I said, "No I didn't." I said, "I can point out to you where you went wrong." Bloody kid telling…"Do it," and I went up and I did the thing on the board

13:00 and I said, "This is where you made your mistake." She hated me. She hated me. I was a fighter I wouldn't take any crap. I mean I was a, I was a mother to my two brothers you know what I mean. I grew up very quickly as a girl.

So you had a lot of duties in the house looking after your siblings?

No, no, not really, not really.

13:30 No I was well looked after at that in the house no. As a matter of fact I was I think I was petted a little bit you know in the house and they I knew they loved me because one time when the nun gave me the cane with the edge of the ruler, 'Mummy Hores' we called her she came up and she got stuck into them, no that wasn't that. But to have a bath we had a chip heater

14:00 and it used to be like, you know, you'd say, "A Sydney Morning Herald, we'll give you a bath," you know, you'd put it in and we had it downstairs. And we'd have this hot water and it would go boop boop boop boop with the thing boiling all the time. And then because you know what I mean there was no more,

there was only so much paper to burn because people couldn't afford a lot of newspapers.

14:30 I'd have my bath first because I was clean and then the boys would have to have theirs. So we shared the bath you know that was that but it was. I was very well looked after. And Daisy who was their eldest daughter she was a very good dress maker and she used to make me some special frocks, like we'd have the school dance you know the school ball. And I can remember her

15:00 making me this pink geisha silk frock and of coarse I'm very fair and it was delicate pink and it probably looked very good on me and it was a shilling a yard and we had and I felt I was the belle of the ball you know. And during the school holidays my Dad was boarding up in Brisbane, this was before he got married. I'd go up there on the school holidays and there was this darling old lady called Aunty

15:30 Kate and she was quite a wealthy old lady. And she would take me to the pictures and then we would go to lunch and there was a place, they don't have them now it was a bit like a chain of restaurants you know but they were only cafés you know. And I would order the same thing, pie and peas and a sarsaparilla ice cream soda and she'd say, "Wouldn't you like anything else?" "No," because you see, you never got a pie and peas. And

16:00 at the convent there, the cake shop would have leftovers at the weekend and they would box them all up and send them up to the nuns, you're not allowed to do it now under the Health Food Act. And they'd send them up to the nuns and the dear old things wouldn't get too much. And but they used to have a cake and it has like it's like a black thing and God it tastes horrible. If we got any cake we

16:30 only got that one, it was horrible. It was sort of a, oh dohey but you know of some sort of thing you know. I can't remember the name of it but it was horrible.

Tell us about when you had to leave school and what your options were?

Well when I left school things were very, very difficult and you remember I got a scholarship but I hadn't had a secondary education because

17:00 although I won the scholarship, Dad couldn't afford to do it. And I went to work for what they called the Catholic Weekly and the first start of we did all sorts of jobs you know, reading, reader you know. And then we'd sometimes work the machine to put the papers through the old fashioned idea. And there was one man there and he was a horrible type, you know I mean, there was some very bullying types of people about. And

17:30 I wouldn't put up with it and I stood up to him and he of course, I couldn't help it you know, I wouldn't let people walk over me. And of course when war was declared in a way I was glad to leave and go into something new. And I would say that the girls who went into the service and the boys they learned a decent trade and I learned to be a switchboard operator,

18:00 that's where I learned.

When did you first hear about the war in Europe starting?

The problem was, remember my father was in the Prison Department, you know, he was a Senior Warder. And I can't remember at the time who was the Premier but I think it was Vin Gair [William Forgan Smith was Premier when World War II started], Vincent Gair you may not of heard of him.

18:30 I'll give you he was a politician in Canberra later on…

We'll just have a stop. So we were back and I was asking you, you were telling me about your father?

Oh yes anyway I've just got to think for a minute. Oh Dad tried to you know get me various jobs but as I say I didn't have that secondary education and oh, that's right, we were

19:00 going on about the war, I lost track. What actually happened was, we saw a lot of young men we knew going away because like I was, I think I was 18 when the war started and there were these boys were joining up 18 but it didn't really affect us until, until we had Pearl Harbor. And then what happened

19:30 the prime minister of the day, he was a Labor man, he went to England, because we had men fighting over in the Middle East in North Africa. My husband had been in North Africa got out of there on the run, got into Crete they call it, that's where the parachutists come down the gliders, got trapped there, got out of Crete and they went into North Africa

20:00 and what's his name? Louie Mountbatten was on the ship and they came into, they were outside the harbour of Alexandria and the British warship they were awash, you know with they'd been the Stukas [Junker Stuka Ju-87 dive bomber] that come over had been firing on them all across you see because from Crete across that waterway to the top of Africa, Alexandria you know that

20:30 port of Alexandria. Anyway my husband told me this, the captain of the, the admiral or whatever he was said, "Abandon ship, we'll sink this ship." And Mountbatten signalled back, "I'll take this ship to harbour. You put your guns on me, I'll fire back." And Ben said he landed them all, got them all out. Anyway that's beside the point, what was I saying.

Tell me about

21:00 **how your family, in the early part…?**

That's right, anyway it was with Pearl Harbour we knew things were bad and Dad being in the Prison Department was called up by the premier and they told him that they'd received orders that, first there was the Brisbane Line and what would happen that when the Japanese commandant and marched into Brisbane and my father was to

21:30 assemble his men outside the prison, padlock the prisoners up and hand the keys over to him. And my father being an ex-military man himself, "No way." He just said, "I understand." And it was sort of a tacit agreement that they knew my father wouldn't do that. Anyway, when Dad saw us he said, "Now," he said, "If we fall," he said, "My brother Tom was in the air force and I was in the army." He said, "I want you to gather as

22:00 many as you can and make your way down to the, down to the mountains," there outside you know outside of the Gold Coast you know that mountain range. He said, "Because," he said, "We will set up a rear guard action." Thank God it never happened to that but what did happen was, we had long pocket. The major came over and gave us an hours practice on the .303s [.303 Lee Enfield rifles], you know the big .303s. What had

22:30 happened was that off Stradbroke Island there was a submarine, a Japanese submarine and they thought that we were going to be, that we were going to have a landing there. And I remember one girl saying, "I can't hit anything." He said, "Well you've go to learn girl," he said, "I can only give you an hour and we've got to get back and make preparations ourselves." But fortunately that didn't happen but the hospital ship that came up, that was sunk by that submarine

23:00 and my girlfriend, her brother went down on that. And anyway what happened, what made me join up – I'm diverting a bit, I'm going a bit off the line – I mean we lived on the main artery, the main road off Gladstone Road, in Dutton Park which would be five miles from the centre of the city. They were bringing in

23:30 equipment the Americans and what they were doing, and I can remember this, they were had the bodies of the planes on big sort of trailers but the wings were brought back. Now whether they detached them or what I don't know you know but we realised that we were in danger and that's when I said to Dad, I said, "Dad, everybody's got to do something." And every man, woman and child had to do something because we really thought we were going to be overrun.

24:00 And Dad being a military man he could see it, you know. Now what we did we had a lot of Americans and here's an interesting point, the black man, the Negro never fought as a soldier, he was a worker. And south Brisbane, that's this side of the bridge, that was their area and they weren't allowed to cross the bridge into the main part

24:30 of the city. And some of those man, I mean they were they were just they treated them like animals and they did all the hard work. Now a girlfriend of mine, her father had been one of the main men on the wharf and these Negroes they were loading this stuff because remember some of the wharf labourers went on strike, they wouldn't load the stuff up and that was up to boys in New Guinea.

25:00 And anyway he got chatting to him and talking to him and he happened to be a professor from an all Negro university. And he was, like he was an officer, but I mean that, and they had to give him that rank because he was over the other Negros. Anyway he said to him, "What do you do on the weekends?" And he said, "Oh we're not allowed over the bridge." And he said, "Well I live

25:30 this side of the bridge," he said, "I'd like you to come to my home for Sunday dinner." Anyway they had them and of course everything was, we had coupons then and food was you know rationed very strongly. Anyway they were sitting at the table and this man said grace and when he finished he looked up and he said, "I've got to tell you this," he said, "This is the first time in my life I've sat

26:00 down and broke bread with a white man." And he was a professor in an all black university. Anyway, Dad being an army man, too, ex-army man, he met a nice young fellow and he'd bring them home for tea, you know bring them, and we met one very nice young man Clifford Rouse and he was from Rhode Island and he was studying to be a Methodist minister or something like that, very nice young man. And he

26:30 used to turn up oh at all times and my step-mother Gladys, she'd say, "We better put some sweets aside because," she said, "Cliff's bound to pop in," you know. And he loved it you know it might be apple pie or you know treacle dumplings or something like that but anyway he went overseas and we never heard anymore from him until one day at the prison, that's Boggo Road [Jail]

27:00 which is now a museum or something, this chap called and he wanted to see my father and he turned out that it was the brother of Clifford. And he said I knew that he'd written to us in America, he'd written to us that he'd, you know, met this family and how well they treated him and that they worked at the prison and

27:30 what sort of thing. And Clifford had been in the battle of Midway, he was killed, they were troops going

up and that's when the ships were sunk and he went down, lovely young man. But there was a lot of Americans and another time there when we were in the army, the American provos [military police] tried to arrest an Australian soldier that had just got back from the Middle East. You probably heard about this, the riots.

28:00 And anyway the other soldiers saw it and they started to mutiny in the streets and then there was the Americans and they were fighting in the streets and it turned out, over on the camp at Chermside the boys got on board and they had a machine gun on the back of their vehicle, and they were ready to go in and they had to be restrained, they were ready to go in and shoot them.

28:30 Because there was a terrible lot of jealousy, too, because the Americans were very well paid and their dress was very much better, but in the long run our boys were really dressed to fight a war because their shoes, their boots used to fall apart in battle, they used to steal the boot off Australians because they would, theirs would. Now that stuff when we were in the

29:00 Korean War, when I was in the Department of Defence, we - all the stuff for our boys in Korea was tested out in the Antarctic at Mawson.

What about your brothers, did any of them join up?

Tom, my brother he was in the air force but he was younger than me and he was you know like, he wasn't in very long. The younger fellow, he was still at home and

29:30 he was sort of pointed by Dad that if there was an overrun, to gather the family, take the rations, they all have little boxes like bags made for their back and even the babies had to carry their bottles, you know, on the bat because as I say they were going to have a rear guard action, that was on those mountains, that mountain range running along the Gold Coast there.

Being an Irish Catholic family, did you have different

30:00 **ideas about the war in Europe, that if it was a British kind of war compared to the Australian one?**

No way, no way, no way. When we left Ireland, my father said, "That's all behind us," and we were never given any talks about the British or that. And to be perfectly honest, I mean to say when I look at the troubles in Ireland today it's not, it's not, it's not the real people, you know what I mean.

30:30 A lot of them, you know I mean I was walking down the streets of Dublin when I was overseas and this young fellow walked past me and he said, "Go home you bastard." He thought I was English you see, fair. I felt like saying, "My father fought for your freedom, son," but I thought let you go.

Ok now tell us about your decision to join up, what influenced you to join up and why did you decide to join the army?

Well for the simple reason with all this stuff coming

31:00 past and knowing, knowing that we could be overrun by the Japanese I felt that it was my, I needed I mean it was an obligation to do it. Because honestly in those times I mean everybody did something you know. We didn't have a population to fight them.

31:30 You know you sort of, everybody had to do something. I mean people were working night and day. I remember we had one lass, her mother was the society lady and they were called up, everybody had to be called up to do something. You could go into factories, now that wasn't on when I went in, that came on later. Anyway, she came into this factory and she come up pair of gloves,

32:00 scarf around the head and a nice apron sort of jacket on and when she saw the conditions that these young girls had worked in. Here was a toilet and the lunch room right next to the toilet, you know, treated everybody, if you worked for your living you were treated like an underling. And of course she demanded, she went straight up to the general manager, started giving him stick, "You disgusting lot," she said.

32:30 She was like, she was doing more work than the union rep [representative] because the union rep wasn't doing too much at the time because he'd be frightened to lose his job, and she was the society lady, she never worked in her life. But everybody was called up, everybody. Everybody had to do a job.

And what made you decide to join the army compared to the navy or...?

Well, because my father was an army man and I think I was used to, used to it

33:00 and it was a matter of principle. I think you know that's what it was. I mean in those days you know we didn't have the access to information like people do now. You know, you'd read a bit in the paper and that sort of thing. It was seeing all that equipment coming in and seeing these Americans having to come in that were going to go you know and that these people we knew if we didn't do everything

33:30 we're going to be overrun.

Did any of your girlfriends join up as well?

No, I only had…We didn't go out a lot. We didn't have the money to go out. My wage, when I started, was 14 and 11 pence, that's $1.50. Now I had to give,

34:00 I was allowed to buy an ice cream with the pig and whistle, which had all sorts of lovely things, every Friday night. Joan, her father was a police sergeant but he was an alcoholic and they had a very hard life at home. And I was, we were allowed a shilling and they'd have this pig and whistle and I would have to hand my 10 shillings over to the family and two and 11 pence, which

34:30 is two and 11 pence would be 30 cents, was my tram ticket to and from work for the week. A pair of silk stockings was a real luxury, oh, a luxury, you know. And I would save my money and I would, I have always been very particular with my clothes, and I'd save my money and when I'd saved

35:00 a pound, and that was $2.00, but that was a lot of money then, a pound. I went to this lady and she would, and she used to, she'd have these pattern books and she would draw the pattern to fit you and then she would make your things and she would charge you anything from 10 shillings to 15 shillings, you know, for the actual material, but she would charge a pound to make it.

Ok, so tell us about

35:30 **how you joined up. Was there a recruiting office? How did you do it?**

Of what I can remember there was sort of recruiting office and I went in and signed up. I think it must have been in the city at the time. They'd have like sort of booths, you know, you could go and join up. And then I got word and I think it was within a fortnight. I got word and we had to go in and meet in the city and then we got on the train, we came down on the troop train

36:00 and no such thing as bunks you know there was like racks, timbers laid down and you'd lay on that and try and keep yourself warm. And that's another thing, when we were at Ingleburn, we had worn what was called a 'giggle frock' [dress without pockets], it was a little khaki frock that buttons all the way down the front, we were issued with a giggle frock. Now while I think when you think back about it AWAS Headquarters

36:30 was Victoria Barracks but when we went into the camp we were under the command of the men and they didn't like it they wanted the command and they wouldn't have them because this was a military establishment, they were office workers they looked at it and we were field soldiers. Anyway when we went in they gave us this giggle frock. Now I started to learn to do things I'd never done in my life. They have these grease traps you see and we'd have to lift this up every morning,

37:00 skim the grease off in the bucket and then scrub them clean. In the toilets, in the toilets they only had the thunderboxes right, each box had to be lifted, taken out and scrubbed clean, you'd have the pan there right. Then it would all have to be hosed. Now they had groups of girls, you were doing latrines, you're doing the wash room, you're kitchen hand, you're

37:30 scrubbing you know and all this sort of thing. Then we did on route marches, now I had a pair of golf shoes, they were like, and I might add those golf shoes I didn't get them new they were my, they were one of my relatives' girls had them and of course everything was handed on, you know, you never threw things out like you do now. And I thought they were really fancy, you know, really swishy. But with all this route marching the damn things

38:00 started to fall apart. Anyway, the governor general at the time when they thought we were good enough, the governor general would came out to inspect us, and we're all standing there you know we'd been through the drill and we're all standing to attention and he's come along and I could see him looking, look and look and he stood in front of me and he said, "Sig [signaller], that is filthy, that garment you've got on

38:30 is filthy." I said, "Yes, Sir, it's the only one we've got." I said, "We can only wash it on a weekend because we've got to wear it everyday." But I said, "Not only that," I said, "Have a look at this, these are my own shoes and they're falling apart." And I said, "We're all the same and nobody's giving us anything." "Argh," he said. Said no more walk along and of course the next day we're all called up. He must have rang Victoria Barracks and said, "What's going on? They've got troops out

39:00 there and they haven't got equipment, haven't got clothing." And we all got done up with nice uniform and hat and shoes, but oh it was funny. And then they had this grease trap, it was out of the kitchens but it was like a, it was at the end of the camp and was like a big pond and you'd have a big long stick that had a like a piece of timber on the end like that

39:30 and you'd put it out and you'd have to skim it all off. I'd never done work like that before in my life but we soon learned. And then with the route marches, the sergeant that would take us out, he take us out, it was out past Ingleburn and it was all bush country then. He'd get us out in the bush and he'd say, "Righto girls, you can lie down now and rest your feet," which we did. And then on the weekend when we'd have leave they'd have a

40:00 train would run right into the camp and we got on this particular train, it was all girls, and it slowed down at Ingleburn, at - what's it? – Liverpool, slowed down. And this fellow hopped on and he nearly had the fright of his life and it went straight through to the city see and of course every compartment

they'd say, "Wow, wow," you know

40:30 and the poor devil didn't know where to go he was blushing up and he couldn't get off because we didn't get off until we got into Central.

I'll just have to stop you there because we're running out of tape.

Tape 3

00:32 **I'll just rewind a little bit there, tell us what it was like as a young Queensland girl coming down to New South Wales?**

We were in the troop train and we pulled up on the Hawkesbury River Bridge and the sun was coming up and it was hitting the water and I looked out and I said, "I've never seen anything so beautiful," it was really lovely. Then we came in but it was July,

01:00 winter and when we hit Ingleburn, we were so cold. And they hadn't prepared properly for us because they cleaned the men out of the section and all we had was cold water, there was supposed to be hot water. And of course after coming down in the troop train I felt really chatty, you know and I wanted, the first morning I went straight down to have a hot shower, as I thought I was going to have, and I turned the water on and it was

01:30 icy cold. And Ingleburn it was like ice, it was like ice and everybody was the same. And the same when we had to do the dishes you know the mess dishes we had these great big round tubs you know the old fashioned washing tubs and we'd wash up in that but there was never enough hot water and as you'd get down the end it was getting all greasy you know, oh God, I'll never forget, it was awful, you know.

You were amongst the first

02:00 **group of women, tell us about that?**

Well most of the girls were pretty, they were really nice. A lot of them were away from home for the first time you'd hear half of them having a little cry at night because they were lonely and they missed their parents and things like that. I know that with my shoes I used to go for route march and I wouldn't take them off until I go to bed that night because I couldn't get them back on again, my feet would be swollen. And we'd have a bed check, they used to come around

02:30 and check us to make sure. Well, of course as you get on in the army, you know, you sort of get a bit wise and when we were at, where was it? At, - can I just have a look, I've got it down here – Chermside, when we were at Chermside we got very cunning,

03:00 you know, bed check would be round about 9 o'clock and some of the boys on the camp, they had a truck, you know, and we'd go under the wire and we'd you know, yahoo and have a little drink and things like that - oh we were very adventurous. When you think of the young girls today, we thought we were being, you know, very, very adventurous. Anyway this particular night we were coming back and we could see

03:30 the lights flashing and they were making an extra bed check, oh my God, we ran, and I ran and I ran in to the ordinary, it was only ordinary wire not barbed wire, and I ran, oh God, all my legs were all cut you know, and of course I had to hide that, I couldn't tell them that, you know, that I'd done it trying to get out, trying to get back for bed check. Oh and another funny thing I've got to tell you about this, this was really funny. The men's camp was all over the other side of the road and there was this

04:00 sort of main road, I don't know whether it was a main road it might have been an army road. And then we were on this side and to put what they called the ablution block, you know, where we had the showers they had them just rough and they had Hessian round, going around, but what had happened, they only put one lot of Hessian through. Whether they did it deliberate or not, I don't know, but anyway I believe that camp commandant got onto it

04:30 and he said, "What the hell's all those fellas standing on that bridge for?" They didn't know who they were, but through the Hessian they could see all these naked girls, you know. It was a fair distance away but I mean they thought it was great you know it was like on films and, "My God," he said. So he rang our CO [Commanding Officer] he said, "I'm sending some men over, there'll be more hessian going up around there, it's a distraction to these men."

05:00 It was funny.

Do you think the army took you females seriously?

They had to because the men were going and we had to man the posts. They had to take us seriously. I know that some of them didn't at the beginning, but I mean those girls really filled the posts. They were doing cipher,

05:30 Morse code, switchboard. They were doing a hell of a lot of work, that was in our, in our core anyway.

Ok tell us about what role you were selected for and what your duties were?

Well I had been first made a lance corporal much to my surprise, but apparently I must have showed leadership qualities and the point

06:00 was I think I came under attention at the training camp when I spoke up to the governor general you know. And I suppose they thought well, and if anything was to be done, I'd say I'd like to have a try. So I think they think I had a fair amount of leadership qualities, but you've got to remember I'd been my own, like, I'd had to look after.

06:30 myself since I was eight years of age.

How does that sound? We'll just. OK Cath, again tell us you were made a lance corporal and then what about…?

And then when I went to Redbank, they appointed me to Redbank as corporal in charge of the Switchboard Section. I had, we were doing we had three shifts from morning until five,

07:00 five till midnight and midnight until the new staff on in the morning. That was a very big camp, that was as I say they were bringing the wounded in from New Guinea. They were those girls were, the ambulance girls they were going out at midnight so the populous couldn't see all these you know ambulances coming in and then the operations would be going on all night.

07:30 So we were sort of you know a sort of had to learn you know and look after ourselves. We were responsible for the camp commandant, who was a man, but he interfered very little with us, it was mostly he just wanted to make sure that the job was done properly. Now we were in a room and we were locked in, locked in couldn't go to the toilet we had a bucket up the back. Couldn't go the

08:00 toilet because we had was called the bomb happy hospital and some of the devils would get out, you know, they were worried we were going to get raped or something you see. I mean, there was the switchboard girls and the ambulance girls we were on a, out on the perimeter and there was a guard that used to walk around and then there was the three big hospitals and then there was

08:30 a section of men going up to New Guinea and the men coming back from New Guinea, it was a very big camp, Redbank. And obviously I must have rated well with the camp commandant because we were very conscientious, very conscientious but when the group moved into Long Pocket, which was over in Indooroopilly, and that was General Blamey's headquarters, the

09:00 university, but we had a thousand girls there and our camp commandant was Captain Ryan and she, her parents had a big pub up at Rockhampton or something. And at the time when I went there, I had met my husband, you know to be and he was a blind date to be perfectly honest. My girlfriend was going with his friend and she was down Indooroopilly and she rang me and she said, "I never

09:30 see you." And I said, "Well I'm away, you know, different times." "Oh," she said, "How about coming out with a friend of my friend?" You know, "Oh no," I said, "I'm not going to be on a blind date," you know, "No way," you know. "Oh well, look, can't you just make it for this time?" And I said, "Oh alright." And we had to meet in the Wintergarden Theatre and I'm sitting next to the lounge, it was like a lounge, you know, it's different to the theatres now, it was like a big lounge out there, very, very upmarket. And I'm sitting

10:00 there, short as I am, my feet weren't touching the ground right. And these two fellas are sitting opposite and they'd be Middle East men, you know come back from the Middle East. And anyway his friend said, "I think that's your date." And he said, "Don't be bloody silly, she's only a baby, look at her," because he was 13 years older than me, a man of the world too. Anyway, I thought he was as old as God when I met him,

10:30 you know, when you're a young girl, anyway that was it.

With all those men wondering around in the camp, did they often make advances towards you and the other girls?

Now strangely enough, no, but I think it was up to the girls. I think in those days, I don't think you would have, look, there was a few rapists, you're always going to get that, but it was always hushed up very quietly.

11:00 But most of the men unless you made the first, you know, say hello and had a talk in the canteen or that and then they might ask, they were very nice young men, truly. But we had, this is look I must tell you this, this is really, really very funny. In the canteen we met these couple of young fellows and they said, "Oh, we're patients at the hospital," we naturally thought the main hospital but they were at the Bomwaby [?] Hospital, we didn't

11:30 know that. Anyway they said, "Listen there's a party on, on Saturday night, it's a place at the, it's outside the main camp and it's just along the road a bit. How about coming?" And we thought, "Oh gee, yeah, we'll go," you know. So we go along, we got out hats on and our starch all done up and we walk

in, knock on the door and the lady said, “Oh, come in ladies, sit down here,” and there’s a big lounge and we’re sitting down. And there’s all these things and we didn’t know, and the ser [sergeant] major walked

12:00 in and he looked at us and he said, “What the hell are you doing here?” And we said, “We were invited to a party.” He said, “What a bloody party?” He said, “Do you know where you are?” We said, “No.” He said, “This is the bloody camp brothel.” He said, “Out! Out!” I said, “They’ve got my hat.” He said, “Don’t worry about your bloody hat – out! I’ll get your hat.” And we didn’t know, and these two fellows,

12:30 they said there’s a party on and we did not know, truly. Now that’s how discrete it was, like we were in a camp and we as girls didn’t know there was a brothel just up the road from the camp.

What was the sergeant major doing there?

Well I don’t know, but he came over for a visit, didn’t he. But when he looked, well, you see, he, I think he got a shock, you know. But we’re not doing anything, we’re sitting there waiting for the party

13:00 to start and our friends to arrive you know. Because like at the hospital, we thought, “Oh well,” you know, “they’ve got to get a leave pass, they’ve got to shower and get over,” you know and we’re sitting there. And the lady in charge, she was just, she never blinked an eyelash and said, “Give me your hats girls, I’ll put them away for you.” And we’re sitting there on this settee, you know, like this old lounge sitting there, waiting for the party to start. We

13:30 were a bit wiser after that.

How did you feel, you mentioned that there was a hospital there for men who were suffering from battle fatigue or shell shock, how did you feel about those men?

You just took it in your stride. You’d meet them in the canteen, they’d be given time the canteen was on the thing and they’d come and talk to you and we’d talk to them. And even over in the what was called the surgical ward, there was amputations and everything going on and they’d burn it all you know you could smell it

14:00 but we were all - and it was important because the nurses and doctors were all working all night because they’d come in on those ambulances and that was probably the most important shift, that night shift. And we thought well that’s right that’s part of war and you know. I don’t know I mean we had very few girls that got hysterical.

14:30 The worst thing I’ve ever had to have to do, I was orderly sergeant this night in our main camp in Indooroopilly and the call come through that one of our girls, he was in you know in Britain as a flyer and the Department of the Army rang you know, they knew she was in the army, and they rang and I was the orderly sergeant and they said, “Sergeant, I’d like you to get her down and break the news to her.”

15:00 And I had that happen to me three times and that was pretty hard.

How did you cope with that?

You just coped. I don’t know we had a, I think we got very worldly wise in seeing you know, we’d go into the military, you know into the surgical wards, we’d go round and meet talk to the fellas and you know because they were no, they didn’t have any family or anything.

15:30 And you got, I’m not saying you got used to it but you knew you had to do it. We were tough old girls, you know, we didn’t know how tough we were until we got in there. You talk to your Grandma, you know. They hardened us up I think.

Some people might have got the impression that the men who were suffering metal disorders were bludgers or shirkers?

Oh no, no, no.

16:00 No, it’s that, battle fatigue is what they’re now recognising it, now that can happen to anyone. Some of them killed themselves, you know. And they, to come and talk to us ladies, well they still called us ladies, you’ve got no idea, to talk to us, and because they could talk to us because they couldn’t talk to their wives. You know

16:30 we saw so much of it.

Ok let’s go back now to the switchboard. What did you have to do?

Well I, the camp switchboards weren’t very big and they were little old plug in ones, nothing fancy like you know the brass things and the plug in. But in the Victoria Barracks, the Victoria Barracks one would probably run the length of that wall, right through and you could what we’d call couple, you could press the thing and couple

17:00 one to two and two to three and three to four. The girls would sit up on high stools and they’d be about that high and we were servicing lines all over Australia. We had lines, what we’d call a tie line and it was something that they’d done, it started the technology was pushed ahead, a lot of things that

happened after the war was due to the war time technology. We could just

17:30 put the plug in, pull the key back and we could talk to Melbourne. Then Melbourne, then Melbourne then, we had a few of those, we might say Melbourne we want Western Australia. They would get to South Australia and South Australia would put us over to the west. Now that was all laid down all very secret, but it was laid down it was what they called direct line. Now in the Canungra, which was the jungle welfare, that's

18:00 the boys, that was down around the back of you know the Gold Coast there, down in there that's Canungra that was a very tough training section. We had direct lines to them. And in my days I could run off telephone numbers just like, like in a conversation. You know somebody would say, "bbbb," yeah, bbbb, you knew them. And being the sergeant, it was what we called the top brass,

18:30 it was on a special board and it had a red thing on it and when that dropped, the girl would press the button and a light would come up, "Sergeant," and I would handle that call. Because what happened was, we'd have to go across the lines because there would be breakdowns or bad reception or something like that and we'd say, "You're getting through, you're getting through." You'd have to listen sometimes and sometimes what you heard was pretty

19:00 secret alright. And not only that sometimes it was terrible what we heard too and you didn't tell anybody. And when we had the War Crimes Commission and that and Chief Justice Webb I think it was he was in charge and he…

Ok we're getting…

When the boys come back from the prisoner of war camps in…

Alright well let's go back to the

19:30 **switchboard. You said there was a special section that was for high ranking?**

High ranking officers, yes, and I mean mostly it was the sergeant in charge of, the corporal in charge of the switch. Mostly when I was doing it we'd actually be walking up and down you know we'd be supervising the girls. We might see something come on, the light coming on glowing on too long and we'd just you know like this or something. We knew the higher echelon you know you didn't let,

20:00 you didn't let them wait you know you just tapped the girl, you wouldn't even have to say. They didn't take any you know they, "All right, fine, go straight in," you know.

Did you ever listen in on any of the conversations?

We had to supervise them. You wouldn't listen in very long, that wasn't right, but remember if the lines were bad you'd have to do a fair bit of supervising, and I mean it would be a bit silly if you

20:30 didn't know what was going on.

If a line was bad what could you do about it?

Well, you could try and get another line but if you couldn't you just had to work with what you had. Because remember some of these lines were direct lines and they were, God knows where they were laid. And that's what the sigs [signals division] out in the field were doing a lot of this, the connecting up. It wasn't as sophisticated like we've got now with

21:00 wires or anything, they were probably cables laid everywhere, God knows where they were laid we never, well never asked anyway. It was only, the thing was the need to know and that's a saying in Defence, the 'need to know'. If you didn't need to know, you didn't get told. Anyway, just as well you don't because you don't know what you're talking about, you know, these sort of things.

21:30 **How many signallers did you have working under you as a sergeant?**

I just can't remember at the moment, I suppose I just can't remember. I could've probably had twenty on shift at each time. And in the camp there was a thousand girls and that was you know Morse code, cipher and switchboards and admin [administration]. It would've been split up into four

22:00 groups of 250. Now that's there switchboard that there, they weren't just in Victoria Barracks they would be in other camps. They'd be in our camp we'd have our own switchboard. The men's camp would have their switchboard because they're doing business all the time too.

What was the relationship you had as a sergeant to the lower ranking signallers?

I got on very well but I was strict.

22:30 Well you had to be because we're blooming, you know we were still scrubbing out the toilets. And one of the worst jobs we had was washing the Canna leaves, you know Captain Ryan had an idea, that's those Cannas, you know, that grow up, and she wanted those around the entrance to the circular thing coming into the camp and around the wash rooms and the girls used to throw their

23:00 starch out. You know, we'd do our uniforms up and we used to call them our 'retreads'. You'd have a tin

mug, you got issued with a tin mug and you'd work, you'd make your starch like hard, you know, with the water and you had a nail brush and you'd go over that and then you'd iron it and it would come up looking as good as new and they called retreads. But then when they'd finish instead of putting the damn starch down into the water, probably we were told not to

23:30 because it might harden up in the thing, they'd throw it out and the Canna leaves would get starch on it and they had to wash the Canna leaves you know. And they'd say, "Oh sarge [sergeant], not the Canna leaves," so you generally keep that and the latrines for anybody who was on you know duty because of a misdemeanour.

What would that have included?

Ackwilly,

24:00 AWL [Absent Without Leave]. Absent without will, leave, they called it Ackwilly. Oh disobeying a lawful order, you know things that, endangering persons or something. It was very strict but we had our, we still had our naughty ones too. We had one

24:30 girl who worked in the kitchen and they traced the knife, they found an American stabbed to death in, in the Dutton Park Cemetery. The knife was traced to our camp because it probably had a number on it and it was one of the cooks, and it was her boyfriend, he was a taxi driver,

25:00 we had that. Then we had another two girls who we copped setting up an abortion clinic. You know, you come across these things but like everything else you didn't broadcast it, you know it was kept within bounds. You know, you didn't, like you know human beings are human beings. Then we had two girls, that was a Jewish holiday and under the War Act it was a special

25:30 holiday, special Jewish holiday they were allowed leave to go to Sydney, we were in Brisbane see. And they went Ackwilly [Absent Without Leave] and the provos picked them up and what they were, I don't think they were Jewish at all, they were a couple of prostitutes, they were prostituting here in Sydney. But all those sort of things they were very quickly, you never contaminated your group,

26:00 you never bring disgrace on your unit, that's what it was all about.

So in a case like that what if girls got pregnant or something what happened?

Well, they mysteriously were transferred out and discharged gently out and it was all done very quietly. I think you've got to remember the times. We were still, we were not living in an age like they live now, you know, where everybody can have partners and have

26:30 babies and all that. That was a, to have a child out of wedlock, oh my God, that was a disgrace. I mean, some parents even drove their own children out of their home for it, it was dreadful.

Ok, if we continue on the line of male interaction. Did anybody use, did any of the girls use the switchboard for social reasons?

Well they could have but who's to know?

27:00 And as long as they did their work who's going to tell on them? I'll tell you one thing which we did have. When Japan fell and peace was declared and they had to go up and get our boys out of the you know Changi and Burma Railway and all that, you know, they were terrible and the starvation was dreadful. They came down, they brought them down by ship. Now what they had to do because they were

27:30 so, their bowel and everything was so shrunken you had to feed them on the baby's food. You know, like you see the baby food now, they had to be fed on baby's food because they couldn't. If they ate a proper meal it would have killed them and they had to be, you know, have that. And anyway, so one lot was loaded off in Brisbane and the others were still, Melbourne and further down they were still on the ship. The CO [Commanding Officer] we had at the time was a 9th Divi [Division]

28:00 man. He'd been up in New Guinea, he was a lieutenant colonial in New Guinea and he came down and he'd been, he'd had a very bad does of Malaria and was you know pretty crook. And his sar major was a pommy [Englishman] sar major and he came with him, he was like looked after him like his batman [personal attendant], more than his batman, he looked after him like a prince. Anyway he came down and I'll just give you a little preamble of him.

28:30 We were all had to assemble in the recreation room and he got up and Captain Ryan was down the front and our officers, and I was a Sergeant, and I had my group up there and there was a couple of other sergeants up there and he said, "I've been pushed down here," and he said, "I'm very unhappy about it," he said, "Looking after a load of women," you know and that sort of thing. And he was carrying on

29:00 and the next minute I got up and I said, "Sir, I wish to address you." And Captain Ryan looked around and thought, "Oh, there's my sergeant again." I said, "Sir, I think you're being very unfair. You're judging us and you don't even know us," and I said, "We're doing a job here to support you people up there in the line," and I said, "We're not chocolate soldiers here," I said, "We're soldiers," and I said, "And I think you should show us a bit more

29:30 respect." "God," he said, "That's what I like, a better, oh I'm going to be right here," and he was really great. When he came out, I said, "Sir, would you be our guest with a beer up in the mess?" He said, "I'd be delighted." And he did and we got on really well with him. Well, when he got his full red tabs, full colonial, he got his red tabs you see. We had one of our girls, who was an illustrator, I think it was in the Sydney Morning Herald that was her job in

30:00 previous life and she used to do these pencil sketches, she was very good. Anyway, she did one of him and she had a galah, you know the galahs are in Queensland, with the red tab and here it is sitting on his shoulder with the red and the cocky's [cockatoo] coming, "Have a load of the bloody Galah." And he thought it was wonderful, he thought it was wonderful, he took it back to New Guinea with him. Anyway when he, he came back he was with us again, he came back

30:30 because they asked him, "Where would you like to stay Joe?" He said, "Well, I'll go out to the women's camp, that suits me, I'm fine that's alright I've got plenty of mates out there." Anyway they brought this boat in with these POWs [Prisoner of War] and he came to us and he said, "Girls," he said, "These poor buggers," he said, "They're sitting on that boat." He said, "They're wives and family are in all around Australia," and he said, "They're just sitting there waiting." You know he said, "How about if I send some trucks in and we bring them out to the camp for the day." He said, "Now for God's sake

31:00 don't feed them because you'll kill them," you know. And anyway they brought them out and each girl was to look after one fella, you know. And so they were, they were really in a pitiful state. And we have in our huts, because Captain Ryan always wanted us to be women, feminine, you know, we didn't want us butch, butch, butch cadets, argh, didn't want that

31:30 so we had curtains on there and we had a bedspread. I don't know where she got them made but she got them made. And they come in and they couldn't get over it and they, look they were touching things, you know the thing and they'd say. And I'd say, "Go on sit down, stretch out on it, see how it feels," you know. Of course you know if they were living in on the camps and that. I said, "Go on, put your legs up, have a stretch, get that pillow under your head. What do you think of this?" And

32:00 then of course, like women, we all had a bit of powder, a bit of make up and a bit of perfume when you could get it. "Have a smell of that," and you know, they cried. They cried. Anyway, we had one public phone in the camp and we said to the chief, "Sir, we want to break the rules today." And he said, "I know what you girls…get the list." So we went around and we said, "Do you remember your telephone number?" And we got their telephone

32:30 numbers and we gave them a number, number whatever it was, and we had a public address system and that went all day and the girls manned that and we got through to Melbourne, South – Adelaide, Western Australia. We rang all those, we got the girls, they rang all those numbers one to the other. And they told the family that approximately in two hours or something, because you know we, that their son would be or their

33:00 husband would be on the line, would only have five minutes because we had a lot to get through, but there, and we got those boys through and they came out crying.

When you saw the state of these chaps that had been POWs, how did that make you feel about Japan and the Japanese?

Well, you see, I was a little different to a lot of the others because I worked with these girls and

33:30 captain, you know what I mean, that were Japanese. I had been out with them. They took me out dining one night to a Chinese restaurant in Brisbane. Now there was limitation, I think it was four shillings or five shillings you couldn't spend any more, no menu had to be dearer than that. They rang and ordered, it was somebody's birthday, and they ordered a special dinner and we went in and we had a private room. And this we had, you never see it normally

34:00 on a menu. They had a fish a steamed fish done in sort of like perfumed water, that big, fully steamed, God knows how they did it. We had black ebony bowls and the chopsticks were mother of pearl, like black ebony with mother of pearl inserts. Now I got to know these people as human beings and even though I knew

34:30 what went on and appalled as I am because I've just – Sandy, I can go into that in a minute – I knew what was happening, I heard it so much. I couldn't hate the whole, everybody for it. So I was probably more open. Now when I did that Army Ed [Education] School down at the end of the war when I was talking about I had to do a

35:00 paper on some subject you know and my thing was 'Japan - Our Post War Trading Partners'. They nearly ate me alive on the thing. And I did that then because I could see that we had to move out of our shell and some of those Japanese even today. There was one man whose son went up to Japan and he was in the local paper and he said

35:30 his father, his father had been a POW in Japan, a POW in the Japanese War, but he came with an open heart. And his interpreter got a call from a young man whose father wanted to meet him. And this father had been a soldier in one of the camps, now they weren't all mongrels and this man met him and he

36:00 cried and he was asking forgiveness and that was only about three years ago, he was asking forgiveness. And another chap told me, you're going to get, I've told them about him. He was taken POW at 16 and his brother was there and his brother died and they used to use him to go under the wires to barter. And as he said you know some of them there was one young

36:30 Japanese fellow that used to come, he was a Catholic and he used to come and tell him he'd say, "Be very good today, be good today, Commandant," you know like this, be good you know because but he couldn't do any more I mean they would've killed him. You see it's the same, I ran into a German girl whose father was a member of the SS [Schutzstaffel] when I was in Europe, no I was in South Africa, she was with South African Airways

37:00 and she said, "I walked out of my father's house." She said, "I couldn't live with him." And I said, "You're being very, very hard on your father." She said, "He was an SS man." I said, "But," I said, "You don't know what he did or what he didn't do," I said, "You've got to be a bit more open with him." You know, it's very hard because if you joined up and you, I mean, that Hitler youth, you know what I mean, the way they were brought up.

37:30 I mean Hitler was a bloody God to them.

Alright I think we might stop there.

Tape 4

00:33 **Tell us about a typical working day on the switchboard?**

Well we'd get up and have breakfast at seven in the mess. Then we'd assemble the group for the day, you know we'd work out our group that was working for that day. As I said it's divided into four sections, some of them would have to go and do administrative work around, you know cleaning and all that sort of thing.

01:00 Then we'd go in by beagle from Indooroopilly from Long Pocket they called it. It was a very big estate before the war owned by graziers and the army confiscated it to put our huts on it. Then we'd drive into Victoria Barracks in Brisbane and we would have, we'd put a full day in until 5 o'clock.

01:30 In the lunch time - they'd bring us home for lunch because we're on you know it was almost enclosed you know very hot - and we'd have sometimes we'd duck down and have a quick shower you know to brighten us up and then we'd go back to say to 5 o'clock. Now that was at Victoria Barracks, but when I was at Chermside we would go we would probably be given relief, somebody would come over and relieve us

02:00 on what they would call the relief staff. They'd come over and relieve us and we'd go back to camp for lunch or dinner at night. Now at night time, later on we worked underground and coming back from there at night we had a guard to march us back to our camp. And a funny little thing, this is a little personally thing, when we were marching through we saw this blue light

02:30 and the girls said to the young man, he was only young too, "What's the blue light?" "Oh," he said, "You'd better ask your officers about that." And we said, "Why? Why? Why? What is it? What is it?" And he said, "It's the prophylactic centre." And we said, "Gee what's that?" And he said, "Get your boss to tell you." We were pretty green. But we had to crawl under a wire fence, it was electrified you know,

03:00 we used to get on the ground and crawl under it.

To go between camps?

We wanted to do things you see. If somebody managed to get somebody to ring up somebody that got a little tuck in from the Q [Quartermaster's] store or something and they couldn't come down to the area and then we'd meet them on the perimeter and we'd crawl under the wire. We used to do a lot of silly things, they were electrified. I don't know whether it would kill you but I think it would give you a nasty jolt.

Ok.

03:30 **That microphone has gone back inside there again. I clipped it on the other side there because when the lapel was flopped the other way. I'm going to have to reverse it back out again now.**

Oh. Right.

It's still brushing.

Do you want me to take this off?

No, no leave it on

04:00 **otherwise it won't be consistent. You've just got to make sure that's sitting clear of the clothing there that's all.**

Do you think if I buttoned that a bit it would make it firmer?

It might be a good idea. Now we'll need to bring it out again.

How's that?

That's better. That's good, ok.

04:30 **And when did you start working underground?**

That was very early in the peace. You know I think it was, we were caught up in the war, you know they didn't think that we were going to be attacked because when they started to, when Singapore fell that was when we knew and I think a lot of things were sort of done in the temporary level. And the idea was if there was any bombing you see we'd be undercover and that was at Chermside.

05:00 But later on we had, Victoria Barracks it was all sandbagged, all outside, all sandbags right up and over the top but it was in the old building, the old Victoria Barracks building. That was the great big switchboard you know were the sort of the heart of the work you know going on in the Australian Army. But then, as I say then there was another big switch room at

05:30 the university at Indooroopilly, that wasn't finished then and that was Tom Blamey, General Blamey's Headquarters. Now General MacArthur, he was down in what we call the other part, on the south side, but I can't think of the name of the place, it was Gabba, I think it was the Gabba not sure, just know I'm going back a long time. And these were American headquarters and they

06:00 had their headquarters in a very, it had been a very upmarket private ladies college and they'd taken over that. They confiscated things when the war was on it was just. Another thing too was that I didn't mention before, not an actual aunt but my stepmother or my mother's sister, she had a guesthouse at Wynnum which is at Wynnum South,

06:30 Stradbroke Island is over the front of it. So to give you an idea of the location, it's not very far out of Brisbane, eight or 10 miles I think, but in those days that was a fair distance. Anyway what actually happened they were evacuating the women and children out of Singapore. This was before, the earlier part before the Japs took over Singapore itself and the idea was that we

07:00 had to provide them with accommodation. Well, she had a guesthouse which was at the seaside you see at Wynnum, and it was a two story and it was sort of an L shape. And the front part was lounge and dining room all that and it was very, very nice because they had an old retired sea captain that used to come to dinner every night with his dinner jacket on, little old fellow. And anyway she got this word that she was having so many women and children. Now she thought, "Now what will I

07:30 do? Anybody with children I better put them on the ground floor because you know the verandas weren't they were just sort of like railings," you know kiddies could have fallen down. So she put all the women with children on the ground floor and all those that didn't have children on the top floor. But what she didn't realise with the English ladies, the officer's wives don't mix with ORs [Other Ranks] you see. (UNCLEAR) They don't

08:00 mix with ORs and they were come and protesting that they had an ordinary soldier's wife and children, ordinary soldier's wife next door to them. And the wives that had children, the officers' wives and they didn't like being down there you know that wasn't in keeping with their status. Of course you know when our Australian boys, when they went up there they couldn't go into Raffles or places like that because they weren't good enough

08:30 You don't hear about those things do you.

And what did you Australian women think of that?

Well we weren't use to it, we're Australian, we weren't used to that sort of nonsense. That's why we came out from Ireland, so we could have a better life, and that's why we, because true Australians, never any ties to the old country. You know, we were, and this is what you'll hear the older people saying,

09:00 we had the same thing after to war when we had those people that were come out of prison of war camps and all that and went up to the Snowy [Snowy Mountains] and worked like dogs up there and lived in conditions which is unbelievable. And they turned out very good, very good Australian citizens and they came from all because they had suffered so much. They knew when they were in a good country. And the same with the, in the Middle East when my husband he worked in the

09:30 recovery section into the desert and of course when the Italians knew they were fighting the Aussies they didn't want to fight them, they didn't put up very much of a fight. There was a few fanatics but not a lot and they threw their arms down and surrendered. When the boys brought them in they were just marching as happy as Larry they were being taken prisoner. And they'd say, "You know my brother at Bondi…" You see what happened in those days the eldest son left Italy, he came out to this

10:00 country, he worked, same with the Greeks, they worked their hearts out, sent their money home to their family to educate the children and keep the family together. And of course some of those boys then that come out and they put them on farms and they ended up marrying the farmers' daughters and they're good Aussies too.

And tell me about when you finished working on the switchboard?

Well they took me out of that and put me on the administration

10:30 which probably I could, you know we had a thousand girls, and there was a lot of administrating to do, I mean a lot of work. I know that one time there we lost our PT [Physical Training] instructors and you'll see some photos of me in gear. And my CO, Captain Ryan called she said, "Tomorrow, Sergeant, you will take the PT." I said, "Madam I'm not the PT instructress." And she said, "You will take it." So I rang my father and I said,

11:00 "Dad, I've got to give PT tomorrow." He said, "Ask your boss," he said, "Can she come out for an hour or two and come home?" This was in Brisbane, see, and this was in Indooroopilly. So in actual fact I only lived across the river but you couldn't get across the river, there was no, it was Dutton Park. And anyway I went home and Dad had a book on PT and he gave me a lesson in the yard and then he said, "Now," he said,

11:30 "If you use your head," he said, "You're always one lesson ahead of them everyday." He said, "When you give that instruction, you go home then and you learn the next day's lesson." Which I did, nobody ever knew any different. You had to do things, you know you said you couldn't, there was no word of 'can't', because it had to be done that's all there was too it. I had one girl that came from a very

12:00 wealthy family and she got the mess hall cleaning and she said, "I've never cleaned mess in my life." I said, "Well where do you eat, lassie?" No, not lassie, Sig [Signaller]. "Where do you live Sig?" And she said, "Here." I said, "Well you eat here too don't you?" I said, "You go in and clean up," I said, "Everybody's got to look after one another." And then I had another time when I was walking around I was

12:30 doing this as part of the administration. When the meals were on, the sergeant, orderly sergeant of the day would walk the floors and you would say, "Any complaints?" And then this particular day these, "Yes, I have a complaint, Sergeant." And I said, "Yes what is that?" She said, "Since when do we have to eat livestock with our vegetables?" And there was a snail snuggled in on the lettuce leaf. Well, could you imagine that you've got 500 for lunch, you know,

13:00 how many lettuce you've got to do? They probably wash it off, they probably in those big tubs again with water. So I just said, "You just take it back and you get a fresh one." I, of course, stood there and they got it and I said, "Just knock that off and number 10 will get that down the line."

And where did you work after that?

Well I came out, I came out of the army after there and as I joined the Department, actually I went in

13:30 with the PMG it was Post Master General's Department because I had to wait for a clearance you know on security clearance and that was in the engineering section. Well then I went and studied the comptometer operator and then I put in for the Department of Supply and from there we went in with the department, we amalgamated with the Department of Defence and it was there that I worked, I was a comptometer operator. And then I went into the costing section where all the contracts for food and

14:00 equipment and everything and there's all these accountants, we worked, they worked all that out and they'd send the paperwork down to me to work out the costing of it all and then they'd go back and they'd make decisions. And I mean say like Mount Assylund [?] they'd put in, they've got that one man on Mount Assylund at the moment and that was always the military outpost, belonged to the Australian government. And it was we used to supply that

14:30 with food and everything and equipment a long time after the war. So I really think it was, and I'm not sure but I think it was a section where the navy must have gone to replenish their supplies. But you see, the need to know wasn't there for me, for what they were doing with the goods, all my job was to check out the prices and have all the costing all delivered to the fellas who made the decisions who were going to get the contracts.

15:00 That was just one of my sections, and then as I say I was doing stuff for Woomera and I was doing stuff for the Antarctic division. Now we had one man who did three trips to the Antarctic, he got the polar medal. And each time he'd come back, I'd say, "You're back from Shangri La [paradise]." And because it is so clean, the air and stuff, he wouldn't have a wrinkle or anything on his face, it would be that smooth, and you know and looking that

15:30 restful. Now in those days at Morson, that was at Morson Base. In those days everybody had to do the chores, they don't do it now they have special troops, but what it was they went down there and they were put in for the whole winter. Sometimes I don't know how long but it would be months and months on end. And they're living in confined conditions all the time. Well, personalities can get very much out of hand and if a man's just a cook, he's just a cook. But they didn't do it that way no matter

16:00 whether you were a scientist or not, everybody took their turn to do the dirty work. See that made harmonious relations. I also did costing and stuff that we had for Woomera and I won't go into some of the details there, they're a bit tight. But we did have, investigated pilfering

16:30 and using, getting tyres for their cars instead of for the military vehicles, all that sort of thing. We had to be very watchful. And when we were doing for Space Track, which was up at you know the Tidbinbilla and Honey Suckle Creek and Orroral Valley, we had to be so careful. What they did there we, the scientific people and they came from all over the world you know in their knowledge,

17:00 you know all these signals that were sent out you know and stuff like that they could switch on a switch and Spain would come in or somewhere else would come in, you could hear it all over the place. And why they did that was somebody else might want to speak to Spain or somebody or you know one of the islands or somebody about something, so they'd have it open on that line. And a rather funny thing happened there.

17:30 They had a night guard on, and this is right out in the back country, you know those big disks, you know the big tracking stations. And we came in and they said, "Oh we're very worried." And they said, "What?" They said, "What happened?" They said, "Our guard, we're in trouble." I said, "What?" They said, "We've got to pay for a cow." Well you wouldn't think you'd be paying for a cow up on a…and what happened

18:00 through the night, this man had served in the British army in India and he was doing a patrol around the perimeter of the place, and that was like big grounds, and he would see these glowing eyes and he thought it was a tiger and he shot it. And of course it belonged to a farmer, a cow had got out. So we had to buy, pay for the cow. There was all these funny little things, they're the funny sides of work. These scientists were to

18:30 be brought in by car, they were given a three-course hot meal every day for 45, 40 or 45 cents, I just forget it was like that then. And the idea was the Americans were very concerned that they ate properly, they had nutritious food because like you know it's like brain power they're paying for and they were really funny. They were quite odd some of them. They'd have their slippers on and their corduroy trousers and

19:00 their flannel shirt, you wouldn't think they had two bob, you know you'd think they were anybody but brilliant, brilliant minds. But they were very humble people too, but then we'd take them home, but that was to make sure we got them to work and got them home and fed them, that was important. And then of course there was no pilfering, and you always get pilfering, you've got to watch that. And when you start to pilfer in there, the point is, it's not only the stealing, they may

19:30 take something that might be needed in emergency and it's not there.

Did you find that people were pilfering during the war?

Oh yeah. Well as I say over at Woomera we had one stage there where the tyres were being used putting them on their own vehicles. Taking a rubbishy tyre off their vehicle and putting it on an army vehicle. And I'm looking at these things and I'm working, I mean I know its rough country, but I was working out what sort of mileage, they've got to give you the

20:00 mileage between there. And I said to my chief, I said, "This is odd," I said, "I'm getting a terrible lot of replacement of tyres," I said, "And the mileage isn't that great." "Oh," he said, and he went through the papers and he said, "Yeah there's something funny going on there." Well then he did an investigation into the section that was delivering them and the fellow that was in charge, he got frightened, he thought we knew more than what we did, but we didn't. You know he was doing a bit of detective work, you know, and you throw a few questions

20:30 there and they think you know more than what you did but you didn't. But he then said, "Oh," he said, "Some of them, some of them have been putting the worn tyres off their vehicles on the army vehicles." And when of course that really had it, we had to tighten up there. Because what happened was in the desert in the dried section those tyres didn't have to stay in the store, like there was a man that

21:00 had a franchise out towards Woomera he set up you know. He got a defence contract probably you know to do it but those tyres could only stay there so long because of the dryness and the heat the rubber would sort of perish. So they had to be, they had to be and I don't know exactly how long those tyres were there. That wasn't my part to check in, you know, in the suppling but they would have to be replaced and new ones

21:30 brought out so that the rubber wouldn't deteriorate something to do with the desert air, the dryness and the sand and goodness knows what. Now when I'm talking some of those army vehicles, they were big tyres, and not only that, things were pretty tight, you know what I mean, we had to use things, I mean you can't have that sort of costs going on, as I say, we've got to be cost effective all the time, like I run this place.

22:00 **How long were you at Woomera for? How long were you in Woomera?**

Oh I wasn't in Woomera. I was working to Woomera, I wasn't up on Woomera itself but my younger brother was at Woomera. He was in the Survey Core.

And going back to living in the barracks with the girls, can you describe the barracks for us?

Yes. Well the

22:30 section that we had which was probably the best was at Indooroopilly because that was a big thousand girls and it was built later, you know it was a bit like big huts. Now each hut was divided into I suppose it would be half a dozen sections like a room and each room had four beds, one, two, three, four, four beds. And you had to, that was your section

23:00 you had to keep, and you had two cupboards, one on each side. You shared the cupboards with this two and the two over there. You never encroached on anyone else's side. And even today when my girlfriend and I go away, she's ex-army, we walk into a room I say, "Which bed do you want?" She says, "I'll have that one," we never encroach, we're very tidy, very happy. You can't break habits you see. And they had just

23:30 boards on the floor. And but I say our Captain Ryan was keen that we have a bit of femininity so she had these bedspreads made which was palliasses [sleeping pallets], straw palliasses made of hessian and you had straw in them. And we did have sheets and a pillowslip, which was luxury, the boys didn't have that, and we had two blankets. Now we would get a

24:00 clean supply from the Q store once a week. You'd take your stuff down, you'd sign for it and you'd get the next lot. We had a lot of fun you know what I mean, girls become like sisters, but at one stage we had one lassie came in and she came from the back country and she wouldn't wash. Now somebody that won't wash, four to a room,

24:30 and a small room at that, you can't put up with that. So we asked her many times and she said, "Oh we were short of water," and I said, "Well there's no shortage of water now." You know, so she didn't do it so we took her down to the showers and scrubbed her down. You do it once, you never have to do it again. So you administer your own, you know things that go wrong, you don't worry the seniors about it, you do it yourself.

25:00 **And what did you wear?**

Well when we were during the camp we wore what we called a giggle frock. It was a button through frock and it had army buttons and they used to have a shank behind them and you'd put it in the shank, when you'd wash it you'd take your buttons off, very plain. When our summer gear was a like a frock - khaki, all khaki and straight through again but a little better then a giggle

25:30 frock, a little bit nicer. A felt hat, I got many felt hats my CO used to always say, "Your hat's Cath." You know, well, you'd put your dirty hands on them, you know, she liked me to look…and I'd always say, "Another hat please." The girls use to say, "You haven't got a spare hat, have you, Cath?" I'd say, "Oh yeah, got one." Anyway, our winter uniform was wool, khaki, darker khaki, skirt, khaki shirt, darker

26:00 khaki tie, jacket, had the, you know there's a photo there and our cap and Lyle stockings, Lyle, they're like khaki and a brown, brown walking shoe. And that's what I say with the khaki, remember I used to say we'd give it a retread with the starch. It used to look pretty good.

And how many of these uniforms?

Two giggle frocks,

26:30 one uniform, two shirts, three pair of pants, Bombay bloomers, three singlets, no bra, three singlets. And they actually was where they started to issue Modess [sanitary napkins], boxes of Modess we never had that before. That came out of the war too they found the necessity for it.

What did you do before then?

27:00 We had little towels we had to wash. So that was our, you know that was a great step forward. There was a lot of things that come out for women, you know, the different things. And when you travelled you had a kit bag and you took all your stuff and you had to carry your kit bag, you carried it on your shoulder. And on top of that I had my Don R [Despatch Rider], which was my field telephone. It was issued to me

27:30 and I carried that anywhere I went, all through the war. It was about that big, it was a field phone, a head piece right and there was a Morse key on it as well and I was responsible for that and I took that, three and a half years I was in the army I looked after it. When I went down to Keilor to a school, I took it with me. When I was discharged I had to sign it in again, it was heavy.

28:00 But it was the sense of responsibility, you know, I mean, the whole thing was that we never knew when we would really have to be in war, do you know what I mean? I mean we didn't know that the Japanese were going to come down and I mean we had to be prepared all the time if we had to scatter and go into the field. What they had to do in Europe, I mean, women, and they had to work behind the

28:30 lines and everything. I think because we were born in the Depression or brought up in the Depression we could do it. When I hear some of the nonsense that is going on at the moment in the services, you

know, I mean these girls, they are very technically skilled but I don't think they can really rough it. And they did have a,

29:00 did have a thing about girls in the front line, I don't believe in that. I think they could work technical stuff but I know too much about women that were taken prisoner during the war in other places and they were lucky to come out alive. Some of them are out of their mind, others causes…

What sort of…?

29:30 Pack rape, dear. I mean you put a, you've got to realise that when you've got men in battle, they're not the nice gentlemen that you see. I mean they're ground up into a fighting force right and their behaviour. We were having a, this football thing you've heard going on, they've keyed up so

30:00 much and it only needs one, although I'll give you an instance. When my husband was in the desert, it was very important that they become friends with the Bedouins. The Bedouins are those people who walk through the desert, you know have through the desert. And an occasion it came one that their women they never see them. They would have eat with them, they eat with this hand because this hand's used to wipe your bum, right? You know, this hand's unclean, the Arab,

30:30 you use this hand to eat, right. And the women would have the food prepared, but they would never come beyond in the tents and have men see them. Anyway, it happened that one man did rape a young Arab girl, and I had some photos of these Bedouins and I gave them to Victoria Barracks to put in their museum. And anyway

31:00 the chieftain of the tribe wanted him, they wanted him and of course they couldn't hand him over. And I don't quite know what happened to him, but you see he put all their lives in jeopardy by that one act. And when they were in the Western Desert, you know, you might think that I talk about these things but its part of my life. I've travelled all through,

31:30 I've been through all of Africa and next September, October, my friend, and I we'll be in Normandy, we're going into France. Anyway, they had to survive in the desert, but if there was a battle on, these Bedouins would wait on the outside and then after the battle when all the dead were there, then they'd strip them, they still do it. They did it when

32:00 Italy went to war with Abyssinia and that sort of thing. You've got to remember I've lived a long time, seen a lot of a lot of history. And as I say always been, of course my father was army, my husband was army, you know, I'm army myself I know you know, things you wouldn't probably read I would read.

Like what?

Well

32:30 what came out of Belsen and all that sort of thing. We saw films when the war finished, they showed us films, I think they're showing bits of it now but it was, it was terrible, terrible. Dead bodies heaped up and they're lying there and they're just skin and bone absolutely starved. You know, there's some dreadful things, they've done it, they've done it, they did it in the Balkans a couple of years ago you know,

33:00 Kosovo and all around there. Demanding humanity to man. So I fight like hell for the underdog and I work for the St Vincent De Paul. It gives you an insight into life that when you've got life you know how lucky you are, how fortunate you are to come out of it. And the young people of this country, you think that bombing

33:30 you had up at, what was it up at the islands there, that was nothing. I'm not saying it was nothing but it was nothing in comparison to what has happened and how it affected the people here in this country if you lost someone through that and that's what we've got to look to now. And I hear them be so critical of people in the forces now and intelligence and that. You can only work on supposition 90 times you can't get 100 percent proof on anything but you've got to take care that you, if

34:00 it happens that you're ready. When Muriel and I travel, money belts, you know, we're very, very careful. We watch where we go. Very, very careful, it's a very dangerous world out there and Australia's become likewise. I mean especially in those Western Suburbs [in Sydney], young men walking the streets and getting knocked over for their mobile phone and their money. Well

34:30 this is happening all the time over in Europe, there's that many people wandering. When I was in Italy I was walking along the streets there. I was with Odyssey, which is University of Wollongong, they run these tours you know and it's mostly people that's ex-academics and school teachers and all that jazz you know. But we get entrée into places that normal tours don't go.

35:00 And this lady had begging, looked very good and she was from one of the other countries that had been at war, and she had fled into Italy but she was a beggar, and I had won money on the Melbourne Cup sweeps and I went over and I gave it to her and the most beautiful English language she said, "God

35:30 bless you madam, thank you," a cultured lady out begging. I goes around the street and here's another one, a man this time, and they had no country you see. When you see these things it makes you think you know how lucky are we in this country, how lucky.

When you were in Indooroopilly did you know of the progress of the war?

36:00 Oh yes, we were always informed. Yes, oh yes. But then we were informed normally no different from any other person who was in the newspaper. It was only when the war, when they first ran into Belsen and that they sent a special film to show us what they got, it was horrifying. And of course one of our fellows who was taken prisoner, when he flew and his plane blew up over Germany, and he,

36:30 near the end when the Germans were on the run and these persons, they were marching them to the ovens, only the Russians got in and released them. See so you don't know how close you are at times. And I just, my friend and I we just sent money away to Sandakan victims, two thousand Australian's slaughtered.

37:00 And they're building, they've got a church there and they're putting in windows now and they've collected I think it was $80,000. And they've got these beautiful, beautiful windows that are going to go in and they are going to send us photos of that. And the man who is doing the windows is a great artist on glass and he has come out of retirement because one of his friends died at Sandakan. Now why they

37:30 died was, we were ready to get them out and MacArthur had other plans and it was put off. So we lost two thousand men, they were slaughtered, died on the way, march, death march. They were Australian boys.

We should change the tape here and talk about that.

Oh I don't know a great deal about that, I only know but…

Tape 5

00:35 **And so tell us what you knew about the Sandakan.**

Well I don't know a great deal, I only know what's been reported. But what actually happened and we hear it you know you hear it sort of what's called the underground you know. Your special force of Australians were being trained to go in

01:00 and rescue them. They were prisoners of the Japanese and they were on the Island of Sandakan, I wish I could get in there and get the paper, I'm not terribly sure on it, but it's very vital history in our wars, that there is. Anyway they, the Japanese war was almost at an end and the Japanese knew that they were beaten and of course they had done so many terrible atrocities that they were frightened too to get caught. Now

01:30 in the eyes of a Japanese if you become a prisoner you were worth nothing because they used to commit hari kari on themselves, disembowel themselves. So they had nothing but distain and contempt for the Australian soldier because they thought he should have killed himself, he shouldn't have become prisoner. So when the war was finishing and coming to a close, and it was quite close they put them on a march and some

02:00 of the poor beggars had been, were suffering with beri beri [vitamin B1 deficiency] and undernourished and everything and they were falling by the wayside and they would either bayonet them or shoot them. And it ended up out of over two thousand men that only six came out alive. Now three or fours dead now and I think there's only two left. It was unspeakable what they went through. And there is this church and they are going

02:30 to put in these memorial windows and there's going to be a memorial book and they call it, they just asked you know about. I wish I could, I'll get the bit of paper before I go. And they're going to send us photos of this Sandakan and I think this is something that your group should get into this and have, you know, these windows, they're not done yet, they're still being made in this cathedral. And it's

03:00 sort of like a thank you to the locals of Sandakan because they were native-type people. Malaysian I think or something description, I'm not terribly clear on it. But I knew about all our men that died and they had this death march, there was over two thousand of them.

When the prisoners of war came back from Changi and…?

Changi and the Burma Railway and all that and in Japan, yeah.

And they stayed near you,

03:30 **how long were they there for?**

Oh they were only over, they only came out for the day. They were on a ship, they brought them back. Now remember I told you about that girl, her father, you know that the Japanese officer, Joyce Crane, his name was Crane and Crane was a bird in Japanese, the bird crane, a crane you know. So he took the name apparently his Japanese name was a crane so he took

04:00 the word, the English word cane. Now Joyce, she went up to Japan and she brought these fellows back

and they were feeding them on this baby food and that sort of thing. Now when they landed in Brisbane, that was I think their first port of call, they were on board the ship, the boys, the Queenslanders, they took them off. The other boys were boys from Melbourne, you know Adelaide,

04:30 Western Australia, the boat was going around. And they were dropping, the army would then take them, a lot of them had to go to hospital they were in the hospitals and things they had to be looked after but they got them home to their families and the families would know. Now the sad thing was, and this is really sad, when some of these men came out of the telephone booth they were weeping

05:00 and their mothers or family were on the phone to tell them that their wives had left them. “Where’s my wife?” “She’s gone off somewhere else, married someone,” or not married, gone off. Or they had deaths in the family or something, you know, and they had gone through so much. And

05:30 it was quite upsetting. They looked like skin and bone, they were so thin. And this lives with you, and you come out of it and you think, “I hope to God we never have another war.”

06:00 We saw the result of it straight after the when we were in the RSL [Returned and Services League] we saw so many of them. They were sort of ‘bomb happy’, we used to call it. They would go off their mind every so often and the boys’ mates would look after them.

06:30 You’d never get them, you’d never get them, you know, somebody saying, “Oh what a damn fool he is,” or, “what’s he doing?” They’d go and look after them, it was just wonderful. And then there was so many women left with little kiddies, no husbands, it was so sad. And that’s where Legacy came in. Actually, my husband and I worked very hard for Legacy, and

07:00 Cronulla was the second-highest raising of funds in this state, City of Parramatta raised more than us. And we’d have all sorts of functions and nights and we had, we used to have the RSL would have the big Christmas party for the kids. And then what we would do, we’d set up a tent because people would bring their picnic baskets and that, they used to have it over at you know the Kurnell over at the Royal

07:30 National Park, not that one, the one on the water over at Kurnell. And they’d have a big picnic there and they’d set it up with tents and they’d set up the ablutions, which is the toilets, you know the tins, and they do it all just like an army camp and there’d be at least a couple of thousand there you know. And the little Aborigine kiddies that use to live along the caves along there and over the water there at that other point where

08:00 the tanks are. Oh what’s the name of it? Something Bay over there, they would come in and they would run in the races and they wouldn’t say anything and they’d always give them a present you know. And we’d have, we’d have these mothers with their children, and they were so good, they looked after the kiddies. And so there was a lot of mateship just after the war, those that came

08:30 back looked after those wives and kids that didn’t. And we had some wonderful things, doctors that worked for nothing, dentists that worked for nothing. Not as strong today because to start with, we have been very fortunate that we haven’t lost a lot of men. Most of its accidents and things like that. And we’ve lost nobody up in that other turnout up in

09:00 what is it? Not Baghdad, you know where I mean, up there. We haven’t actually lost, we only lost one with an accident. See even now you know you watch it, you watch it all the time. And my opinion is that I think our Australian soldier is a better trained man. He is trained tougher and the Americans are too soft, this is the trouble, this is how they get into trouble. And quite frankly,

09:30 in Vietnam, our boys didn’t work with them. They were a menace, they’d be on pot [marijuana]. Even I had one Vietnam officer, not officer, sergeant came out from the camp we were doing a run in the local papers. I used to write for the local paper they would come out once a week. I’d do Legacy [association for families of war veterans] features and I also used to write for the

10:00 monthly journal for the RSL. And it was Legacy week and I wanted somebody special, you know, to put on the front page and I rang the army camp and they sent me this man out and he said to me then, he said, “We didn’t want to be with them, they were high on pot and they had bloody transistors,” and of course you got the enemy. Now when Muriel and I were in Vietnam last,

10:30 last October, last October twelve months we went into Vietnam, we went right up to Hanoi and right down into Saigon and went into Cambodia and then to Angkor Wat and our first little, our first little guide the chap we’re at these ruins and that and they said, “He was Viet Cong.” I said, “Oh yeah, tell him we’re two World War II soldiers.”

11:00 And they, and he come and I said, “Ask him if we can have a photo taken.” I said, “We’ll show these to our Vietnam boys,” you know, here, have a go at one another, have a look fraternising with the enemy sort of thing. And he put his arm around me and he could feel the fat and the poor…got quite excited. And we had a couple of, the next group were in their ’70s, you know, and they’re laughing their head off. They said, “You two girls are

11:30 carrying on.” And he showed them that, but he’d help us over all the rocks and everything. Now the next fellow when we came down, down to Saigon he was saying, he said, “I was only a 12-year-old boy,” he said, “And I worked in the camp.” And he said, “They taught me how to speak like this,” he said, “The

man was a Georgian." And we said, "Oh yes we know," because he

12:00 had the Georgian twang you know. He was telling us then he made, like, he used to run messages and do everything for the soldiers and his mother would do laundry and that. See a lot of women who lived… Anyway he said that when his kids, his kids see the war on TV [television] he said it doesn't register

12:30 with them at all. It's just like another comic. See, different world, that's even his, and of course his children would be better than a lot of kiddies because Muriel and I were in Nui Dat it was and this woman come along and she had all these little children running amuck and they were grabbing hold of us and she was like a real, she had these little orphans and

13:00 she had them out as beggars. I went up to her and said, "You miserable creature." You know, poor little ones with their hands out. You know it's so sad and then there was a lot that had lost limbs and, see, even the boys that were in Vietnam will tell you it was a farce. You know they'll admit to it now that we should never have been there and I knew that.

13:30 I happened to mention it once, they were talking about Vietnam at the time and I said something and Ben kicked me, my husband kicked me. I spoke out of turn and I thought, "Shut up."

Can you tell us about the American women who came to your town?

Yes right. Well the American women were called WACs [Women's Army Corps], Women…or something WACs. And

14:00 I was in Indooroopilly and I was the mess sergeant, I ordered all the grog [alcohol]. And we had three girls who'd been cooking demonstrators in private life they were on the catering side and I used to go out around the different camps you see and I used to go to a disposal. Now when a unit went away everything had to be handed in they had to be given all new equipment.

Sorry, the microphone again

14:30 **has dropped. When you unbuttoned your blouse there.**

Oh did I? Oh God.

You can unbutton that top one if it makes you more comfortable. If you're getting hot just unbutton it if you want to. As long as you're comfortable.

Yeah.

We want to be able to hear your stories.

Ok good. What was I up to?

The WACs.

The WACs. Anyway

15:00 I used to do a trade-off, you see, and I'd say, we had the sergeants' mess and it, just to give you an idea the floors were made of Silky Oak timber, it was war time, they had to get it wherever they could. And the walls were very good timber and we used to polish the floors with sump oil and kerosene. We'd do it and it would shine like glass, you know.

15:30 We had this cook, Ivy, darling girl, big fat country girl, and these three lasses in cipher, they'd been cooking demonstrators in private life so they took her in hand and they really trained her to be a top chef. And we entertained some top brass in our unit, down in our mess. And I was the mess sergeant, we all had jobs these were all voluntary jobs, and I used to buy all the grog from the

16:00 canteen services. Now a bottle of beer was one and eight pence, that's a shilling and eight pence that's 10 cents and oh, say, would have been about 16 cents, right. But we charged two shillings, 24, so that was four pence we made on every bottle of beer.

16:30 And we used to get, you know, some scotch and things like that, but mostly it was the beer. Now we were allowed as sergeants to have a guest, you know, a military guest because some of our people were army, navy air force and they would come. And we had permission to break them up to our mess and have them as a guest. But we would have what we called a 'formal mess' every so often, now when we had a formal mess was when the auditors came in

17:00 to do our books and they were always delighted to do the lady sergeants' books because we were the only unit, the only mess that had a profit. All the others were always down the drain, and of course they knew it was party time, see. So Long Pocket [?], that was where the men's' camp were, the sar [sergeant] major there, I'd say, "We're having a formal mess, I think we'll have it about next month such and such a date,

17:30 can you assist?" So the sergeant cook and the sar major always got an invitation. They would get a suckling pig from somewhere around the country, don't ask me where they got it. And the sergeant of the mess would dress it and have it all ready to cook, you know be killed and dressed. They'd buy it a

baby little piglet, see, you know. And when I'd go to the

18:00 disposal, I'd say, "Now righto boys, what have we got interesting this time?" "Oh we've got this, we've got this Cath." Because two of them, they'd get an invitation, and you don't get an invitation for nothing, and they would get an invitation and anyway it was cutlery or things like that. And then these great big cylinders, you know, that the PMG, big cables come around, we got those and some of the boys,

18:30 sergeants from Long Pocket came over and made lovely little tables out in the greenery at the side of the mess, away from all the vision, but so to dine out, you know to have a drink outdoors. And we entertained some very famous people. Sir Ernest Fisk, his son was a major, we had him to dinner. We had, there's another fellow his father was in the parliament, I

19:00 forget his name now, he was in the battle of Alamein. I can't think of his name, he was a major, we had him. But I'm getting down to the American WACs. So we'd have these boys from our camp and like all my different ones that could contribute, you know everybody had to contribute. And all the drinks and everything was free because we'd, it was out of our, we buy all this, we'd pay for all this out of our funds out of our mess funds because we all had to pay mess fees. And

19:30 Ivy, we had her trained like a top quality chef, she was a darling girl. She'd come off a really hard poor farm you know. And I think, I don't think she had every enjoyed herself so much in all her life because we'd come in and give her a cuddle and, "How are you darling? What have you got for us tonight?" You know sort of thing. Anyway the WACs came so we sent an invitation to the American

20:00 headquarters that we would have a formal mess and the lady AWAS, the AWAS, the Australian Women's Army Service sergeants would like to entertain likewise sergeants in their mess and after dinner at night it was open house and we were inviting male guests and that was the fellas, you know, hanging on. And the boys were quite excited about these, they thought they were all going to get Greta Garbos and you know, all these famous film

20:30 stars. Anyway in they come and they sat down and they didn't have anything because they didn't have a sergeants' mess in the military, in the army in the military government. Even the men, they all had to eat with the men and the women, they just all ate in the ordinary mess. Anyway you've never seen such a hard looking lot of faces in all your life. They were tough nuts, I'll tell you. And our boys had come over all excited afterwards and thinking they were all going to meet

21:00 these girls, and they'd all look like the Hollywood version. Sergeant major, I remember him saying to me, "God all mighty Cath, I wouldn't like to have a go at her." I think, well, they were, they'd been in the army and I think they were pretty hard nuts in those days you know. And it was really, really very funny, but they told us that it was the best meal they'd had since they'd been in the army. But what they did there, they had pork and they called it

21:30 Spam [canned pork]. And it was like canned pie only more fat, oh it was horrible. But the whole thing was, too, even in New Guinea they'd drop in equipment to have ice cream. Our boys never had ice cream, they'd have heart attack and they could live and that's what happened a lot of these fellows when they were on long marches as prisoners, they were falling down because they didn't have the stamina. And also Ben told me you'd have to watch your boots because they'd

22:00 crawl in and snatch the boots from under your tent because the shoes they had fall of their feet, not made properly you know, and anyway, but that was it. Anyway we had one lass she, her brother died as a pilot in Britain and there was only her and her brother, the father and the mother was dead and they had a big sheep property up back country probably out Kulnura or somewhere around there

22:30 and he came down to visit her and he came down to our mess, we asked permission we had him for lunch and we had the bar and I had when I'd been to this disposal I got a lovely big piece of brass, it had come off a ship or somewhere so you could put your foot on it. And you know the cutlery we had was army stuff and he said, "You haven't got any nice decanters or anything." And we said, "No we haven't got any decanters." He said, "I'll send you some."

23:00 And he sent us a box of crystal decanters, beautiful stuff he stripped it out of, out of the thing. What actually happened, when her brother was killed, I don't know, he said, "You're now got to take his place and serve your country." She was in cipher, lovely girl. I lost track of her, you lose track of people you know there's so many. But they were the sort of girls…they, we had Helen, then we ran, we ran

23:30 for the War Bonds. We ran Princess of the Forces and this girl Helen Vendervan, beautiful girl, beautiful sculpture, you know, beautiful high cheekbones, oh, that sculpture, beautiful frame, beautiful looking girl. So we made, we put her up for our princess and we had things and the boys down at Canungra who weren't getting any leave, we had a direct line to them on the switchboard and on the nightshifts we'd ring them down

24:00 and they ran poker turnouts and all sorts of things and they raise a hell of a lot of money and we won, we won. We were princess and anyway here she was in her military uniform with a tiara on her head on one of the wagons you know. And these boys, they got special leave, they all came up in Brisbane, they were all along the side and they have what they called a blanket muster, and they put the blanket out and people throw money in.

24:30 And that was for War Bonds you know but this money would got to the Red Cross, the money in the blankets you know for the military hospitals. And as we came down there was a song. Around her hair she wore a purple ribbon, la la la da da da, I can't think of all the words, but it was our patches, you see, in the C Corps, and the purple in it you see. I can't think of the words now I used to know it quite well. And these boys sung that song right through

25:00 Queen Street in Brisbane. So you know we had some fun times too.

What about in the camp again, with girls, I was interested by what you said about the abortion clinic, girls who were pregnant?

Well we only happen to, we had one girl who reported sick and we, you know, the nurse

25:30 straight away, they knew she was haemorrhaging. And then it was two girls and we never knew a thing about it and it must have been pretty bloody crude, wherever they did it, where it might have been in, God knows where they did it. You know because we had bush around us and God knows what. And where they did it, it must have been there if it's anywhere. I think the girl had septicaemia. But they, because I was administrative sergeant, I knew about it,

26:00 the others didn't, and that girl's name was never mentioned and those two were just removed very, very quietly. And I think but it's like, life, the girls were pretty innocent in those days, they didn't have the pill or anything like that. There fiancé was going away, and I mean they'd been good girls for a long time, right, and the fellas, they had intercourse and

26:30 they fell pregnant, right, because they didn't have any preventatives, they didn't know about it. We were very, they didn't know, girls didn't have the knowledge that they have now. And anyway if a girl, even a girl in civilian life, if you had a baby out of wedlock that was dreadful, oh it was a shameful thing. Your family was disgraced, your family oh, your grandmother will tell you about that. And anyway, it was kept very quiet.

27:00 And as I say being an administrative sergeant, even that murder that created, you know, that it wasn't common knowledge. Quietly done, you know, these things are done very quietly and of course our camp commandant she wasn't any guides runner, she was the daughter of a big publican and she knew life, you know what I mean. Captain Ryan, she'd dead now, wonderful lady.

27:30 We had the mistress of the brigadier in our camp, I won't mention her name, she could be still alive. And it was his birthday and the Bellevue Hotel in Brisbane, it was destroyed, it was near the Botanical Gardens, but it was a very exclusive hotel and it was a birthday dinner for him. And it was his, him and his 80 comp

28:00 and a couple of his officers and her and madam, Captain Ryan was asked to be hostess. And I didn't know this lass said to me, "Cathy would you come," she said, "There'll only be Captain Ryan and me and I'd like," well of course, I'm only a sergeant see, and she's a sergeant, and I thought, "Oh the Bellevue, oh boy," you know,

28:30 that was really stepping high you know, I though, "Boy oh boy that'll be great." Anyway here I sit down and my partner's a bloody old major, you know, old bugger he was. Slapped his hands, you know. And he said to me, "I'd like to meet you again." I said, "Oh yes?" He said, "I could have a car at the gates for you, but I couldn't get out, but my chauffer will get you." I said, "Listen I don't have to go to any gates," I said,

29:00 "My fellas a sar major." And I said, "He takes me to Leonard's." I said, "So you're not giving me anything," you know. And anyway, but Captain Ryan, she sit there and she saw me, she knew I was only to sort of balance the figures you see. "Good evening, sergeant." I said, "Good evening, Ma'am." Anyway you wouldn't believe it,

29:30 two days later we had a parade and this major was an inspecting officer and I had my group there as sergeant and he looked at me and I said, "Good morning, Sir." And he said, "Good morning, Sergeant." And that was it, he didn't say anything else. Yeah.

Can you tell us some more about Captain Ryan?

Well she was a very gracious lady. Very well schooled

30:00 and a perfect ma'am. But she was like us the general orders the ORs and all the different orders they were all in a mess. You know these army orders, oh my God there was books of them. And she said, "I can't make head nor tail," and I'm telling Ben, who was a sar major, and he said, "Put me onto her." "Captain Ryan," he said, "Cathy tells me here that you are having trouble with the ORs," and that. She said, "Yes, yes, Sar Major." She said, "We've got that much paper

30:30 work here," she said, "I don't know where to put it." He said, "Just bundle it all up and I'll get it fixed for you." And he took it to his orderly sergeant and he said, "Here straighten that out." He said, "Oh God, what?" He said, "It's for Cathy." And of course another time there I was on duty, orderly sergeant, night sergeant, and there was a call come in and I said, "Oh just hold on Ben," he gave me a ring. He was a sar major, he was, you know,

31:00 a law unto himself to. And he said, I said, “I’ve got to go and get one of the sigs.” I said, “There’s a message here.” He said, “What do you mean, you’re an orderly sergeant, you’re going for sigs,” he said, “Where’s your runner?” I said, “Runner, what runner?” He said, “Oh my God,” he said, “You girls have got to be taught,” you know. He said, “You’re supposed to have runner,” he said, “You don’t run around looking for people. You’ve got a runner to do that.” And of course I told, I said, “Ma’am, you know we’re suppose to have a runner.” And she said, “What’s that?” I said, “Well that’s in case somebody’s got to be got around the camp and

31:30 we’re not supposed to leave the orderly room.” “Fix it up, sergeant, fix it up.” I said, “Sar major suggested.” She said, “Yes Ma’am, that’s ok.” So what happened ism when I was telling you about this fellow who came down from New Guinea, you know, that won the red tab fellow. His sar major was a British fellow, “Attention, dress right.” And here we are we’re practicing for a Bon, it was a big

32:00 Bond march, you know those raise the Bonds, you know, raising money, and the girls were all behind and he said, “What is wrong with you lot?” He said, “Can’t you understand a command?” And I said, “No Sir, we can’t understand his language,” it’s. I said, “We don’t know what he’s saying.” And he looked at me, you know, and he put his hand to his face, he had to have a laugh, you

32:30 know. Normally, you know, you would have got into trouble. But anyway, this sar major, he eventually, was going back to New Guinea and he was posted billeted in my husband’s, which was my fiancé at the time, mess. And he’s at the bar and he said, “Oh I had it made,” he said, “I had all these AWAS,” he said, “I had them running around things.” He said, “And then one of them turned up,” he said, “The boyfriend was

33:00 a sar major,” and he said, “Boy did that kill everything,” you know. And a friend of Ben’s was there and he’s going, pointing to Ben he said, “It wasn’t you?” he said, “Yes.” He said, “Oh, you couldn’t do that to my girl,” he said, “I wouldn’t let you do that.” Anyway they had a few drinks, but anyway that’s the sort of winning.

How did you hear about the end of war?

33:30 I think we might have heard it on the, on a radio. But Ben rang me and he said, “The war is finished, you tell your captain that I am taking you out to the Bellevue tonight for dinner,” you know. And I went in and I said, “Ma’am, I suppose you wouldn’t stop me having leave tonight?” I said, “Ben’s rang me and he wants to take me to dinner.” “No sergeant, no, no that’s alright,” you know. Anyway

34:00 we go up the, was it the Bellevue or the, that hotel was there a few years ago, I think it was the Bellevue but anyway. General MacArthur also had an office there and he had guards on there and of course by the time Ben had met me he’d had a few drinks, you know they’d all met up in the mess and had a drink. And he got a vehicle into town and they weren’t going to let us in.

34:30 And Ben said, “Don’t you dare. I outrank you.” You know they know all these things in the army. And he said, “We’re having dinner, we have a table booked here and my sergeant and I.” And of course, you know when we went in there was some civilians there and honestly when we walked in there was stuff, every time there was stuff coming to the table, champagne and stuff, people were buying us stuff you know. Anyway of

35:00 course Ben was stingy, oh God he was tight and I had to get him back to camp you know. And I’m in the taxi and I got him back to his camp and they, they had to drive me back to my camp. We were lucky to get a taxi. I don’t know what it cost him, Ben just gave him money and there was plenty what ever it was. Anyway, Ben got in and instead of going into his own tent he stumbled into the major’s tent and slept in his bed.

35:30 And I think it was the Bellevue, a lot of water under the bridge since then, dear, you know. And so that was how the war finished, I believe they went mad. And we weren’t in the city, I didn’t come in until that evening you know, we were in camp. But what we did do, we went up we short-sheeted all the officers’ beds [folded the sheets in half to play a treat]. We went up there and short-sheeted them all and made a mess.

36:00 Threw everything up on the ceiling and God knows, it was just mad, you know, exuberance. And some of the girls, some of the officers were very good. We had one girl, she came from a theatrical family and a very well known theatrical family, but I can’t remember the name, and she used to say, “I’d have rather been a sergeant with you, you have a better time,” she said, “There a stuck up mob up there,” she said. And then we had a

36:30 two fellas that come down from New Guinea and this lass and I took them on a barbeque and we’d never barbequed in our life and they had this steak and we were trying to cook it over a bit of fire and the boys are saying, “God Almighty,” they said, “We’ve just had the (UNCLEAR) as bad as this stuff.” They were two boys down from New Guinea, they were nice lads. I think I was dragged along because she was going with one of the fellows you see

37:00 and that was his mate and she said, “Oh come on.” She said, “I promised them a barbeque.” I said, “I’ve never barbequed in my life.” Didn’t know how to barbeque.

And did you, did the women drink in the mess?

Oh yes, yes we all learned to drink in the mess. Yes.

How did you learn to drink?

Well you'd have a shandy [beer and lemonade mix] to start with you know and then

37:30 gradually it would go to beer and then you'd have a whatever, scotch and something. And we all learned to smoke, although I did smoke before I went in, but only one packet of 10 a week, Craven A's. My girlfriend, who was studying nursing, you see, she said she smoked so she put me onto it. But when we went into the army, we all smoked, all smoked. I only gave it up about, when was it, 10 years

38:00 ago. I got pneumonia when I was in the Balkans, ended up in hospital in London. And they said, "Oh she's a smoker. Oh she's a smoker." And I saw this poor old thing lying there, cough, cough. I said, "What's wrong with her?" They said, "She's got," what is the term, emphysema, "Emphysema from smoking." I thought, "God almighty, I don't want to look like that." I gave up smoking like that. I tried to give it up three times before that because when I was with

38:30 Space Track, you know up at the space thing our leader, who was the head he belonged to the Gourmet Society. This is not in the army, this is out of the army. He was in there and he used to bring a suitcase about that big but that was his cooking utensils and that was his clothes. Now he'd been in one of these Special Forces remember like Z special and he had been exposed to shrapnel blow up and he had

39:00 pieces of shrapnel all around him. And because I was ex-army, the other's weren't army see, it used to work it's way out and he'd get blood and you know in those day's you'd wear, you always wore a white shirt, white shirts were the thing. And so that he wouldn't come out on his shirts, he'd have like a lined, like a wrap around, I used to do it for him in the, I'd wrap it around him and then I'd put another

39:30 band around him like flannelette and then I'd put another sheet flat around him. And so when the blood would come through it would go into the flannelette it wouldn't come out on his shirt. Now he was a gourmet, he belonged to the Gourmet Society and we used to get an allowance for our meals while we were away we were in a unit and we'd all throw in. And we had some, the three the three there was two units for the boys and I had my own, I was always treated with great respect.

Can I stop you there and can I change the tape?

Tape 6

00:30 **Ok Cath, I'm going to drag you back in time again.**

Oh God, you're interested in…

You mentioned earlier on when we were talking about Brisbane that the wharfies were on strike.

Yes.

What were they striking about?

Well they didn't want, they didn't think that we should be at war.

And how did the rest of the population handle

01:00 **something like that?**

The soldiers went down and did it. And the American soldiers, or the black men they were working there. And oh yeah, that's dirty history, that's going back, you know that was very bad. Yes, they went on strike and the poor blacks, they had to live on the south side of Brisbane, it was a definite, they couldn't mix, couldn't go over into the city.

It's not very

01:30 **patriotic is it for the wharfies to…?**

That was American. But it wasn't very patriotic but it was a communist controlled thing and at time we weren't cheek to cheek with Russia at the time. We did that later. It was before the Russians come in.

You've talked about the dinner that you had with the American female sergeants.

The WACs.

What contact did you have with American men?

I didn't have a lot because I already

02:00 had an Australian right, but there was great jealousy. But one girl, one of our sergeants, she had a set of

clothing that she used to change into, into his, he had a room in the city. Now I don't know, you didn't ask, you know, you mind your own business, and look, I didn't think anything of it at the time but looking back she must have been

02:30 sleeping over with him. And she'd change into civilian cloths because as an officer, and that was applied to the Australian Army too, you couldn't, they couldn't have an OR lady on their arm. It had to be another officer and if you heard of what some of the fellas said, you know, my God, you know, "Old biddies, who wants them?" and that, you know because we were all fresh and young, weren't we? And

03:00 anyway, she, I'll give you another funny, she told me this was a funny too, she told us all actually. I used to, when I used to order all the grog she'd get me to order some scotch and like a silly girl I'd used to only charge her the price that I was charged. She was probably selling it on the black market making a fortune, but you know I didn't know about those things then, I just thought I was doing a nice courteous thing for a friend right. And anyway,

03:30 she was at the dinner probably at the Bellevue or one of those you know they were the top hotels. And it was a terrible hot day, it had been very, very and when she sat down she said, I don't know whether you people hear this expression today but it was quite common when you've been exhausted, "God I'm knocked up." And they looked at her

04:00 and there was silence and she realised she'd made a whopper [faux pas] and she said, "What's wrong? What's wrong?" And he said, "What do you mean by that?" He got terrified, too, I suppose. And she said, "This heat, it's taken so much out of me," she said, "We get so knocked up with the heat." That's true too.

04:30 And when she came back she thought it was very hilarious. And oh yes, we had luck, you know, as I say we had our brigadier's mistress, and you know knew these things, I mean, we weren't that silly, we were just getting our eyes opened. Because I'd be in the pub and people would say things and I would be, "What are they talking about?" "I'll tell you later dear."

The story there about the person taking the bottle of

05:00 **scotch at cost price, did you see any other instances of people scamming or rorting the system?**

Not really, I wouldn't see it. The only thing, not in the war but later you know when I was doing the Woomera stuff. No, I've got to be honest it could've happened. I know that a lot of like I know this is a fact, I'll tell you this. Akiller Callwall [?] was a famous ace, a famous air ace Akiller Callwall

05:30 but he ran his own two-up [coin game] school in New Guinea, in the jungle. And I mean, what else did the men have to do? Right. My Ben at the time, my brother, my father hadn't met Ben then, and he wrote to me and he said, "Cathy, if I send you a parcel, will you bank it?" That's all.

06:00 So I said to Dad, "Oh Ben, you know the chap I've been going out with, the sar major, he said he'll send me a parcel." I said, "It will be money, this is what he's talking about, and he wants me to bank it." He said, "No. No." My father, "No, no, no. No way, no way. Women don't accept that sort of thing." See right, he said, "A box of chocolates, a pair of gloves, that's it." He wouldn't even accept stockings.

06:30 I'll tell you I painted my toenails once and I got the rounds of the kitchen [I was hit for it]. And anyway I had to write back to Ben and say, "Daddy said I couldn't do it." Well he realised, he thought, "Oh well she comes from a pretty strict family." Anyway, he had nine hundred pounds with him when he's coming back on the boat. He was a very big gambler

07:00 in the early days, until I cured him. And he was playing poker and he had nine hundred in front of him and he thought, "Now that would buy Cathy a house, but if I win a bit more, I could buy her a car." So it was double or nothing and he lost. Now when he come home, he met my family and everything and we had an

07:30 engagement, he bought, he gave me an engagement ring. And Titch Kerr, Kerr's Jewellers used to be in Martin Place, I don't think they're there anymore but Titch was in the army with him. And Ben was always, he always lends money, you know, he had a book, he would always lend money, people would always borrow, he was a very big gambler. Anyway Titch, he said, "What sort of a ring." And I said, "Oh I'd like a sapphire," you know. And he brought me in this sapphire ring with a couple of diamonds and it was wartime

08:00 stuff and you know it had. Anyway, oh, and after we're married, we're married some months and he said, "I better pay Titch for that ring." I said, "What ring?" He said, "Your engagement ring." I said, "What do you mean you've got to pay Titch for it?" "Oh," he said, "Darling, I didn't have any money at the time, I lost it all remember." And he said, "Titch said take this one and when you've got it, give it to me." That's how they were, you know, I thought, "My God," you know. I couldn't get it paid quick enough. Then we were at

08:30 an uncle of his asking to an evening, a card evening and they were playing big money and then all of a sudden Ben threw his cards down, he said, "You are feeding him. You are feeding him every card." He knew it, he knew it every card that dropped. He was, he was 36 years of age, he wasn't a boy, right.

He'd raced cars, he'd ice skated, he'd skied, he'd, you know, done it all,

09:00 gambled and that and how he made his extra money, his cousin had his hire car service and on the weekends, you know the Oriana and the American ships that would come in Ben would go down and he would drive these tourists around. He'd make extra money, he'd get tips and all this sort of thing and then he'd win money on gambling and that. Anyway I knew he had a mickey fit, but when he did that, I felt sick in the stomach. I was sitting there, I think I was not crocheting

09:30 doing a bit of embroidery for God's sake. When it was over, we left and I said, "Ben, I could never handle that again." I said, "I just couldn't handle it," I said, "I just want you to give up this cards business." And he said, "Ok love," and he never played them again. But I was nearly ill when I heard my ring wasn't even paid for. But in his book he had hundreds of pounds that people owed him

10:00 and it was a thing that you'd never ask. That was an honour thing that you pay back your debts, didn't you. But I suppose the other poor devils were in the same boat, they had no money neither. Then we ran into one fellow who was in the, a sergeant in the field with him and he had done two years medicine, like studying at the university and when they were over at the Middle East the doctor had him almost as an assistant

10:30 and he learned more in that time while he was away as a surgeon because the doctor would say, "This is so-and-so," and give him stuff to do and if they had a lot of wounded somebody had to do it didn't they and that was frontline wounding.

What did you know, during all these years '42, '43 and so on, what your brother was up to, what was he doing?

I had no idea. He was in the air force, he would be a very junior, very junior

11:00 and he. See what you got to realise when we came back and as we got older Dad had another family, a girl and three boys. We lost one boy, he got killed outside the home. But that was a toll on Dad, you know what I mean, I mean, he was without to give us a decent education as best he could and then everyone of us went back to school on our own weight. I went back twice.

11:30 And Tom, Tom went through when the war finished and he met this girl in Melbourne and she was a lovely girl and he went back, he went back to study and he was doing uni studies and he was ironing in a dry cleaning place, you know, the model frocks and all that, because these boys could iron and wash as good as any women. And he was doing all that to make this extra money and then he went back into the air force

12:00 and he played, he was at the Christian brothers [school] and he played not soccer, what is it? Rugby. Is it ruby they play? Rugby, the schools used to play rugby, not rugby union, just rugby, I think that's the one is it? Well anyway it's that. Anyway, the officers were playing rugby and he was a rugby player, I think it was rugby, and they'd go back to the mess afterwards and he was only a sergeant and he couldn't go back to the mess. So they said,

12:30 "Well you've got to get rid of this Tom. We'll send you to officer school." He ended up a wing commander.

Being back in Brisbane, how did you deal with the fear about what might happen to Ben or what might happen to your brother?

What when they were away?

Yeah, did you have worries about them?

I think you had them but you put them at the back of your mind. You couldn't dwell on that, you couldn't dwell on that, you know what I mean.

13:00 You always have that hope that they're going to come out of it. That's what kept you going. Hope that they come out of it. I, as I say, I had three times when I was orderly sergeant that I had to tell girls that their husbands had died. They were in the army and the department was there, rang and expected you know, as another army person that you would do the right thing, and we did. I know when girls when their husbands would come back from New Guinea and they

13:30 wanted a bit of leave or extra leave and they would come and say to me "Cathy, I'm going to have a few more days. When will you be orderly sergeant because if anyone's got to arrest me, I'd like you to arrest me." And of course, when I march them in before the CO, you know, for that, I'd say, "Extenuating circumstances, Sir," I said, "Sig so-and-so's husband has come back from New Guinea and of course he had a touch of Malaria when she went off you know and she was nursing him there for a while and they managed to just get a couple of days

14:00 together." "Oh that's no good, Sergeant." I said, "No, Sir, It's pretty sad, isn't it you know." "Oh," you know, "two days confined to barracks." You'd have to give them something. It used to be 30 days and a pound. You know two days confined to barracks, march them out. They used to tell me, "When will you be orderly sergeant?" Of course we had a roster see.

14:30 Of course I would have done the same thing if Ben had of come back.

While we're on Ben, let's go back and you can tell us in more detail about how you two met?

Well, this girlfriend of mine she hadn't seen me and she was down in Sydney, down in Brisbane and I was at Redbank which was up the country a bit. Do you know Redbank at all? Do you know Goodna? You know it's very fast in the train but it was only the old Puffin'

15:00 Billies in those days, steam trains. And she said, "I never see you," and she said how about coming out and meeting a friend of, whatever I can't even remember what his name was and that and we could have a. And I said, "Oh a blind date, I don't want a blind date. Oh," I said, "I could not stand that." She said, "Oh come on Cathy, I haven't seen you for so long." And I said, "Oh alright then." And so she said, "I'll ring you back and make all the arrangements."

15:30 So she said, "Now we're meeting in the Wintergarden Lounge," that was the theatre. The Wintergarden was a top notch theatre back then. And I'm sitting there and of course I had to come down by train, probably a bit early and these two fellows walk in you know slouch hats, boots and everything and desert gear. And they sat opposite and he said, this fellow said to his friend he said, "I think that might be your girlfriend." And he said, "Oh don't be silly

16:00 she's only a baby." You know I was baby-faced, I didn't look, I didn't look 21 or 22, I looked about 16, you know. And I thought he was as old as God and he kept persisting, take me out, take me out, you know. And I used to take a girlfriend along and he said, "Do you think once we could go out without a girlfriend?" And I said, "Oh I think so." And he would then, see my brothers always cleaned my shoes all my life

16:30 so my shoes were never really a good clean in the army and he wouldn't, he would be in town and he would take me around the corner and he would have boot polish and a brush and I would take my shoes off and he would clean my shoes and I'd put them back on. Because everything, he had a batman for God's sake.

What had he been doing in the army?

He was, he was transport and he went into, he was in North Africa.

17:00 And then they went into Greece and then of course they had to get out of Greece and they were out, they just escaped with what they stood up in, with their rifle and their cloths on their back, nothing else. And then, then they went onto Crete and the same thing happened in Crete. And then, and what was his name? Oh God isn't that dreadful.

17:30 I'm trying to think of whatsaname's name. You know the uncle of the queen, oh God, I told you before his name.

Louie Mountbatten?

Louie, yeah, Louie Mountbatten, he got them in to Alexandria Harbour. Now they were pushed on then into Bardia and all around there and it wasn't until later until that the 9th Div [Division] you know the desert fox, what did they call them? The Tobruk rats, they got caught in there but

18:00 he wasn't caught in the Tobruk rats he was at Bardia and other places. But he used to run all through the Atlas Mountains and all through there and down into, down into, right down to Alexandria and what not. He saw a lot of the Middle East and they used to come out of the desert and they would go into Cairo and they'd go and have a Turkish bath, manicure,

18:30 facial, the works and then go to the Monibar [Malamar?] and the air raid would come on but they wouldn't leave they'd still get the grog and put the money in the till. An air raid because they said they were only after military sections and that was down in the native quarters I suppose. So they didn't bomb.

So what was he doing back in Australia when you met him?

He was a sar major. He'd been made a sar major in the Middle East and he came back as a sar major.

19:00 And a pretty good unit, there was quite some good figures. I was trying to think, Crusader Cloth, I can't think of the name, a very old family here. They came into Egypt and they were to be paid and he got a draft on

19:30 the, one of the banks, the English banks. I think Shepherds, no, not Shepherds, no, not that's where they went in Cairo, one of the banks and this fellow paid all his crowd paid them on a draft. That was how well known they were. The family had arranged for him to have a draft on this bank. I forget the name of the bank now. No I can't, it doesn't come to me. All I know

20:00 is they wanted a big rate of interest when I was in Johannesburg. Forget now.

So you met him when he came back from the Middle East?

I met him on that blind date actually.

And then where did he go after that?

Well he went up to New Guinea. He was up there yeah. And they were flying stuff in and you know dumping it out.

20:30 When the, they had their own workshop too everything up there so they used to sell the, make swords for the Americans. Japanese swords for the Americans, they made a few bob on the side. Listen the Australian soldier he will never starve, never starve.

21:00 **As a good young Catholic girl, what was it like for you, what was expected of you when you had a boyfriend?**

Well actually at that period of time, although I still had my religion I didn't go to church because I had a thing, a friend's father had committed suicide and they wouldn't bury him in consecrated grounds because he had committed suicide

21:30 and to me I thought that was wrong because I thought any man or women that does that is not in their right state of mind and I thought that was wrong. Now when I was in Indooroopilly, the priest used to come out and I even set everything up for him. He said, "I don't see you at mass, Cath." I said, "No, I don't go." He didn't push it. Now there was a wonderful priest over at Beverley Hills, I don't know whether you've heard of him, Father Evans.

22:00 He was sunk during the war and picked up by an American croup and ended up in an American hospital and he said mass and various other things. So when the war finished he was given the parish of Beverley Hills. Now they had a staging camp over there for migrants coming in and it was a very poor area and he wanted to build a church. So he went to America

22:30 on a sort of – somebody hammering up there.

Ok.

I think it's the fellow up there doing the tea. He's a school teacher and she's not home until six - and anyway he was in Hollywood, he was in, not really in Beverley Hills he was in there somewhere and he called a taxi to take him to Beverley Hills because he was going to say mass

23:00 there and the taxi driver said, "Oh Father, that's a long way away, that costs you so much." And he said, "Oh I don't think I can afford that." He said, "You wouldn't have some of that lovely creamy stuff you put on bread?" he said, "It's in a tin." And he thought creamy stuff you put on bread that in a. And it was condensed milk. And he said, "Oh no, no I haven't got anything." He said, "Well what sort of cigarettes?" He said, "I've only got Craven A's."

23:30 "Oh," he said, "I'll have them." He said, "You give me a packet of Craven A's and I'll take you up there." And he waited for him. Anyway he did very nicely while he was in America because it was you know over in war time and he'd been in the hospital you know and he said mass and moved among the troops and because he'd been you know that sort of thing. The cardinal in New York got a bit uptight about it because he was making too much money and he got in touch with hierarchy here to have him brought

24:00 home which he did but he built the church. And he used to get all these bets on horses and he never betted, never drank, never betted. But his housekeeper Marie was a friend of ours, group of girls we know but he'd tell her and she would go to the races and back and win and she brought all his beautiful vestments. And when he died – I don't know whether I should

24:30 say this – when he died they were only going bury him in a shroud. Marie said, "No you're burying him in his vestments." "Oh no they're too good." She said, "I bought those vestments for Father and I want him buried in them." And she didn't muck around and so he's buried in them and he's buried at Sutherland. And some years later, about three years later a couple of my friends went over to find his grave, couldn't find a marker, couldn't find anything. Finally tracked it down and here he was they didn't even put a

25:00 marker on his grave. You know that sort of, he was a man who did that and the church couldn't even remember him in his death. You get a little bit uptight about things like that so I'm not glazed in the eyes if you know what I mean.

But nevertheless I expect there was a certain standard of behaviour that you?

Oh God, they were very strict, the nuns, you know that was. And of course you were terrified that you might go home pregnant might

25:30 you. Oh my God. I could imagine my father, oh God, dreadful, Irish Catholic. Terrified.

So what year did you meet Ben?

It would have been, I was 22. That would be, wait a minute, '42, '44, probably '44. Yeah see he come back and then he went up

26:00 to New Guinea and then he came back.

So at what stage was marriage being considered?

Well we just went and got married in a Registry Office. We couldn't afford anything else we didn't have any money. And we just got married. We didn't have a penny. We finally saved up and we bought a block of ground. It cost us £55 at Como. I think the land today there is worth about $450,000 overlooks the water.

26:30 And we subcontracted and we drew up a home. And Harry Devolor, who was an architect, went to school with Ben and he drew all the plans up for us, he gave us 12 sets of plans and you know, and what's-a-names notes and it cost us £12. He was apologising for it because he said, "Ben, I had to pay the typist." Ben said, "What about you?" He said, "Forget it."

27:00 And he ended up building over in Western Australia, you know, when these like North West Cape and all those big places, he ended up like building a town. He didn't go into houses but he built the home, he measured me and everything. You know, did it really nice. And I said to him, "Don't build me one of those square boxes they have up here," I said, "Where that back door opens and they go down the stairs," I said, "No way." I said, "I want a Queensland home." And he gave me,

27:30 almost gave me a Queensland home, it was a T shape place. Because in those days they had a restriction on how many squares you could build. It was very difficult to get past, and even to get lead flashing and things for the bearers and things. Very, very hard.

The fact that you had a wedding in a Registry Office, did that disappoint your father?

I didn't tell him. We

28:00 didn't tell him. We knew it would have hurt him so we didn't tell him. I was what, what was I out there? I was 24, you know, and I thought, "No, he'd be upset," and that sort of thing so I never told him. And he just took it for granted. Well, we had no money and he was, I wouldn't ask him to fly down to Sydney, that didn't happen in those days, he was still raring another family.

28:30 **So he made the assumption that you had been married in a church?**

That's right. Never told him any different.

And did Ben then have to go back on service or he'd finished his service by then?

No he'd finished his service and he went back to a firm that he, it was McEwen's McCarrier and he was the head, head like,

29:00 the head man in the transport. But he, you know, by the time we built our home, which we did, we borrowed £1000, no £1,200, and to borrow £1,200 in 1947, people went, "My God, how are you going to pay it off?" We paid it off in 10 years.

29:30 It was 30 shillings a week. You know, and by the time it was something like nine years when we asked them to give us a serry [?] what it is and we still owed them £900. You know, like the first 10 years you're only paying the interest.

You've told us a lot of funny stories about some of the things that went on in the camp, so you've told us a lot about the fun times, what do you think were

30:00 **the worst times, what were the times that you really hated like in the army?**

Well you had to do some dirty jobs and you had to do some hard things at times. I had one group of girls that came from the north and they were bad eggs. And the camp commandant said to me, "Keep them working Cath, they're moving on but we've got to keep them busy while they're here." And I don't know what they were involved in but it must have been bad.

30:30 And like as I say, the army doesn't advertise everything all the time. Like we had our little problems and they were quietly done away with, well the north sent us these in transit, but to be careful because they were difficult and they were going to be discharged and that's all we had to know. And they decided it was hot and what with whitewashing the bricks and

31:00 doing, you know, doing all the dirty jobs around the place, and I'm out there with them you know. And they went on strike and they went up to the recreation hut and there was a lady officer, complimentary officer from the Salvation Army. And they were up there and I said, "You will report back for duty." "No, we're on strike." I said, "Oh are you?" They said, "Madam

31:30 said it's alright." And I turned around and said, "Excuse me Madam," I said, "You only hold a complimentary officer's uniform," I said, "You're not army, it's complimentary." Now I said, "Do you wish to be involved in this or not?" And she looked at me and said, "No, Sergeant." I said, "Thank you." I said, "Out on that ground, I'm giving you five minutes or every one of you are under arrest." You had to be hard.

32:00 I mean, you couldn't have that sort of thing happen, I mean, once, you know. And this is what happens today you've got to nip things in the bud. Then we had another group come in and they had dysentery, and oh God, that's a worry. And in a camp with a thousand girls, so we put a whole section on the top. Cleaned it all out, moved them all down and we put them under,

32:30 you know, under a curfew, and we had to look after them. You know what I mean, we went in with Lysol and God knows what and we treated them and we never got one outbreak for anywhere else. But you see it was hygiene, it had to be clean. Another thing was like the night soil, you know that those boxes, they were scrubbed clean every day, every day. And

33:00 we had three baths, you wouldn't think it, but we got three baths, I don't know how we got three baths there. We never got bathed anywhere else but I think whoever was doing the job thought, "Oh, they're getting ladies, we better put a bath in." Well they had to be cleaned everyday with kerosene, it would kill anything. But all in all the behaviour was very good and that as I say those incidents of the murder

33:30 and then these girls going on strike, they see this they may remember it.

Were there ever times when you thought to yourself, "God, what am I doing here?"

No, no, I've got to be honest about that. We knew we were under siege. We knew if we didn't do it, we could go under and survival is a very important thing. And we were children of the

34:00 depression. We were all pretty hard. We had one lass who had a fellow who was madly in love with her and he was building roads, he built that big road like, you know, going up to Darwin, he was building roads and he had all that and he would come down in an army plane to see her. And she couldn't stand a bar of him, he wanted to marry her and get her out of the army, no way. Now whether they ever got together after the war I don't know but I

34:30 would say, I can't remember his name, but I would say he came out a millionaire. But that didn't matter, you know, we knew if we didn't do our best we could go under. We knew that.

Did you ever encounter any girls, it was all just too much for them in the army and they had to leave?

Oh there was probably a couple who had a nervous breakdown, but like everything else, it was always

35:00 handled very, very quietly and discretely, and I'll say that much for it. The morale was the important thing. You didn't want any disturbance you know. The morale was very, very important. Like you take that father that sent all that stuff, told his daughter to join up, I mean that's how tight it was. I remember being in Sydney here, this girl, she was a famous, she

35:30 had been living in France – what was her name? – Anne Ross, she was studying painting and her aunt had died and left her £1000. Can you imagine what £1000 was in 1938, '39, '37? She built a beautiful home at Southport. She built it for herself and for her family. She had been living in Paris

36:00 studying there and of course she got out when Paris was going to be overrun. She came back, she joined the army and they put her in the camouflage department. Anyway it so happened when the canteen, the American canteen, she did the big murals for it and Tom Blamey, General Blamey saw it and he said, "Oh that's very good," and they said, "Yes, one of your soldier ladies did that for us."

36:30 "Oh who was it?" "Anne Ross." So she had to go and front up before him and he said, "I want the same." She said, "No Sir, I can't give you the same." She said, "That's American," she said, "If I'm going to paint," she said, "I've got to paint an Australian way for the Australians, not there." And anyway, she did, but she never got invited to the opening because she was only an ordinary old, she wasn't a sig even.

37:00 She was in the camouflage department. Now Anne also rented that to the Americans as a holiday rest camp and they in turn built a very nice attachment down the back for the staff that they, you know the housekeeper and that you know. And when the war finished you know it was under the lend lease

37:30 this man whoever he was came to see her and he said, "We are supposed to demolish this, but," he said, "I for a consideration…" American, I think it cost her a couple of hundred pound. Now she was getting £20 per week for the holiday thing and then when they went we still had some Dutch and that from the East

38:00 Indies she rented it to them but then she got rent for that and rent for the one at the back. And she went back to France, she was a great chum too, we had a lot of fun. And how we become friendly, we were on this trip, it was near the end near about the last 12 months of the war. We were on, I was taking a group at the RTO [Rail Transport Officer], you know, the Rail Transport Officer,

38:30 I was in charge of the group moving down to Keilor in Melbourne. That's what I was trying to think of Keilor, it's now a big suburb it was bush when I was there. And we were in July again, oh God we were cold. And Anne's, all her arty friends were seeing her off and they're all half shattered [drunk], you know, on plonk [champagne] or something. And I had my list and I thought, "Private Ross, Private Ross," I had the RTO

39:00 pager and she come up and I said, "We're ready to board Private Ross," I said, "Are they your friends?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Well you better wish them goodbye." And I said, "Where's your kit?" And she said, "What kit?" I said, "You've got to have a blanket in your kit." She said, "Oh I've only got a change of clothes." And I thought, "Oh dear God." So we were on this palliasses type of thing, it was like just boards that were put in and we shared a blanket. She

39:30 slept the bottom and I slept at the top. Well that made great buddies didn't it. And we did some, we went to a Chinese restaurant once and she said something or rather, we didn't have enough money, she said, "Don't worry," I thought she had it see, she said, "Don't worry," and I said, "Why?" She said, "I'll fix this," and I said, "What?" And she said, "Just watch it," and so she falls on the floor in a faint. She was no more fainted than fly and of course everybody rushed to help her and the poor old Chinese

40:00 fellow and that and she said, "I'm too ill to eat, I'll have to go." And I, "Oh Anne," she said, "Well that was a good way, we didn't order much, did we?" She did a walking tour with another painter and they were doing to the, that was at the forest in Germany, I forget the name of the forest, it's very well known. Anyway, they were sure they made a certain amount of money in each stop

40:30 so that they were carrying a lot of money and they weren't vagabonds you see, of course you can get knocked over and robbed. So they put like put the money in different towns and they'd go and collect it at the post office or whatever it was. Anyway she…

I'm going to have to stop you there Cath because the tapes just run out.

Ok.

Tape 7

00:32 **By the way, before we go on, I just want to ask you something, what did you think of General Blamey?**

Not good. The men stood out in the desert for bloody hours to see him and all he did was come past in a jeep and that was it, threw the dust up in their faces. His son

01:00 they sent a special plane in, I don't know whether it was Greece or Crete, to bring him off and everybody else was out the best way they could. He sent the plane in for his son. No, he wasn't well thought of. And then there was another officer, I can't think of this name, he was in charge of the punishment camps,

01:30 and he was despised, absolutely despised because in the old system they had what they called 'the wheel'. They'd strap a man to the wheel in the sun, that was the English idea. Or they'd have a mountain of bricks and they'd pick them up and they'd put them over the other side and then when they got them all stacked they'd pick them up and put them back again. And some of those provos

02:00 were really bad, hard men. The original ones were very good, as Ben said when they were having you know like when they were sort of retreating they stood their posts and guided them out right, you know stood their posts and some of them probably taken prisoner. They stopped in the end but then they got another lot and it got a bit shall we say too

02:30 much power and they, they were mongrels. That was the provos [Provosts – Military Police]. And one young man was a provo and he was very keen on me, I wouldn't have a bar of him just because I said, "You're collared," I wouldn't touch him. I actually stood up and challenged the boss there too in Queensland my boss, Major Ryan laughed she knew it was me. And I said, "Sir," I said, "You have the women provos meeting us off the trains,"

03:00 I said, "We've come probably travelled from the south to come," and I said, "We're tired and we come off and we're not A1 [in the best condition] in our dress and hair," and I said, "But you could think to be consideration that we're tired." But I said, "No," I said, "They're drubbing the girls and fining them and all this sort of thing." And I said, "I don't think that is the right thing." I said, "There is a lot more important things for your provo girls, ladies to be doing and the men as well." And

03:30 he didn't say too much, but as he was coming out with his entourage at the end he said, "I'll clip your ears back." He never did of course.

Where any harsh physical punishments given to the women soldiers?

No not that I know of, never, never. Oh no you wouldn't raise your hand to anybody oh no. You'd charge them or put them on a sheet but you'd never, oh no.

04:00 I mean I know you've heard about some of these people that you know that say there's bullying and that sort of thing but what you've got to realise is that that Special Forces, they're tough boys. I mean they have been up in that country up there and there's not one of them been killed. I mean they are tough. Now I'll give you an instance, and I can't verify this because it's only been told to me, but one man was found

04:30 cheating onboard ship and they threw him overboard. Another man broke away he had VD [Venereal Disease] or venereal disease and he came on leave and cohabitated with his wife and gave her the disease and when he came back he accidentally got a bullet, didn't he. And then there was another turn out

05:00 they were coming in a plane over the Marker Valley which is full of air pockets and they had Japanese, three or four Japanese prisoners with their arms tied around their back, but not their feet sitting down in the plane and a bit of a gabbering going on and the plane started to rock under that. The next minute they ran towards the tail and the tail went like that, they got them back down, got them down level and the light came on, discard

05:30 cargo. It was them or them. I mean well its war it's terrible but it is.

As a 21 or 22-year-old girl, did you find it hard to discipline other females?

I used to worry about it at time, but then again you've got to

06:00 realise that I came out from a very disciplined life and I was used to taking orders and obeying. And I wasn't homesick like other girls because I'd been from pillar to post [moved around a lot] in a way you know. I had no mother to cling too, my father was away and although I had these lovely people who looked after me they weren't,

06:30 my mother and father they had their own children. So you get a certain shell and you either go under or you can't be overrun. I just look at all my young families now and they're, they're really strong. They're thinners, tough Irish.

We never really cleared up why was your father away so much early on?

07:00 Well, he was a member of the military forces. I've got his papers there.

What was his connection to Australia? Why did you come to Australia?

Well, my grandfather had been in the Sailing Clippers and in the potato famine in 1850, there was a million people died of starvation, and I think a million people left the country. Now you've got to remember in those days women had

07:30 six, seven, eight, 10, 12 children. We weren't as poor as some of them because we had a fairly decent life, but some of the poor beggars, especially on the west coast, when I was in Ireland I went to have a look and it's just a poor as ever, they were living in little brick humpies and things and all they were growing was potatoes and of course you got that disease and they were starving and this is

08:00 where the bitterness came in. Queen Victoria was on the thrown at time and they appealed to her to send food and she refused. Now there was a lot of problems in Ireland, you know what I mean, it goes back a long way. And really when you think of it, it is a lot of rubbish that they should forget about it. And they are doing very well at the moment now with the common market. But property was terrible, and I think we were brought up very hard.

08:30 No it, you learn to accept what life handed out to you and make the best of it. And of course my father, here he is he's got three children and he didn't get married again until I was nearly 16, that was eight years and he was paying board for us. He had to pay board, these people can't take us for nothing. He had to pay board for himself

09:00 and even on that he was working for St Vincent De Paul and on the Catholic Ball Committee you know.

So again what your grandfather was a sailor and he come to Australia?

He come to Australia, yes, I got off the point. And he said to Dad, "If you're going to migrate, go to Australia." He said, "America, there is that many there and the poverty is so great." Poverty was terrible in America when these people were there

09:30 and the Irish were almost as low as blacks and especially the well-to-do [rich] treated some of those people like shit, excuse the expression, but they did. But the joke was that the Irish girls where so beautiful that their sons married them. Beautiful skins and we always say, you know, we are a product of two lots. The

10:00 pillage of the Danes and you know the Vikings, that's the fair ones. And the rape and pillage of the Spaniards on the coast, and you'll see them, that dark curly hair and the high cheekbones, that's the Spanish influence. And the fair blonde, that's the Vikings and the Danes that have came in and raped and pillaged. It's true, you know.

10:30 These young fellows see a lot of the other girls come from Europe and they came out of a different background. Mind you, there are some beautiful Russian girls today, and it's a funny thing you know, my nephew is married to one.

One more thing about life in the barracks there, what were you eating, what was your daily fare?

Well, we had butter which was canned, and that

11:00 tasted like, you know, rancid at times. And they we used to get M and V [Meat and Vegetables], we could come into the camp and you could smell it, that was meat and vegies out of a tin and we'd say, "Oh God, not meat and vegetables today. Errr ickie, ickie," you know, and that was that. And then mutton and we'd get plenty of greens, plenty of salads, you know plenty of salads, tomatoes, lettuce,

that's like that girl said, "We've got to eat livestock with our vegies," you know.

11:30 And, but we always knew when we got VIPs [Very Important Person] coming because we got ice cream. "Oh," we'd say, "There's a VIP coming." You'd always get ice cream because they'd always make a point of walking through while the mess, while everybody was at mess. You're being well fed, looked after, you know.

What about breakfast?

Breakfast, I couldn't have been terribly

12:00 marvellous. Oh that's right I remember when we first went into Ingleburn we were dying of starvation, we couldn't get enough to eat and they had bread on the table, bread you know slices of bread and jam, no butter, jam. And you'd be that bloody hungry you'd grab a piece and jam it. I put on weight terribly. And anyway, then we had porridge, and I didn't eat porridge, I couldn't handle it. It was really

12:30 gluggy, you know, like glue, but we existed. I think we might have occasionally got, oh that's right, egg powder, they had egg powder. It was like scrambled egg, but you know it was always watery, but you ate it, there was nothing else. And none of us died of starvation, you know, hard tack [hard lifestyle].

Were you able to supplement your diet with stuff you bought yourself?

Couldn't

13:00 afford it. I think, I can't remember whether I got five shillings a day or seven and six pence when I was a sergeant. Half of it went in my mess bill, I entertained a lot. Yes, well, two bob, two shillings for a bottle of beer you could have a friend up there goodness me. If you got five shillings a day you know like that was a day's wages wasn't it.

13:30 **Where there any other personal expenses you would incur in the army?**

Very little a bit of make-up, you know, you'd have to buy that. There was a lot of things that you couldn't buy you know they were off the, you know off the market. Our greatest problem was bobby pins. We always had our hair you know we used to wear our hair, we'd have a roll and we'd have the bobby pin in to keep the roll, you know, tidy. And they used to have a hairdresser

14:00 come to the camp and it was a small supplement, you didn't have to pay much but it was a small supplement. But she was an army girl and she was supposed to give you a special haircut, but I think if you slipped her a shilling you got a better cut. So of course we always slipped her a shilling and that. But these bobby pins, you'd get them and you'd put them in your roll and you'd roll your hair. Well, we kept losing them and you couldn't buy them. And if somebody had some bobby pins you would have heard it, "Oh please Mary, lend me two

14:30 bobby pins?" "No, no you might lose them." "Oh look, we're going out. Look, I've got to look a bit decent. Surely to God you could lend." "Oh no," but then in the end they'd give them to you because they'd come to you, see, and then you'd let your hair go a bit. And the minute they come in, "Where's my bobby pins?" And that was sort of the big thing. And then of course there was the one time there, I must tell you about this. I was going up to Redbank and this is before I met Ben and this young American came on board and it was at

15:00 a camp up there, it's now a prison camp. But he was in camp up there and he got talking and he was a nice young man and we were talking there about army gear and that and I said, "Look at those miserable damn, look at those," I said, "Look at those Lyle stockings." I said, "I can't even have…" He said, "I'll get you some nylon stockings." And of course that was a very big thing. Anyway I thought, "Oh yes," and he said, "Would you come to the films with me," you know I said,

15:30 "Oh alright," up at Goodna I think it was or somewhere and anyway the next day I'm on duty in the camp commandant's office, just off there with the switchboards, and the corporal…and although I might be working the board some of it there was other work they'd bring in stuff for me you know for priority stuff and all that to go through all that. This big Don R [dispatch rider], the American big, American Don R

16:00 come up the thing, great big thing and into the thing and, "I have a special delivery for Corporal Nolan," you know. The camp com [commandant] said, "God almighty, what's Cath been up to?" And the sar major, the one that found us in the brothel, you know, he got it and said, "She's on duty." You know he wasn't going to let me come off, "She's on duty. I'll sign for

16:30 it." I could hear this and he came in and said, "What the hell, what have you got here?" I said, "I think they're nylon stockings." And they were and the girls said, "Oh God, aren't they gorgeous," but I couldn't wear them. The provos would have picked us up, but I put them away special, you know. Anyway I had dinner with him and we went to a show and then I think he was shipped out. I didn't hear

17:00 from him anymore. He was a sergeant, too.

Did the girls ever go for a night on the town?

If they did, they didn't let on. As long as they were in by 23.59, as long as they got in on there. One time I went to Toowoomba it was a special, I had an overnight pass. And I got the train in Brisbane, South Brisbane and got the rail train up to

17:30 Toowoomba and it was a special army turnout that was on and one chap I knew asked me to go. And then he put me on the, he put me on the mail train coming back at 3am in the morning and then I got back into Brisbane, I think it was 5.30 and I had to get out to my camp by 6 o'clock, just made it. No, I don't think, girls didn't do the things

18:00 that girls do now, you didn't have the money or the, it just wasn't on, it just wasn't on. We loved dancing though there was one place we used to go to and that's when we really did a lot of jiving, you know oh that was fantastic, we loved dancing it was great. And the American boys, they could really jive you know. It was really good.

18:30 **What would you wear, how would you get prepared for that?**

Uniform - never had anything else. Oh no you were in your uniform there was only that one and I told you I think she used to change and as I say, I don't know. You know it never entered my head that she could have been sleeping with him. It never entered my head, truly, because those things didn't happen see. She said, "Oh I change

19:00 in the hotel," and I just naturally thought, well, you know, she changed and that because she couldn't go into the American Officers Club as a sergeant, just couldn't.

Who organised these dances?

Oh there'd be the canteen fund and then there was another group that, there was nearly all ex-service, nearly all service personnel that went to it, you wouldn't see any civilians.

19:30 I don't think they would be game to come. They would be standing out like a sore thumb you know. Although in the Brisbane Town Hall they used to have a very special dance. And I'll tell you about the night cart [collector of waste], we used to call him 'frangipani'. And it was my job, it was one of my jobs to record how many pans were taken out and how many new pans come in because we

20:00 got billed right, everything had to be kept. And I would meet him at the entrance and I would and the pans that he was taking out, those boxes weren't on it see they were left onto one side. And I would say, "You've got a hundred pans block so-and-so, so-and-so, and so-and-so, and they would have to be replaced you see each day. And I would meet him at the entrance he was

20:30 coming in and we chatted on quite well, he was the night man, he was doing a job, wasn't he. Anyway, I'd have an offsider with me, you know the sort of different things, if there was a bit of point that she had to go up and show him something special. Anyway, we're at this dance at the Town Hall, the Brisbane Town Hall and she's dancing around and this fellow's in civilian and he said, "How are you?" And she said, "Oh,

21:00 very well, thank you," you know and that. He said, "You don't recognise me?" And she said, "No." And he said, "Well, you do know me." She said, "You're in civilians." He said, "Doesn't that give you a clue?" She said, "I don't know anybody." He said, "Yes you do." Because he wasn't in a suit was he, he was in overalls or something right and as he said, "I'll tell you at the end of the dance." And as he's taking her back

21:30 he said, "I'm Frangipani," because we used to call him Frangipani, "I'm Frangipani." Because we all used to say, "Oh my God fancy going out with him," you know. He was quite clean, scrubbed up clean. I don't know what he cleaned himself with but he was. Well everyone had to do a job and that was a very important job. A friend of mine who was a doctor said, "Cath, they more important than us. Remember, they used to go on strike occasionally." It was very difficult, wasn't it?

22:00 **Was there any stigma against men walking around in civilian clothes?**

Well I didn't encounter it and I think at that time we knew if men were of an age who were walking around in civilian cloths, nine times out of then they were in a protective industry. They were doing something which was important. There was nobody that would get out of the gap you know. It was, the population wasn't like, there wasn't millions you know.

22:30 Everybody stood out. And I think they carried a card, we carried a leave pass, I think they carried a card. We didn't have, you heard about World War I, you know, the white feather [men were given white feathers as a stigma of perceived cowardice] and all this. That never happened, I don't remember, you wouldn't do that because I mean there were men working in emissions and ships and I mean men in their trade you know it was important. So I really never encountered it, now

23:00 somebody else may have but I never did. I never looked for it anyway. You know you wouldn't go around, if I seen somebody in civilian cloths he'd just go past me I wouldn't take any notice.

When you went out to the dances like at the Town Hall for example was there some sort of curfew?

Oh yes, 23.59 we had to be back, oh yes.

23:30 Oh yes you had to be in, you know otherwise you were in trouble. Well they had to have, you know I mean there was an orderly sergeant they came in and they handed their leave pass, you knew who was off, it was all there. You couldn't have people just wandering in and out as they liked you know. And they knew I mean and if anybody was, you know they might have just missed a train or something

24:00 happened you know and they were an hour or so over you wouldn't you'd say, "Don't do that, you know you're supposed to be in." "Oh yes, serge, but so-and-so happened." So, "Righto, off you go," you wouldn't make a big issue of it. You know it's not worthwhile and they appreciated that it's the same as these girls when their husbands came back, they come back three or four days late. Had to round them up before the CO and a good tale, he knew damn well that you were

24:30 sticking up for them, but it was a game, wasn't it. The only time you got mongrels is, they were power drunk, you got a few of those from time to time. But as I say that sar major, that pommy sar major, we cut him down to size real quick.

What do you think your girls thought of you?

They probably thought I was very strict because I demanded the best all the time. But when they gave me the best

25:00 I gave them a lot of privileges but I did demand the best because I thought to myself and a lot of these girls didn't worry about that because their husbands or fiancés were away fighting and they knew they had to do the right thing. I mean mistakes costs lives, we'd have that up everywhere. Lose talk costs lives. It was a different era.

25:30 I just wonder sometimes with the soft lives that our young people have had could they endure what we endured. And we did endure hardships.

What was your relationship with Q store in the camp?

I was very, I was in very good there because I think being around, being admin sergeant around

26:00 the grounds you know and there was the dirty work and you'd put your hand up to your hat and I'd walk into the office and Captain Ryan would say, "Sergeant, that hat," and she'd give me a chip for a new one and I'd go you know get another hat. But I didn't like using my good hats out in the yard see. And you might be able to get an extra pair of stockings, you might you know it was then there'd

26:30 probably be something a bit lose you know, you'd get a pair of stockings. So what you'd call a little bit of pilfering I suppose but not much because that girl behind there she had to account for everything. And I remember going out to Ben's camp, and he's best friend was the Q Master [quartermaster] and I took a group of girls and it was a big band, one of the big bands that used to play at the Trocadera here he was there, I forget the name but he was very famous. And it was the Sunday

27:00 afternoon and Ben asked me if I would bring the girls and they sent a big vehicle for us and we went there. And we all had a little present and it was a toothbrush, boot polish, a little brush you know to clean our shoes and a cake of soap and it was all nicely wrapped, it was a little gift. I suppose they worked that out but nothing big, you know

27:30 nothing big. Oh really our group, when you consider there was a thousand girls discipline had to be strict. But I didn't really find it difficult to those girls to do what they're told. They'd whinge and moan sometimes on you know like doing the chores you know like washing the starch off the Canna leaves and

28:00 having to scrub out the, you know the thunder boxes and mopping the floors and you know things like that. But all in all it had to be done, that was part of your living, everybody was living that way, that's it.

What differences did you notice between the male soldiers and the female soldiers and the way they lived?

Well I think it depended on where the men were. Some of the

28:30 camps were very good and some were very spartan. And I think those that were going north, we just say going north which was going up to New Guinea and the Islands, they were very spartan because they were stripped down to the bare essentials and they had to learn to live with what they had because they had to carry it all. Whereas when they came back they generally came into a camp where there were huts, whereas otherwise they'd be in tents

29:00 and on the boards you know with their palliasse or you know their that and that sort of thing because that's what they were in action you know. And those dog biscuits [hard biscuit rations], they were full of vitamins but they would crack your teeth in two. But you could make a meal out of those, soak them in water and it was like porridge, but they were full of vitamins. You know and they'd have

29:30 like tin food and stuff that they could eat on the run. It was pretty tough up in New Guinea, dreadful. Have you seen the films of that and the crosses? They brought a couple of Fuzzy Wuzzys [New Guineans who aided Australian troops on the Kokoda Track] out, very old men they were and they had done a wonderful job.

30:00 And I remember in one place when troops moved in, and the tribe that met them had very seen a white man before.

Was there a difference, you've talked a lot about the hygiene that you had in your camp. Was there a difference between hygiene in the men and the women's camp?

Oh no very strict. But I'll tell you a funny. On the Queen Mary, when they went out they had these urinals, it was like a,

30:30 a long trough and it was running water all the time and they had to do their business and whatever you know there. And some of the cards [jokers], some of the jokes the fellows, they'd wrap up newspaper and they'd set it alight and then it would go along. See, even then they could laugh, you know what I mean. And you'd hear "Woo." And you had to be strict because if you

31:00 weren't, dysentery would break out and that was a terrifying thing. Now I hurt my leg, you won't see it because I've got a thing, but I've got a scar right up there, it's nearly disappeared. I went into a hut to get palliasses, we had a new group coming in and I was bringing palliasses, which was you know these hessian bags that you put straw in. And I went in and when I came out they,

31:30 they'd put a step, that was two pieces of round thing and a step and I stepped out for no step, do you know what I mean? And I spun around and I came down and I grazed that shin like that on this green timber, it was green, you know. I mean, they had to build places, they had to cut trees down, they had to do it quick. Anyway, it became infected

32:00 and I had to have it treated. Now there was no such thing as penicillin, it was sulphur drugs right. And it wouldn't heal and the proud flesh was over it. So I was in the camp hospital, you know just a small little hospital just for a couple of days stay, you know, not a big thing, they'd come over to see you. They had to get a scalpel

32:30 and slice it off. And what they gave me was a bit of towelling to bite on and they took that off like that. And I used to have to lie out in the sun with whatever they gave me to heal, and it did heal eventually. Then we'd have the injections, you know, the needles. And the girls would line up and the fellas would be lined up you know. And I'd walk up and down and I'd say, "Righto

33:00 girls, righto. Don't let them. They're going to faint, we're not going to faint are we? We're not going to show them that we can't take it. We're the stronger species," you know, and we'd go up and down and those girls would not bloody faint, I'm telling you, the fellas would fall but the girls never fainted. It was a matter of pride. You see what I'm getting at.

What contact did you have with the men in the camp day to day?

Mostly work. Very strict.

33:30 They were on one side of the road and a fair way over and we were on the other side. And at one stage there, this is a funny too. They got Bromide in their tea, that was to keep their urge down. But for some reason or other the tea order got mixed and we had an outbreak of sleeping sickness in our camp and our camp commandant was very worried. The girls said, "I've never felt so tired in all my life, oh my God. Oh I'm so tired," you know

34:00 and it was done up, you know, like for men, you know, heavy. And they found out that we have been having the Bromide tea and the fellas had been having our tea. They were a little bit worried about that. Anyway it was good because they thought we had, in those days they didn't have a lot of knowledge of the diseases that come out of New Guinea and they thought we might have had some sort of damn sleeping sickness. But that's what it was an overdose of Bromide.

So you encountered men

34:30 **during your work?**

Through our work but there'd be no, you wouldn't have men wondering over, oh no, no they were very, very strict. And I think it had to be so too, you know what I mean, it could get out of hand. I mean you've got young men you know, young girls, there's going to be consequences isn't there?

What about in your particular

35:00 **job Cath? What contact did you have with the men?**

What in my civilian life?

No, no in you job as a signal sergeant?

Oh I'd have to liaise with Long Pocket sar major. If I wanted work done, a work party to come over you know what I mean. Now when I'm talking about work party that might be some heavy, heavy really something heavy that we couldn't lift because we did just about everything else. And or we were

35:30 having a parade there, maybe a parade, Bonds Parade on, and we would be having a marching and the sar [sergeant] major would come over and put us through out paces. We would work with them at work

in the barracks and that we would be working beside them all the time. But the men they didn't stay long, most of these men that were in these camps were moved on to New Guinea. There were fresh crowds coming along all the time. So

36:00 the sar major of the camp and the senior sergeant of messing, they generally stayed because you know what I mean they knew the works you know and they were the sort of right hands of the officer in charge, you know, the camp commandant. But the ordinary troops they didn't stay long and never, only once when I was in

36:30 Redbank, remember we're all night in this room working. There was a fellow crawled underneath the hut and we fixed him up, we got some hot water and put it down and he left, he screamed and left.

What do you think your achievement as women in the army at that time, what do you think your achievement was?

I think what it did it gave women confidence. It made men

37:00 realise that we weren't idiots and that we shouldn't be in the kitchen barefoot and having children all the time. Now I'm going to be honest about this. And we gave women confidence to move on, to do other things. And they then took themselves and expanded themselves, now look at me I went back to college to learn the comptometer and then I went and sat for the Third Division Exams and honest to God, that took me two years. I never had a book out of my hand.

37:30 Morning tea I'd have a book in my hand, in the train I'd be falling asleep in the train. On the weekends, the weekends, men would take me out to dinner, you know we'd always go out to dinner with friends but Sunday I worked all day on that. And I did all my other work and even when I was travelling up, I was still travelling then up to Tidbinbilla and Honey Suckle and all around there. I would do a full week's menu

38:00 in the freezer and I would have it there and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday for Ben. So we did our work I've painted, I've mixed cement, I've been a brickies labourer, I've career sorted. We lived in a garage when we first got married and we had a Tilley lamp, a copper outside and two primuses to cook. Now I

38:30 hadn't like I mean even as hard as things were I hadn't lived like that but I come out of the army, I knew how to do it. And we built our own home. Sub-contracted some of them but a lot of hard yakka [physical labour] we did ourselves. So that's when I, you know when I walked into research and development, I mean, as the administrator, it was a piece of cake to me and they got the shock of their lives. They had doors that were opening the wrong way, we could have explosives. I said, "Those doors are wrong."

39:00 We had a big tank of liquid ammonia, they had it in an area they had the gas masks next door and I said, "I can't believe this." I said, "If that's leaking, how do you get to your gas mask?" I said, "If we have an explosion," I said, "This door opens in," I said, "Everybody piles up in here," I said, "Doors have got to open that way. When you go out

39:30 you've got to throw them open. They've got to open so the surge can go that way." I had a lot of experience in the army, you had to learn for danger all the time and even now I do it. You know, you see something that's wrong, that's not right, fix it now, do it now, don't put if off until tomorrow because that's how accidents happen. I'm very conscious of that.

40:00 **Alright then we've got to change tape and just take a breather.**

Tape 8

00:34 This lass worked for FELO [Far Eastern Liaison Office], which was Far Eastern Liaison, and she had lived in New Guinea, she got out a week ahead of the Japs. She was in Rabaul, her husband was a planter, I won't give any names because she could be still alive.

01:00 Anyway she got ahead of the Japs and he stayed behind and these planters, the few of them that were there got together to sort of put up a sort of resistance. Now her head house boy had been a mission boy and he had brought him in and he ran the house. And when she married him, when she married this man and I won't give names because I don't want to,

01:30 when she married him, he said to this boy, "This is the new missy, whatever she wants you do." And he says, "Yes master." Now he felt very proud because he owned a pushbike, he was head boy. A funny little thing had happened, he ironed her stockings once and they disappeared and he was nearly in tears. "Missy, Missy," he thought it was magic you see.

02:00 "Disappear, gone," you know, and he was in tears, you know, and she said, "You mustn't do that," you know. And anybody that was going through that used to be, you know, travellers going through and we were really adventurers in those times before the war, he would have a dinner party for them. They lived very well right and he would stand behind her and the rest of the house boys would have to knuckle to him. She'd

02:30 only raise her eyebrow like that and he knew that ones to be given attention or that ones wine was to be filled or that was that, oh, she was terrific. Anyway she got out ahead of the Japs and she was working in this special section Far Eastern Liaison. And one night she came to me she said, “Cath, please come up to the mess with me and have a drink.” She said, “I’ve had terrible news and I’ve just got to talk to somebody.”

03:00 And we sat there and she said, “My head house boy came in today,” she said, “And when he saw me started crying,” he said, “Missy, Missy,” you know. And she said, “Where is,” and I’m going to not say his name and he said, “Oh Missy,” he said, “He sent us all away into the bush,” and he said, “I wouldn’t leave and I hid and I watched.” And he said, “Master

03:30 fought a Japanese but they got him,” and there was two other planters. And because he was such a brave man, the man, well, he didn’t say the officer, the head man, which was our Japanese, they gave him a warrior’s death, he didn’t say ‘warrior’, a brave man’s death, you know, they beheaded him. How would you like to live with that?

04:00 So we knocked over a bottle of scotch between us. And she had a good cry in the mess when nobody was there. And then we came back and we had a terrible headache the next morning, I felt really crook and so did she and nobody ever knew. Nobody has ever told anybody else but she had to get it out.

04:30 She said, “I thought he’d gone down in the ship,” because she was privy to a lot of stuff too, she said, “I thought he went down in that ship where the prisoners of war were being taken back to Japan, you know it was sunk by an American cruiser,” and most of them died, they were drowned. And anyway so that’s war. Now she’s gone back to New Guinea, well, she was when I last heard, whether she’s

05:00 still there I don’t know but I don’t want to name her name on the thing, but I’ll always remember that. So you get pretty tough, not tough but you get hardened. When you hear of things, now I went to see The Passion [The Passion of Christ] the other night, and this one with me, she was in tears. I felt it but I didn’t cry. And it’s one of the most, if you’ve seen it you

05:30 must see it, it’s a tremendous film tremendous, most of the actors and actresses are from Italy I think, very good. Anyway, let’s get on.

Did you feel that you were part of the Anzac tradition?

Oh yes.

Can you tell us a bit about what…?

I think I know of all those, I think I know what they went through. I think I know what they gave up, I saw them how they

06:00 come back, some of them weren’t any good, some of them didn’t last very long and some of them suffered all their life. I’ve had friends whose husbands would wake up screaming and they had to live with that. A lot of marriages went on the rocks. A lot of men turned to fury in their

06:30 sufferings and that’s what it does to people, you don’t come out of it. You know with nothing behind you and if you do survive you are stronger in your character. And that’s one of the things the Vietnam boys got a bit of a bad spin for a while and I stood up in that club and there was a lot of people, men and women, and they know me and I stood up and fought for those boys and their on the board now.

07:00 Our new president is a Vietnam man. Our vice president is a Vietnam man. Our vice president in the sub-branch is a Vietnam man and they’re our shining hope.

And could you tell us about your work with women in Anzac Day?

Well I don’t do a lot in the associations now, I keep

07:30 out of that. I’ve been to a few reunions. I always march on Anzac Day. I go to the back of the line because there’s a lot and their fighting for a position to get on the films, and my friend and I, we go down the back and we know a couple of mates down there, we always meet them. And recently, and she was on Australian Story, Mae Dwyer was 100, she was 98 when she was on her last

08:00 march. And the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Committee] was up before up in front interviewing a couple of girls that had flown down from the Territory [Northern Territory] and I went up and I said, “You know we’ve got a 98, she’s nearly 99, she’s marching today.” They said, “What?” I said, “Yes, you come down.” So there was her daughter-in-law standing beside her, who was a civilian. There was Mae, there was

08:30 my girlfriend standing beside her this side, I was behind her and her granddaughter, who is a lieutenant in the University Corps, she was standing here. Just in case she didn’t make it, she did make it. She did make it, she made it all the way. So the Association got very worried about her age, 99, she wanted to march. I said, “Oh darling, I think it’s a bit, and the weather’s not all that great neither, it would be good if you went in the vehicle.” So anyway she did

09:00 go in. Now I said, “You give them the queen’s wave,” she always wore her hat and gloves, Mae Dwyer very, very posh. I said, “Give them the queen’s wave, darling, as you go,” she did. And they had her on Australian Story. Anyway, she turned 100 and she said, “I’m sick of all the luncheons they’re giving me, Cath. I’m getting them all the time. I’ve had enough.” And she was a sweet lady, a sweet lady. And she had a baby shop that was her second

09:30 husband’s. He son’s down there and he’s alive still today and she said, “He was a very weakling child, you know.” And I look at him and said, “Are you feeling alright, kid,” and he laughed. But we lost her last year, she died of cancer, you know, old age and that. But she was a sweetie. But outside of that, I don’t have much to do with the associations, I’m more involved in

10:00 the RSL [Returned and Services League] itself, and I don’t take a position because I feel that there are men there that should be in the positions. We’ve only got one lady on the committee and she’s a publicity officer. And she was the one who talked me into coming to ring you people. And she’s a very nice, and her husband was a prisoner of war, she’s a very nice lady. And, but I just do,

10:30 I just do my bit, when I see an injustice or anything’s got to be done I’ll stand up and take it on the floor of the meeting and bring it to the floor. And I know one time there they wanted to drop the word ‘Memorial’ from the club and I got up, it was the Annual General Meeting and I got up and really into them, into the board. And I said, you know, I said, “You take that word ‘memorial’ away,” I said, “You’re taking everything that

11:00 this club stands for.” And anyway I forget what else I said, and a young Vietnam boy came up to me later, he said, “Thank you lady, thank you.” And that was all the thanks I needed, wasn’t it. That meant more to me than anything, and they didn’t drop the word ‘Memorial’. Because I said, “You look at that Honour Board,” and I said, “How can you take that word down?”

And you mentioned before that, World War

11:30 **Two moved things forward for women that dealing with things like menstruation became easier, what other examples of that do you think…?**

Well, I just think it gave women more confidence in themselves and mothers were having children then, right. These girls were then married and having children and they could see that education, that was so important for their daughters to

12:00 get ahead and they filled them with confidence, you know. And our, like all our young ones, they’re all graduates. I’ve got one just turned she’s 17 in November she’s gone to university now in Ingham, not in Ingham, in Townsville. My other nephew is in charge of the crowd of industrial

12:30 section in the museum in Melbourne. My other nephew runs his own employment business. My niece is a physiotherapist and she flies out to the States [United States] quite often teaching the American women on this physiotherapy for you know for problems down below. And the last time they went, they

13:00 gave them a week up at Whistlifish, skiing as a thankyou. That was nice, you know. But she’s been, she’s also been flown into Germany where the big American camp is and she’s set up a clinic, with doctors for women. So all these kids have got, we know the score, we know education is the thing. We had one little darling

13:30 got tied up in the Hari Krishnas, she’s out of it now and she’s doing fine. She bought a little house and she’s paying for it. So you know you always have your little dropouts along the way, so that means you’ve got to give them extra love. But no I think that’s what it is and I worked in the research and we had brilliant women scientists, brilliant.

14:00 And of course they were the daughters you see of my generation. But then it’s their girls who are now getting their. Now Edmund that works in the museum, in the industrial side of it, his wife is studying commercial law and she’s 2IC [Second In Command] of a big investment company in Melbourne and she’s got two little girls. But she can work at home if she wants to with her computer you know. But she has her clients,

14:30 mostly elderly women. She knows how to give them the right oil and they trust her, she’s very good. But all this that’s what I think, that’s what we brought, we brought confidence and the realising and the realistic idea that you can do anything but I still wouldn’t like to see women in the front line. And that’s something I don’t like. We saw, when I was in Russian,

15:00 when was that? Three years ago. We were going into St Petersburg and we were on the boarder and we wanted to go to the toilet and they deliberately held us up. And where the bus was it was like an opening underneath and some man had tried to get out the week before, hanging onto a bus and he was caught, and they held him up, he was a Russian trying to escape.

15:30 And they had him under restraint and he grabbed the revolver and shot himself. Now we were late, we wanted to go to the toilet and we went up to the office and it was a woman in military uniform. Well if you’ve ever seen a man dressed up as a woman this was, touch old birds, they were. And she rang somebody and they apparently “Niet, niet,”

16:00 and anyway we didn’t let them go. We went up again and then they brought, after an hour and a half,

this other one come out and she was you know, full colonial and I said, “God, look at a load of this will you, coming.” And anyway she finally let us through, but all our baggage she made us pick it up, take it up three steps, take it in a revolving door, take it along, put it on a machine so that

16:30 it could be x-rayed and then when it was through we could get out bag. And as I got my bag I started singing, “Here we are again, happy as can be.” Somebody said, “God Almighty, Cath,” and I said, “Well,” I said, “We’re not going to let them see that they’re giving us the pip [causing us irritation],” and we finally got to the toilet, but they had to show their power. And you see this is it and they were so much like men, God almighty, you know, they were really

17:00 big burly things. And yet my nephew, he was backpacking around Europe, had a beautiful voice singing. And he was offered a very good job in Spain and he did it and then he decided to come home and his interpreter was a Russian girl, spoke six languages. And I said, “Six languages?” I said, “She was either was Politburo,” I said, “Because,” I said, “She had to be specially picked,” I said, “to get that education.” Anyway

17:30 they said, “Oh no, no.” And anyway he went to Moscow to see the parents, they lived in a lovely home. And I said, “I’ve been in some of the Russian homes, I’ve been in that once.” And I said, “So there definitely Politburo or Mafia,” I said, “They’re the only ones that have got the money.” “Oh no aunty, no, no, no.” I said, “Oh alright, leave it at that.” Anyway, they had a baby, Grandma and mother flew from Moscow to

18:00 Costa de Sol, what is it Spanish name? Costa de Sol, Costa de Sol, the sunny coast or something Spanish. And then the Christmas before last they came out, Kevin and his wife and the baby in Queensland, he came out to meet the family. And they were to come here but they got down to the Barossa Valley

18:30 and the baby got sick so they flew them back to Brisbane, so I missed out meeting her. And this year the mother, they said she stood for parliament and she’s in the parliament in Moscow and I said, “They’re definitely Politburo or Mafia, definitely,” they won’t have it, but I said, you know, and anyway, she went to a special meeting in Paris just before Christmas

19:00 and of course remember there was the trouble with the French and the American Airlines you know and I thought she’d be held up and then she flew out to Australia. Now she’s a member of the Russian parliament and so it’s a very small world isn’t it. And all he did was his backpacking and singing his way around Europe.

Tell me what, what you think you helped to win the war and do you think that since that time that we’ve

19:30 **won the peace?**

No we haven’t won the peace. There’s been so much interruption all through the world. We’re always getting people that have got a rise in power and become almost dictators. I mean some of the poor people in Chechnya and all those areas and Kosovo and that that was dreadful. They were just because they were Muslims they massacred them, put them, it’s dreadful you’ve seen them digging the greaves up, it was dreadful.

20:00 Then we’ve got that other fellow you know with the Iranians. And then we’ve got Mugabe. I was in, I’ve been in, when I went through I’ve been up there, oh God what’s the name of the place?

Zimbabwe?

Zimbabwe. I went to the Victoria Falls and everything. I’ve been in the game parks and all that. And when I was there

20:30 they were having a terrible drought and there were people starving and their dams were nearly empty and this has gone on for six or seven years after and they still haven’t done anything. And that Mugabe is killing his people. And where the beautiful farms you know, mind you some of these people live on the properties but those fellows

21:00 they were part of the force. They you know they had been killing planters and what not like that. Mugabe’s edging them on, he’s gone out of his nut he’s that old. And it’s dreadful.

Do you have a message for Australians?

Well, the whole thing is, dear, whether we like it or not, we’ve got to be strong. And we can’t

21:30 knuckle down to any Tom, Dick and Harry who wants to kick us in the guts, can we? And if you’re too weak, they’ll run you over. And you can be strong but still be charitable, and that’s what it’s all about. I mean, you don’t hate people. I was in, up in Becerra [?] and that sort of thing and those women you know they were all done up in their fancy

22:00 gear to go to the markets with little children running around and they had those Muslim clerics there that were teaching young people, you know the Koran you know. And I mean, I have no hatred for those, but we’ve got to be strong and we just can’t buckle down, we can’t let people walk over us. That’s not the Australian way. I mean I know there is a lot of people that say, “Oh, we

22:30 shouldn't do this and we shouldn't do that." It's very difficult when you're in government and when you've got your secret service. You can only work on what might happen. You can't tell for anybody, nobody can tell what will happen, what might happen and so therefore you've got to put a guard up. If it does happen you've got to be ready for it. And we're no longer isolated in this country, we're only a few hours away from Indonesia.

23:00 We've had Indonesian, we've trained Indonesian soldiers up in the Territory. And when I was with the research and laboratories, I had three of them come for training in administration in R & D [Research and Development], and two of them were Muslims and one was a Christian and I showed them every courtesy. And they were saying their, you know, they say their prayers midday, afternoon, evening,

23:30 sunrise, sunset. And when I was studying for my Third Division, I learned a lot about the political systems in the whole Southeast Asian Basin, about the religions, about their habits, about everything else. So when I saw them and they said they were in the toilets and I said, "No, no, no." I said, "You say your prays," I said, "You come in," I said, "This is a meeting room,"

24:00 I said, "You put that sign up, 'do not disturb'," I said, "You come in and you say your prayers in here." I showed them their respect. And the Christian boy, they weren't eating properly, they were throwing their food in the garbage, the cleaner told me. I realised straight away, sandwiches - they don't eat sandwiches, they eat rice and vegetables. So I rang Canberra and I said, "These man," I said, "have been given from the army camp, they're given sandwiches," and I said, "They don't eat it."

24:30 Now I said, "Are you prepared," I said, "if I can arrange for sort of a Chinese-type of food at Mascot?" you know, get given at Mascot and have that prepared and they can feed them. And they said, "Yes Cath," but I said, "You'll pay for it of course," always make sure we keep out money you know, we had too much to spend it on see. And they said, "Yes," they would. They appreciated that, now when they left they were able to Photostat just about any ordinary stuff but

25:00 we had to be very careful you know we were doing secret stuff and what happens is they may do one section here at Alexandria, another one at Maribyrnong, another one over at Woomera, another bit at Northwest Cape and then it gets put together, that's how you keep your secrets. Anyway they were allowed to do it. They took so

25:30 much stuff away, they photostatted everything we let them have, that I couldn't send it home by plane I had to send it by ship in boxes. Something about 10 boxes and it was all paperwork. And they told me they had been on that cold water port, that of Osdock, you know that port that's on the side that's facing Japan they had been there prior to coming to us.

26:00 Now that was Russia and we were, not actually enemies but we weren't hosy-cosy [friendly] with them. So they'd already been and found out what they could there, found out what they could down here and the Indonesian representative in Canberra sent my chief and I a lovely piece of batik cloth as a thank you.

26:30 But I felt that I did the right thing, they went away knowing that I was respecting their religion and I would expect them to respect mine too. I respect their habits of eating. I made a point of it so that they could have proper food because I don't know what they got back at the camp. But I made sure they had a very nice meal at midday. And my driver use, my driver would go up, I would ring up and I'd say you know,

27:00 "I want three nice meals today," and they'd be, come in hot boxes and I'd say, "My driver will be up," and the little Chinese man, he was perfectly delighted, he thought he was getting the VIP treatment. I told him I said, "I've got three Indonesian people here and it's important that they have a nourishing meal." And I had an inspection of the first time it came and anyway they were very happy about it.

27:30 And of course the Department of Defence in Canberra were a little bit impressed too. That's diplomacy, isn't it?

And your post-war work, what did you enjoy the most about it?

I felt it was a challenge all the time. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed working with these people. I felt they were contributing something to our civilisation. And there were some very interesting things that come out of these

28:00 research laboratories. And now there was something down at Maribyrnong, which was you know when the planes come in when they have the fog and that, it was a landing device and they made it right and it was sold overseas. We did an atomic clock, another man did an atomic clock. We had a symposium up in Canberra, they had a

28:30 lot of people that come and visited us. What did we do? We sold it overseas. You know the machine you put the stuff in and you get the, you know what do you call it? My brain doesn't work that well these days. You know you put it in and it comes out the writing,

Photocopier?

Photocopier. That was perfected in Maribyrnong and sold overseas.

29:00 **Did you think that they shouldn't have been sold overseas?**

No, we should have sold them. We're doing the same thing today with some of their medicines and research. They're trying to get money here to raise it and they can't raise it but the Americans will buy the medicine. This is the sad thing.

And did you and Ben work together post-war?

No I didn't work with him. He worked in transport

29:30 But when he took very ill at the end and he wasn't working he was having difficulty, his lungs were cut to pieces with the sand out of the desert. And when they told him that that he was bludging he came home in tears. I've never saw a man break down and I said, "Stuff them. We don't need them." And that made me say, "I will go the highest I

30:00 can go. I'll get the biggest salary I can go so he does not have to worry about any money," because he gave me everything before, he denied me nothing. He worked hard and he was a good man and that made me, we had a very close relationship, very close. And I think because he was 13 years younger than, older than me, he was more in tune with

30:30 my excesses, probably, shall I say, or when I got all uptight about anything you know he'd calm me down. You know and we had a great life together and he was so proud of me, he was so proud. And when I got the Jubilee Medal, I didn't tell anybody it was in the Canberra Times, but he got down to the club and told them all down there. And I didn't want, I didn't want you know advertise it, it wasn't in

31:00 my nature to advertise it because I have friends who are ordinary housewives and they are lovely girls. And you know, they say things to me, you know, and I'll say, "But you did a great job too. You fulfilled your thing by rearing children and doing that. And every women has even a man, you all have your rights and things to do in life but you've got to work with one another and don't get over proud about things."

31:30 I'm proud for myself what I've done but I don't like to say too much about it outside. They wouldn't know here half of them what I did. Dear old lady up there in number three, you know. And that's all it is but I do feel that World War II ladies opened the flood gates for all you young women today.

32:00 But there's one thing I warn you, don't get too proud, don't get too bloody clever. There's a man on the other side and you give him kudos too and I've seen some girls say things to boys that are very nasty at times. It's better to hold your tongue and walk away. But I mean you've got wonderful futures ahead of you. I know of one girl who's

32:30 a wonderful research person and she married a fellow from New Guinea, he was a patrol officer, and she's so clever that he can't even go out with her because all his friends, all her friends talk above him. So they've got no marriage, no marriage life, he's on a farm and here she is one of the top people in science today in Australia

33:00 and I know her, I know her mother, and that's what it is. You see, sad isn't it? We're not smart arses, we're just human beings. You understand me? Good.

I think we should leave it there.

Yeah.

Let me just unhook you.

INTERVIEW ENDS