Australians at War Film Archive

Elizabeth Cameron (Betty) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

01:06 **Okay Betty, I'm just wondering if we could start, as we discussed, just with a summary of your life story? Starting with where you were born.**

Well, I was born in Maroubra, I don't know where but I was born in Maroubra many years ago. And then I lived most of my young life up in Turramurra,

01:30 way out, you know, the back past Lady Davidson's home. My parents had quite a big size property and they raised chickens and dogs and horses and cattle. And I had three older brothers. They were born before the war and then my sister and I were born after Dad came back and, but he couldn't work any more. He'd been a doctor but

02:00 blown up in France. So they had this property and we lived on there. Had a wonderful free life, running round bare footed and snakes and lizards and what not. It was quite good. We quite really, quite enjoyed it. And then we moved after, I think I must have been about eight or nine before we came down to the city

02:30 and then we lived in Chatswood for a while and then out to Concord West. And went to school in from Concord West and by this time I was at high school. And I went into Fort Street and we went by electric train, which was a change after steam trains. Because from Turramurra we used to get, you usually came into town on a horse and sulky, then a steam train to Milsons

03:00 Point, and then a ferry to Circular Quay, and then a tram up to town. And that was you know, almost a day out before you started doing anything. But we only every came down usually Christmas to go to the Christmas things at Marcus Clarke's or Anthony Horden's and, or to, my father used to take us to shows. To the

03:30 Gilbert and Sullivan shows or any of the other lives shows that were on, which were good. A good introduction for future life, I think. And after we went through schooling at Fort Street, what'd I do then? Oh then I would've liked to go on to university but it wasn't possible in those days,

04:00 and in my life then for I became a lady cub master at the cubs. But first of all I was a Bagheera and then I was Akela, and that's where I met Mick. When I was about, just after I was nearly eighteen I met him and we belonged to the scouts' younger set and to the church. We had a fellowship with the church

04:30 and we'd have a, well I think most of our entertainment was intertwined then between the scouts and the church because we all belonged to each thing, to the same things. Although the Methodists also joined in with the Anglicans, and we all went to the scouts and Mick was a cub master, a scout master, so that's where I met him.

05:00 And so we, I sort of thought, I'd heard about this chap called Mick and then I heard of somebody called Leith, and I wonder if Leith, what he looks like? Might sort of be an improvement on Mick. But I found out it was the same chap, so I was stuck. So, and then of course, the war came '39 and

05:30 Mick was working, and then in 1940 he joined the air force and the week after he joined up. I had said to him earlier I'd never be just engaged. It was married or nothing. So he didn't like that idea, so he said, "Well, we'll get married." So then we had to confront our parents. Who at first my

06:00 father was much against it, but by the time the day wore on, that night when Mick threw his hat in to see if he was welcome, he said, "I've booked a hall. I've booked a cake." I've done this, I've done that. He was all for the wedding. So that's what happened. We were married in 1940. So it's nearly 63 years we've been married in July. And

06:30 then Mick was on what they called the reserve. In those days it was air crew, called the air crew reservists and they had to do lectures and different navigation, all what he had to do. And then in the meantime I'd joined up with Mrs McKenzie's

07:00 WT Office. She had a school for wireless telegraphists and we learned Morse code. ‘Cause I thought, well I’m sure women will be accepted some time. Although at the time the government said, “No women are going to be in the services other than the nursing service.” And then after Mick went into the air force in

07:30 early 1942, I’m sorry ’41, they did start the women’s air force and they took WT operators and cooks and stewards, I think stewardesses. And so we had to do pass our twenty words a minute and when we passed our twenty words a minute we were accepted into the WAAAF [Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force]. And

08:00 I was in the first fifty WAAAF joined up in, went for my test at the end of March but didn’t get called up until the 30th of April. And then the air force thought we were just wonderful. But we still had to do some more tests in Sydney and some of the girls went down to Melbourne

08:30 straight away. I didn’t go down to Melbourne till much later and they put me into a shipping comp [company] to do the shipping for sending the chaps overseas. And that was the wing commander and myself, and we had to do the secret job of not letting people know when boats, ships were going. And we would, a lot, the men, their berths, etcetera,

09:00 on the ships. And unfortunately one or two, one particularly the [MV] Oranje. That was when Jack Davies’ father was the captain of it, and it went down not far out of New Zealand and fortunately that was the boat Mick would’ve been on if they…but he didn’t go till the next ship. So

09:30 that was you know, something but we did know some of the chaps that were there. And then when he was going the Americans of course weren’t in the war but they allowed their [SS] Mariposa and [SS] Monterey to have servicemen in the air crew who were going to Canada to do their training, they allowed so many to go and…

10:00 But they had to be treated as private people, they weren’t treated. Nobody was supposed to know about this. It was all secret. Anyway, Mick went on the Monterey and I was able to put him in a decent cabin with two other chaps, and they had a state cabin to go on, and the wing commander asked me would I go down to see the boat off? And I said, “No, I couldn’t do that,” thinking it was a

10:30 very secret thing. Then Mick tells me all the women knew all about it and they were all down there. But I couldn’t have, it was about five o’clock in the morning but apart from that, no, I couldn’t come at that. I thought that’s too much, too hard to take. And so he set off, then I went down to Melbourne to get my rookies. And then from rookies I changed

11:00 over, I didn’t want to do WT then and then I went into fighter sector, and we did our course and then we worked underground in Sydney. First of all we came up to Bankstown and we were at Bankstown for about two months working there and we were working and by this time the Americans had come into the war and

11:30 they were sending their pilots out. Which was supposed to be all hush hush but everybody knew they were there. I mean how can you tell? There were thousands of them wandering around that they weren’t there. That we had to teach them the geography of Australia ‘cause they had no idea about anything of Australia. I mean as far as we were concerned we were some little

12:00 island way away from America, and they really didn’t want to be there. So we were stationed right on there at the aerodrome. We were right on there beside the hangers, which was pretty scary when we were doing our fighter sector work and plotting. Some horrible accidents happened there. And then we were moved into town and we worked underground.

12:30 You know the Mitchell Library? We worked underground just outside where the Mitchell Library is now. There were eighty-seven steps down and eighty-seven steps back. It was one of the where the eastern suburbs railway was going to go through and this part, just one of these tunnels, just wasn’t used. So it was made into our working area and we had no

13:00 water, no toilets, no anything. And we were stationed at the Metropol Hotel and the Yanks were all there. And we were up on the fifth floor which was guarded very much by the, the guards were always on duty to make sure the Yanks didn’t wander up our way. But we had to eat their food. At four o’clock in the morning. We went on shift

13:30 at five and came off at six or went on at six at night and came off at five in the morning, and at four o’clock in the morning they expected us to eat a chocolate cake with scrambled eggs, a piece of fruit salad and maple syrup over the whole lot. Well, that was a bit more than we could take, just so. And a friend of mine who, we shared

14:00 a room together, we rushed out on our next day off and bought a little billy can and one of those, a little fire that you put kerosene in, no methylated spirits, I mean we’d got into trouble, and those biscuits from David Jones and that was our breakfast and we thought that was much more appetising that this other stuff we were supposed to be… And then when at night we came off we

14:30 had their meals again, we sort of moved some of the food around so that we didn’t have to eat some of

it. And then you'd have you know B B and J – bread, butter and jam. And the jams were always in these dixies and you'd go through it to find out you might have six types of jam. Instead of cleaning them out each day they just put another tin of jam on top. So you either had, you might have quince jam at the bottom

15:00 and raspberry jam and plum jam. It was you know you're guess as to what you were gonna have on your bread. But we managed you know, it was all fun. But our work was very, very difficult. Mainly because we were down underground all the time and we would be doing the plotting of all the ships.

15:30 It was mainly for the shipping so we could send the aircraft out on strike and they would either convoy the ships or we were looking for submarines. And when we found the submarines they'd have to go out. And unfortunately, I don't know whether you've read about it, but we lost a lot of shipping up the coast and mainly the local shipping. You know, that went from Sydney to Byron Bay to

16:00 Lismore, Murwillumbah down the coast. And because they were small ships and unfortunately one of them, a very close friend of mine, her father was the captain of one. The [MV] Ukai I think it was called, and he was lost at sea,

16:30 which was very unfortunate. And by this time I was a corporal. I was allowed to sit up on the poop, what we called the poop deck, it was up on top. And I had to tell the girls where to move the plotting table, where to move all the things too. It was, although hard work, we did enjoy the company of each other and I

17:00 think that meant for so many of those girls, we were all girls, are still friends and that's where we cemented that friendship. Because we lived so closely and worked so closely we've sort of all had over our life lots of sadness, lots of happiness but we were able to be together and I think that's

17:30 meant so much today. When particularly one of our friends happened to leave us we are all greatly affected. And I think that's, I think I've always felt I was closer to some of these than even my sister. Because we had so much time together and lived together and worked and played together and went everywhere. And then as time went by, I, then

18:00 was on duty the subs came in the harbour. And I had the boom across the harbour and I felt there was something funny going on and we heard this. We could pick this up on the radar. Anyway, the American captain said I wouldn't know the difference between a fish and a submarine. Between a shark and a submarine.

18:30 Anyway, what happened later was he was very uptight about and I had written all this in my logbook. And he wanted my logbook and I wouldn't give it to him. So I rang the Eastern Area which was at Point Piper and the AOC [Air Officer Commanding] sent down and wanted my logbook. And they took it away

19:00 and this American captain wasn't seen again. Disappeared, so we don't know what happened, but we guessed. We also had a horrible experience one night where one of the chaps went berserk. One of the captains had a gun and he shot all round the table, and so I had to yell out to the girls to get under the table and stay

19:30 there. And I called the MPs [Military Police] and they came in and took the captain away. But there were marks all round the table and all up in the dais where I was, but it was a perspex, so it didn't get broken. And I'd put the chair up on top of the thing so he couldn't climb up the ladder, but it was quite a frightening experience we had. But well, that was part of life.

20:00 We know what the other chaps were going through much worse than what we were because so many awful things'd been happening at the time. Particularly in Europe, and then up in the Islands, so we felt well, we were just having a little bit of what they experienced, but only a tiny fraction. But also when we were at the Metropol, one of the girls heard a noise

20:30 like Morse code, she called me in and we found we could hear this Morse going on. So I had to, I was the only one who could read it, so I had to climb up out of her window up into the two deck part and they called, the Yanks came in and they had torches and searchlights and I had to take down the reading and it was all in code.

21:00 Anyway, we discovered later it was somebody sending messages to the Japanese. I never knew who he was. Never found out because it was just after that I was called up, and it was after the incident with the subs I was called up to Point Piper and I thought I'm being batted. I didn't know what I was being called up for, and the Group Officer Stephenson was there and the air vice marshal

21:30 was there and I thought, "Gosh, you know, I suppose they're gonna chuck me out." And they asked me all questions and at the end of it they said, "Just sign this, we want to you go down for you to be an officer." I sort of said, "But I didn't apply, I didn't want to be an officer." And they said, "Well, I'm sorry but you're going down onto the next course." So I went down on the next course to Melbourne. And did our four-five

22:00 weeks' course. We were at stationed at the university at Melbourne. Melbourne University, and the… After the course, it was quite a strenuous course I found. We had to learn quite a lot of things that we didn't know about. We had no idea where we were going after it of course.

22:30 And then when we'd finished I was chosen to go onto the operations room of course. I was told that although mostly people with mathematics degrees and university degrees were picked for this course. And I said, "Well I'm only an ordinary leaving certificate person. I'm not very clever in any of those things." Anyway, I was sent on the course and there were eighteen men and myself

23:00 did the course. I was the only woman. And I'd found that two other women had done it previously but they were very highly graduated women. But I did the course, it was also in Melbourne. We did all the navigation aircraft reconnaissance shipping reconnaissance everything that dealt with operations

23:30 room.

I'll just pause there for a moment Betty. Ok, you were just telling me about your course in Melbourne, the training you were doing there.

Yes, it was really a most interesting course and we had quite a lot of exams during it. I found it quite hard work but at the end I came out coming third on the class. Which I was very thrilled about because

24:00 all the men you know, they were all so clever and I just felt that well, I was going to be sort of outdone by them. I came top in quite a few of the subjects which were new to me but I did work hard to do them. And we were stationed, the men were in barracks but I had to live out because they didn't have anywhere for a

24:30 woman to be on the course, so I had to find some accommodation out of, away from where we were doing our training. But I soon found that they soon found it for me. But you know, it was hard living there because it was a big old residence that had been taken over by the government and a lot of the people living there were families, that, they were refugees from various countries,

25:00 and I was the only servicewoman there and it was very hard. They'd want to ask questions of what you were doing and of course I'd say, "I'm just working in an office and I don't do really very much." And if they asked you anything you had to say, "Well, I don't know about that." No, I hadn't heard about that, and you just

25:30 couldn't, you know. You acted so dumb that they must of thought golly, if that's what the people are like running the war then who's going to win? But it was just very, very hard to talk about anything, and so I got to the point of just going straight to my room and forgetting about meals. Just thinking well, I just can't face that any more. Well, we eventually finished the course and I was told

26:00 I was being transferred to, I was going to go to Townsville which I was quite excited about. But when it came to there were two men and myself. The two men went to Townsville and I went to Eastern Area, at Point Piper. So I went to do operations room there with one other lady who worked there too. She did on one shift and I was on the other and most of our shifts were six o'clock

26:30 in the morning till nine. Pardon me. Nine o'clock in the morning till six o'clock at night, and then the next shift was six o'clock at night till nine o'clock in the morning. So one was a short shift and one was a long shift. And we did that, we'd do the six till the, nine till six for a week then have a day off and then you'd do the six till nine for a week and have two days. But one

27:00 day you slept and one day off. But sometimes if things were going wrong you didn't get your day off, you had to go back to work, because quite often we'd have a lot of... There again we were doing all the shipping up the coast well then round the whole of the eastern [sea]board, we were sending the men out on strike up as far as Bundaberg, from then on Townsville took over. But we operated

27:30 from Bundaberg down to Point Cook and we'd send the ships out with convoys we'd convoy. The only ships we didn't convoy where the HMS Queen Mary and the HMS Queen Elizabeth because they were far too fast for subs [submarines] to catch up to them anyway. But all the other shipping we had to convoy and we'd send the aircraft on the

28:00 strikes or out on convoy and then if anything happened to one of the planes you'd sort of think, "Oh, I hope it wasn't my error." Because one second when you went back you could be sixty miles out when in your degrees and you'd sort of check everything to make sure no, it wasn't your fault. It was just unfortunate that something happened to the plane. But

28:30 not through your giving them the directions. And so it was just a most amazing work. And we really did enjoy it once we got into the thing. At the same time they were short in the, I've forgotten. The intelligence room, which was next door to us, and so I

29:00 helped out or started helping out in the intelligence section as well and so they sort of classed me as being in operations and intelligence. And we would get all the cipher, would send all the codes and we'd have to break codes and get the information out and sometimes it was pretty horrifying some of it. Particularly when I knew some of the

29:30 girls that were their boyfriends or their husbands or people we had met. It was often hard to take. Because I suppose we were still reasonably young and never come across some of these things in our life. So we…. Sorry.

30:00 But fortunately things got better and then in 1944 in July, July 1944 it was coming up our wedding anniversary on the 13th of July and I thought oh, it would be wonderful if Mick was home. He'd been, he was still over in Europe

30:30 and then on the 8th of July I was on duty and we got this red message came in from Amberley and the AOC was in the room and we thought, "Oh, what's on, what's happened with Amberley?" And he handed the phone to me and he said, "This is for you." And I said, "For me?" It's a red message. And it was Mick. He'd

31:00 just arrived in Amberley. And he said they'd asked him to fly a Liberator home from New [York], from America. And of course, he'd never flown a Liberator, he'd only been on Catalinas. And I said, "But how did you get there?" He said, "Oh we landed." And this was on a Friday afternoon, and he said, "We thought we'd catch the train and come down to

31:30 Sydney." But two things. They said, "No, you've just come from overseas after all this time, you've got to have an X-ray and a medical. You can't leave the base until you've had your X-ray and your medical, and that can't be done till Monday morning." Because they stood down over the weekend. And so he and they…and his second one was they couldn't catch the train because the train didn't go until the next day, they'd missed it. It only went ten or eleven o'clock in the morning,

32:00 and that was it. So the AOC said, "Well, you'll have to go to Brisbane and meet him." And I said, "But how can I?" And he said, "Just a minute." And there was a plane going to New Guinea he said, that was going up from Melbourne. He said, "I'll stop it in Sydney, take you up to Brisbane and you can meet your husband." So he sent me out in his car to Mascot. I had nothing, just my

32:30 uniform. No toothbrush, no anything. And he sent me out and the plane stopped and they took some man off and put me on the plane. It stopped at Brisbane, it wasn't supposed to, took me off the plane and a chap met me and took me into Brisbane in a truck. And in the meantime Mick was to get into Brisbane. And he said, "Where you gonna meet your husband?" And I said, "Well I told him, the GPO [General Post Office] Brisbane." Because

33:00 Mick had never been to Brisbane. He didn't know Brisbane. I didn't know that much of. I had been to Brisbane because I did some other work there which I haven't told you about. And the chap said, "Well, look you can't, I'll go round and pick him up." He said, "I'll know him because they're all Negroes that meet at the GPO and I'll know your husband being in air force uniform." And so he brought Mick round to the truck and that's where I met him.

33:30 After all that time it was wonderful. We didn't know where we were staying but they'd arranged that for us to stop in a hotel in Brisbane for two nights, so that was good. I'll leave Mick to tell the story of that. And then when he'd passed on we were to come down on the train, and on that I

34:00 was section officer by this time and when we got to the station the guard said, "Section Officer Flight Lieutenant. She's a woman." I said, "Yes, I'm a woman. We're married." "Oh," he says, "That's what they all say. No you can't, not in my carriage. You don't share a cabin in my carriage." And I said, "But look, we are married." "No," he said. So Mick still had only had American dollars,

34:30 so handed him a few American dollars and he allowed us to stay in the cabin together in the sleeper. But that was in 1944 and it wouldn't happen today I can tell you. It's, so that was our homecoming and he was back for our fourth wedding anniversary, which was really something. And he then, we knew he was going to go up north again.

35:00 He was going up north because he was getting his discharge. And I said, "Well, look well you mightn't get back a second time mate. You've got back once, we can't expect everything." I said, "Let us have a child and at least I've got something. If you don't come back, I've got something to live for." So we decide that and I became pregnant and I got out of the

35:30 air force not till the November 1944, because they didn't have a replacement for me, so I had to wait till somebody could take over from me and then I got out. Mick was away up north then till 1946, and Peter was born 1945 and then it was rather sad because

36:00 although he didn't know it, I got a cable the day after Peter was born saying he was missing. But I thought, "Oh no, can't be." It was two months later 'cause Mick had been doing some special work away and he got back to base and he knew he had a son, and then later on after Mick got out '46,

36:30 we were able to start married life again. It was just wonderful and our married life went on and we had two more children after that. I didn't go to work, I looked after the children, brought them up right through our life till... They all wanted to go to university, so I looked after them. Got food for thought or thought for food, I was never sure which. But eleven

37:00 o'clock at night one'd want something to eat and then he'd go to bed at twelve, then I'd hear his shoes falling on the floor. They were never put away. And then our daughter would wake up at five to study. She didn't like night study, she liked morning study, so I'd have to be up and making tea and chocolate and what not for them. But that was what they chose to do and that was what we wanted.

37:30 So we very happy that they all picked a career and it's a very good life. I did a little bit. I decided I

wanted to do something, so I started a travel agency and it wasn't... We'd by this time we were living in Connell's Point and they, there was none around and so I started it, and 'cause we had travelled a bit and I knew quite a bit

38:00 and it grew so successful that after about five years I just sold it because it was too much for me. And I was employing four girls by this time, so I sold it and decided that it was just a little bit in my career. I didn't do anything wonderful other than being a wife and children, a mother to the children.

38:30 And then the three of them were all married and now we're Darby and Joan again and we're living up here. I have to have a break.

Tape 2

00:31 **Betty, I was wondering if I could take you back now to your childhood? And I guess if you could tell me about your mother and father and what they did?**

What they did? Well my mother and father they were both English. My mother lived in a country place called Soberton in Hampshire, and when

01:00 she was a bit older she didn't want to be just a lady at home, which was expected to be in those days. She had six brothers and one sister and the sister of course was aunt, was always very good at embroidery and that. And she was the lady but Mum didn't want to be the lady like that, she wanted to go to university. But in those days this was before the 18th, no

01:30 before the 1900s, she had to go to Ireland to Dublin University and there were only three women there, Trinity College. And she went to university there much against her parents wishes but that's what she wanted to do. And when she graduated she wanted to be. She graduated as a matron for a hospital, and even worse she travelled to America which was also a dreadful thing in those days.

02:00 And she was in Philadelphia for quite a while as a matron of a hospital and after that, after awhile she decided she would go down to Argentina and she went down there. According to her father, she lived amongst the, not Aborigines, but the natives and she was a matron there for quite a while. So

02:30 she spoke many languages. She spoke about seven different languages altogether. She could speak Dutch, French, Russian, German, Spanish and whatever the Argentina was, a mixture of their native language and Spanish. And then worse than that she decided she'd come to Australia. I mean well this was almost Australia, where was it?

03:00 You know, some little place miles and miles away and she came on one of the first steam ships from Argentina round the Cape, down to Melbourne. And she was there just a short while and met my father. Well, my father had, he was actually educated in India because his father was an ambassador in India and he

03:30 had joined the Indian Army as a doctor and then he came to Australia too. Don't know why, never heard why he decided to come. And they met in Melbourne, then they were married. And both were a lot older than what Mick and I were when we were married, and then there were three boys, then the First World War came and Dad joined up. And he went to France in early

04:00 1915. No, he didn't go to Gallipoli, he went straight to France. Anyway, he was blown up in France and came back and he could never work again, and Mum never worked either but they sort of always looked after anybody around the area. Anybody had a sore toe or cut themselves they knew where to come when. So that's how we sort of

04:30 knew everybody in the area, I think. But when we lived at Turramurra there it was very sparsely populated. We, as I said miles out of Turramurra station and all the friends around were all boys, there were no girls. I was, when I was born, I was the first girl around the area. And when I was about five, we always had dams for water,

05:00 and my brothers decided, they all stood... I thought they were going to drown me. And they all sat around the edge of here about six of their boyfriends and threw me in the water, and I thought they just want to drown me, they want to get rid of me 'cause I'm a girl. Anyway, I spluttered and squashed and that's how I learned to swim. And that's apparently what they were going to do, to teach me to swim. I had to be thrown in the water. But

05:30 then we used to go down to Bobbin Head, never knew there were sharks in there before. There were oysters around, we used to gather the oysters and they, that's where I learned to eat oysters. And they used to, we used to swim in the in the river there at Bobbin Head. Then suddenly somebody found a shark so we were forbidden to swim there. But it was just you know, you never thought of these things you just

06:00 did them. And I had to do them because I was only the boys and if I didn't do them, I'd be called a sissy. So that was how and you played cricket with them, you played football and that was sort of just part of

your life. My eldest brother went to Sydney Boys High from there. He used to catch the train. He used to walk down get a bus to the station Turramurra station and he'd

06:30 go into town by steam train and then ferry and then tram out to Sydney Boys High, and he did that for five…till he passed his leaving certificate and then went to uni [university]. And he was an engineer a mechanical engineer and then afterwards he decided to go into the ministry. And he then

07:00 went to Moore College and then he went to India as a missionary, so it was just a different life that he was. The other two boys went to Sydney Tech [Technical] High. George went to Sydney Tech High and he used to do the same thing until we moved to the city and then it was course much easier for them to go to school. Same for us, I came down when I first started school

07:30 from Turramurra, I used to have to go by bus to Turramurra station, I caught a train to Hornsby station and walked the whatever it was a mile I think to school. And you know we never thought five, nobody ever took you, you just went on your own and you came home on your own. It was never thought of when you think of today you know, how the children are taken driven to school and picked up and driven home again. It just was

08:00 one of those things. And once I thought I must apparently missed the bus, I thought I was going to walk home. I knew the way. You go by the way the bus went. Well of course the bus went much further way than what you would go normally. And they were all out looking for me and couldn't find me. Anyway, apparently the local minister found me and took me home. And I got into trouble for being so stupid. But it was just

08:30 a natural thing to do to follow the bus route. It wasn't till later on I learned that buses don't go straight. They go A B C D no A, A to D. And then I went through high school at Fort Street, got my leaving certificate. And I would've liked to have gone on, I did do a short

09:00 course at university, I was going to do one in psychology I think. That was at night time and then I worked for a little while in the public service because my father said, "You must be in the public service, it's the only place a woman can work." And then when I joined up from there and that was my young life.

Did your mother and father talk much about their

09:30 **or did your father talk much about his experience in the war? Did you know?**

No, he never talked much. The only thing, we learned a few things because there was a jeweller's shop in town called Sam Lands, and apparently my father was taking his leg off when they were blown up and this chap always remembered it, and he and Dad were quite good friends. And Dad

10:00 also did a lot of work for some of the handicapped children in Lane Cove, Sunshine Homes, and through that we met a lot of people who knew him. And you'd hear bits. But no, he never talked much and my mother never talked a lot. She never went back to England again. We never asked and she said, "No, I don't want to

10:30 go back." But her mother and father died in 1918 after the war, from shock really. Because of her six brothers, five were killed in the war and only one lived. And I think that's why she never wanted to go back. In the little towns where they lived in Soberton, we've been there quite a few times. My cousin lives in my mother's, where my mother lived

11:00 and in the town, it's got the war memorial and all their names are on the war memorial. And my Mum's sister, Aunt Cec, she was married to a chap in the army and they had one son and then he was killed four days before the second son was born, which was a great tragedy. And then greater still

11:30 in the World War both those boys went. And Geoffrey was killed on his first mission. He joined the young air force and my other cousin Bill went right through. He was in the artillery and he was one of the first to land at Dunkirk, anyway he got an MC [Military Cross]. And

12:00 then six weeks before the end of the war he changed over into the airborne parachuting and was killed at Antwerp. So that was you know a terrific tragedy for my aunty. Whereas my mother had three sons, two went to the war and two son-in-laws and me and we all came back. Although my eldest brother he had joined up in India. He

12:30 wouldn't go in as a padre, he went into the Pioneer Corps, and he was in charge of the Ghurkhas and he was in Tobruk when it was taken and he had lost a hand. And my father said, "He'll be found," because all we knew was he was missing, and the day after my father died we got news my brother was found. But he still went

13:00 through, right through up with the Ghurkhas, right through Crete and right up to Trieste. So, but he never came back, he was coming back to Australia to see Mum but he died before he did. And he had married a Scotch girl and they went back to India after the war, and then when they got thrown out he went to

13:30 the Seychelles Islands and operated from there and then went back to Scotland. So, but we were very

fortunate for all the boys came back and it was so sad to think that my aunty lost everything. And that's about the story of their life.

That's amazing.

14:00 **Do you remember the day you heard that the war, that war had broken out in Europe?**

Yes, it was Sunday night we'd just come back from church, and we had the nine o'clock news on, and Menzies was the prime minister and he announced the war had been declared in England. At, I think it was ten o'clock in the morning there or something, because the

14:30 time difference, just thinking of the time changes, and we're just sort of stunned. I got a bit upset thinking "Oh dear, what's going to happen now?" But, 'cause you know, we were all young and war hadn't even come into our thoughts. We were enjoying life you know. So that was the, my first reaction I think was that Sunday night

15:00 and it was just a horrible feeling not. And I think being so far away we didn't quite visualise what was happening. Although we'd heard about what was going on in you know, Czechoslovakia and these places it wasn't until it was declared, and when we heard about Chamberlain. And our news wasn't as prompt as what it is today. It happens

15:30 and you're seeing it now as it's going on. But there of course, all the news was quite delayed. So I suppose we still felt even though we knew war had started you still felt a long way away from it, and could never imagine anything ever happening out this way. That was my first reaction.

Were there young men, were your brothers around

16:00 **or was Mick around or?**

Yes, you'd come home from church with me, hadn't you? Yeah. I was, well my eldest brother was in India. George and Bill had joined, they'd just joined the permanent air force. I think Bill had, no George had joined first, Bill had joined later. And they were in, they had joined the permanent air force. So

16:30 we didn't expect them to be going anywhere because nobody talked about anybody from here going. It was just, that was over there, it wasn't here. But they weren't around at that time. One was in Melbourne I think, and one was in Canberra. And my eldest brother was in India. So it was but Mick was. And Mick had two other brothers and they eventually both

17:00 went. But at that stage none of us had thought of joining up. We weren't called for at that stage, but I remember my father going down to Martin Place and he wanted to join up and they told him to get home, he was too old. Happened to be one of the chaps knew him and he said, "You're too old man. You go home." So that was the only bit we knew about

17:30 joining the war.

Sorry I'm just gonna jump backwards a bit. What was life like in Turramurra I guess during the depression, was it?

Well I. See we grew everything, and I think I didn't realise probably the depression was on 'cause Dad got a full military pension and we had our own

18:00 WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and we had animals and we all, vegetables were all grown. We had our own milk and Mum made butter and we weren't affected as much as so many other people were. And I think too, parents in those days were inclined to stop you from thinking about things. And that

18:30 although by this time we were in Sydney, by this time and we still, Dad always grew vegetables and had fruit trees and we just always had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Always had the choko growing over the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s house, and we had passion fruit growing over the outside toilet, so I mean

19:00 they were just ways of life that I suppose, we were in one way fairly fortunate. And Mum made bread and I suppose we didn't fully realise. A lot of my friends I know did suffer so much and Mum was always inviting them in for a meal, and I think that's when I started to realise that things, we

19:30 were fairly fortunate.

Did your parents have great stories of travel from their life abroad?

Dad never spoke very much about it because he's mostly, it was in India. He used to tell us stories about tigers and elephants and snakes and lions, and of going to the Taj Mahal. And of course I was intrigued and I had a little model that,

20:00 he had sent it out for me, a little model of the Taj Mahal. I always wanted to go to India to see the Taj Mahal and to have a baby elephant, which I thought I could bring home. But eventually when I did see Bombay I thought, "No, thank goodness I never came to stay in India." I wasn't really impressed. But they were just your childhood thoughts that of being and Mum used to talk

20:30 a lot about the different places but never spoke a lot about the actual work. But we always had to speak French one day a week in our place because she thought we should learn French. Thursday was French day and we all had to speak French, so we all had to learn how to speak. So I, which proved pretty well when I went to school and I was able to get an O in

21:00 the oral French exam. I thought, “Well, at least I could do something.” So it was just one of those things in our family life that you had to speak it. And my brothers used to resent it and make excuses not to be home in time to speak French on a Thursday. But I suppose it was good training for us which helped a lot in other

21:30 parts of our lives I think.

Can you tell me, I guess your mother would have been quite an unusual case in for her day to have had…

Yes, she was.

such an education? Was she different to other mothers in many ways? In any ways?

I don’t know about being different I mean I suppose just that was

22:00 although she was a very clever woman. A lot of people were you know quite friendly with Mum. I know she read a lot. And we always read a lot and she insisted that we all read, you know. I suppose from about the age of ten I was reading detective novels and whatnot. Because we used to have a library woman, used to come round and

22:30 she’d, Mum used to take six or eight, every, she’d only come fortnightly and we just read all those books. But she did have quite a good circle of friends. I think she instilled in us that good friends were the mainstay of your life. You must always have friends and I think that was

23:00 one of the main things we thought about her. She was a very stubborn woman. She could very independent especially in later life she was very independent. After my father died she was you know, you couldn’t say, well how bout doing this or that? If that didn’t suit her, “No way.” She wanted to do her thing,

23:30 especially later on when she died. It was she had moved up to Lawson and she’d lived in Lawson for a number of years, and we used to go up every fortnight up, my sister used to go the other fortnight. And Mick’d do the gardens help with the gardens and we put hoses out because the bushfires, and they had one came right up close. And I used to say, “Well, look just go straight up the town, don’t wait to be rescued because somebody might

24:00 come and they might get killed and they might have a family you see, so.” Anyway, she was, the church were very good with her. But Mum knew everybody in Lawson and everybody knew Mum and we had insisted she always get a cab up the town not to walk up because she lived way down. You know, way down Falls Road, a long way down and a rough road, I can tell you. But this

24:30 particular day she had rung, was coming down to Sydney and I was going to meet her. And she had walked up to the street and the taxi driver said, “You didn’t… You’re daughter will go crook on me, you didn’t ring me and tell me you were coming.” And she turned around and said to him, “I just feel so well, I’ll never need you again.” And with that she dropped

25:00 down dead, just right on the footpath there. It was right outside the hotel. And fortunately a car was coming by and a lady doctor was in it and she got out and pronounced Mum dead. But when she had her funeral every shop in the town, even the hotel closed. And my mother would never have been inside a hotel or anything. We were never allowed to have drink in the house

25:30 or play cards or anything. So it was really amazing thing that they did for Mum. I mean that’s how they thought of her. So I thought, “It was a wonderful gesture for Mum.” I still, when we drive past there, the pedestrian crossing isn’t there now, but I can see it, and I know that’s

26:00 where she left us. So.

Was religion an important part of your upbringing?

Has been yes, through always. Even at Turramurra we didn’t live near the church but we always had a, Dad always made sure we had Sunday school at home on a Sunday, and the rector used to come quite regularly to, oh well once a month I think, so

26:30 Mum could have communion. And then later on when we were at Concord West and we’re there and we’re in the fellowship and confirmed there. It’s always been a part of our life and it still is. Even during service life when I wasn’t on duty, I always made sure we could get to a service one-day one part of Sunday. And there were about four or five of us and we were all different

27:00 so one week we’d go to the Anglican and the next week we’d go to the Methodist and the next week we went to the Catholic. Because we all joined in together, so we sort of got to know how every service was run. We never went to a Seventh Day Adventist or anything but always went to the three or four

different ones. And it's always been a part of our life and part of our married life and still is a part of our

27:30 life.

You mentioned that you'd met Mick through scouts? What did you do as a lady scout master?

Lady cub master.

Oh, lady cub master.

I used to take the cubs. They were from aged eight to about eleven and we used to take the cubs we'd have our cub meetings where we taught them the different rudiments of knots.

28:00 They'd have different badges they would go for, whether it be cooking or gardening or different badges and they always got an extra badge for it. My mother always took them for their cooking and their gardening and the different tests that they went for. And we'd have our day outings, we'd go different places. Take them out for a day

28:30 usually at weekends. And we'd have our meetings, weren't they usually from about half past six till about half past eight at night, because it was a bit late for little boys to be up. And we would have about, oh yes we'd play games, and lots of things teaching them different things. Early scouting, I suppose it would be.

29:00 And I was a Bagheera at the start, that was an assistant. Then I was Akela and that was in charge of the cubs. And we'd have about thirty boys I suppose too and but they were always pretty well behaved, some of them. Some of them would try you out. 'Cause they knew you weren't very old, you started about seventeen or eighteen you

29:30 know. It was good fun and we had a jamboree at Luna Park it was. Well, they had their jamboree in Sydney at well at Bradfield Park it was, where later on it was going to be the ITS [Initial Training School] for the air force. And we took them all up there for a day and then another day we took them to Luna Park and then we took them to various

30:00 things, and then of course the war came. And after when I joined up I didn't go back to scouting. Although later on when our children were in it I used to take for their tests and never really got out of it.

How would you become involved in it initially?

Initially? It was I think it was something I wanted to do. I had been a guide,

30:30 been a brownie and a guide, but I didn't want to go into guiding and I'd met the scout master down and he suggested they needed a Bagheera at the time and he suggested I join. And I did. And I never ever regretted it. I used to go for the different

31:00 tests. We'd go up to Pennant Hills and do different tests there, and it just became a part of your life. So that's how I think I got into it.

What other things would you do for I guess recreation or social activities?

Oh well, we played tennis and swimming. And from the fellowship

31:30 at the church we used to have different outings as a group. We'd always, any public holidays and that, drama, oh yes. We put on two, three-act plays a year. We used to put them, put these three act plays on every, twice a year. And I think we were very involved in that. Some of them were I suppose you'd. Well one was 'Fresh Fields' and

32:00 a few other different plays we put on. And it was always a good group and we'd do them not only in our own area but we used to go to a coupla different areas and put them on to raise funds for their church or their scouts or whichever. So we used to have social dances once a month, we always had a dance, played tennis. And I can remember when

32:30 tennis or shorts came in you know pleated short above your knee. Just above you knee but my father insisted I wore a skirt over mine. I wasn't allowed out unless I had the skirt over it. He said, "You're not going out dressed like that." And we played competition tennis – only C grade. Never got any higher. And then we started playing on a Sunday

33:00 sometimes. So that was almost forbidden but Mum got round my father and let me play tennis on a Sunday afternoon so long as we went to church at night. So that was ok then, to do that. But I still had to wear my skirt, I wasn't allowed to just flaunt up the street in a pair of shorts, that wasn't done.

How long was the skirt that you had to wear?

Oh,

33:30 below it had to come down below my knees. Oh, you couldn't wear it up. It had to be, it was white made, the same material as my shorts were and my top and shorts were all made the same and it had to come

down you know, so you didn't show a leg. It wasn't down to the ground. I mean now it's, that's the length now. But oh no, I wasn't allowed out.

Was it difficult to

34:00 **play in a skirt and shorts?**

Oh well, I took the skirt off when I played tennis, as soon as I got to the tennis. It only went on when I was to go home as long as, 'cause I knew my father would be waiting for me, so the skirt always went on up the top of the street. But it came off at the top of the street too. No way. I was the only one that had to wear a skirt but then that was parents I suppose.

34:30 **Did you notice the difference playing in the shorts as opposed to the skirt as a player?**

Oh yes, I was oh much nicer. You're freer but they weren't short, they weren't tight shorts you know, they were pleated shorts around and quite wide legs almost like the Bombay bloomers that we had in the air force but they were pleated and they were,

35:00 the dressmaker made them for us so. But that was the uniform of tennis in those days, all the competition tennisers all wore that sort of thing. But nobody else but me had to wear a skirt.

Had it been quite revolutionary to bring in something like shorts into tennis?

I think it had been. I think most of them had been frocks before that. I think you know they were always, I think it was only

35:30 just starting to, to come in that women could wear shorts. And of course, we were modern young things. We were going to wear shorts. But from what I think of now is that a lot of them only, they used to wear of frocks as long as it was white. But you never wore coloureds. We never ever dreamt of playing tennis in

36:00 coloureds, it just wasn't done. Same as cricket you know. You didn't wear these fancy pyjamas coloured that you see them wear today. That was ours but, no I think we weren't you know ultra modern or anything, but it was just the way I think the trend was going at that time and the trend was you know, had to be a little bit more easier not to be old

36:30 fashioned.

Can you believe what they wear today, the players?

Oh wow! When you see some of them. You wonder what they're, whether they're going swimming or what. And also they seem so tight you wonder how they can move and play tennis. I think you gotta have a bit more freedom, but some of them seem so darn tight and so short. We used to think "Oh how can you

37:00 wear them that short and get away with it?" And some of them haven't always got the nicest legs either.

I was wondering could you tell me Betty, when you first heard about the, what did you know about your chances of being involved in some kind of war time effort after it was,

37:30 **or after it had started?**

Well, after it had started they did have a VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] and but I didn't want to be in that. And of course, nurses were the marvellous women, they were able fully trained nurses, could go to war and we thought, well gosh. You kept thinking to yourself "There must be something women can do." So when the, I

38:00 found out about the Mrs Mackenzie's place for her radio school, I think it was called. And she taught the men, there were about twenty women I think. We all went to learn and we thought "Well, maybe by doing something like this we might some time, come a chance." At that stage you weren't sure if it was going to be navy,

38:30 army or air force because the government of the day just wouldn't have women other than the nursing service in the war. And you just thought, "Well there must be something that you can do to help." You just felt it was idle not being able to something and I think that's when you started even though we were younger, we still had to do something.

39:00 Didn't want to just knit balaclavas caps and socks. I mean that was for the older ladies to do not the young women to do. And you thought you didn't want to sell badges and serve in the NAAFI [Navy Army Air Force Institute] headquarters serving tea and toast or something, you thought that was being a bit of a waste of time. You wanted something much more interesting and you could get your teeth into. And that was why

39:30 I think I started doing that. So it was a great thrill when they did decide to have an air force.

Tape 3

00:30 **Okay Betty I'm just wondering if you could tell me about how the way that you enlisted into the WAAAF?**

How I enlisted?

Yeah how?

Well having been at Mrs McKenzie's school and then on the 13th of March, no that was 15th of March 1941 the government then put an edict out that women would now be accepted

01:00 **into the Woman's Australian Auxiliary Air Force and that was a wonderful thing we thought. Just it was the first time that they had admitted that women would be wanted. Mainly only, we were only allowed to be within Australia, not to go overseas. See the nurses and that they were allowed away because they were doing such a wonderful job. But we**

01:30 **thought at least we could be doing something here and that would allow the men, we'd take the place of the men, to go overseas, and it was a breakthrough really for women for future for being allowed to do work. Be married and do work you could. Because a woman usually when she was married had to leave her work whether she was in an office, a school teacher or**

02:00 **wherever. Up to that time they just had to leave work. So at, it was the beginning of a breakthrough I think for women for the future. But at that stage we didn't think of that and we didn't even worry about that because all we were so keen that we could go down, we could become members. So we had to go to our medical, we had to go down to Woolloomooloo and have a medical**

02:30 **and they gave you a bit of an IQ [Intelligence Quotient] test I think. They asked you know, "What you wanted to do?" Well there were only three choices at that stage. There was WT operator, cook or a steward. And I didn't want to be a cook or a steward. I couldn't cook anyway. I'd never cooked and so I wanted to be a WT operator, not knowing what we would**

03:00 **actually do or where we would do it and that was how, just the thrill. And then I passed the medical and it was just cockahoop [exciting] that I could, that would eventually go in. And so I had to wait a few weeks but we were in the first fifty to be in the women's air force.**

What was your family's reaction?

Oh my Mum, parents thought I was

03:30 stupid. Couldn't work out why I would want to do something like that. Although they were secretly quite proud I think that I did it. Eventually they were both quite proud that I had joined up. I think they thought, "Well, what's a woman going to do? She's not going to be nursing," she, you know, there was nothing much else for a woman to do in the services but it was all new ground

04:00 and I think the women did break it. And we were always thrilled that we were the first of the women's services. The army and the Army Medical Corps and the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] came after us. Although the WRANS have been the senior service, the navy we thought were the first of the women's services. And we always have been proud of that.

04:30 **What did you think about, or talk about with your friends and the WAGs [Wireless Air Gunners] waiting to go?**

They didn't realise. A lot of them said, "Well, what to do?" You know. Why would you want to join up and get three and four pence a day instead of earning a little bit more money or going to munitions or…? And you thought oh no, it, I mean if your friends thought… I think they were secretly

05:00 thrilled or proud that you made the effort. Some of them would've liked to have done it but for family reasons they couldn't or wouldn't and I think they were all quite pleased when they eventually, when it got known that it was women's services and what we were doing. We weren't going to join up and be issued a gun and rush overseas and shoot somebody. I think it was just that initial

05:30 reaction to a lot of people. And I think that's how we looked at it anyway.

Can you tell me about the first day you arrived to complete training? What you saw and what you?

Into the… When I first went into rookies?

Yeah.

You were issued a palliasse which

06:00 was just a hessian bag and told to go over to that shed and fill it up with chaff. We thought it was chaff. It was hay. And that was our mattress. That was absolutely shocking. And of course, at first we all put

too much in and you just stuffed it all in and had it like this. And they said, “Well sleep on it one night and see how you go.”

06:30 And we’re also issued with three blankets and a pillow. No sheets, no pillowslips. Horrible to sleep in blankets and no sheets and no pillowslip. And so the next day we found our palliasse had far too much in it, so we had to throw that out and make a mattress. But I mean after sleeping on really good mattresses it was a bit of a come down, and then we learned

07:00 how you could. In Melbourne it was so cold we learned how you could wrap up three blankets and make it into about six or seven blankets to keep you warm. And I sent home and asked my mother for a pillowslip, which I put on. I learned to put up with the no sheets but I couldn’t sleep on a pillow with no pillowslip. And I was quite willing the first day to go home.

07:30 I really was. I thought, no, I don’t think I could stand this. Because quite a few things that happened and, you were stood up and a sergeant came round and looked at your hair, and just chopped your hair off if it was too long. These were horrible things to happen to you, you know. How can a man come along and just cut your hair off and tell you that your hair’s too long? And we, a little bit rebellious, but what could we do?

08:00 I mean we’d joined up. And then we were given these men’s. They didn’t have enough clothing you see for women and they gave us these jeans, we call them, in the men’s they called them goons. But they were buttoned up all the way up and the crotch came way down here somewhere and in those days there was no such things as zippers, and when they gave you a five minute

08:30 break and you wanted to go to the toilet you had to undo all your buttons and take it off. And being a women it was not a very, it was dreadful, so they were the things we were willing to say, “No, well I’m going home.” But we didn’t, after we were all in the same we all put up with it and we all enjoyed it.

How were your treated by drill sergeants and…?

09:00 Well, you were treated like a nong. You didn’t know. Well we didn’t either. We, you know had to know your left foot and your right foot, your left arm, which arms to swing. Of course, in the air force they did the swing arm and if anyone did anything wrong of course you were bellowed at. And we thought, “Not used to this treatment, this is a bit hard to take.” But no,

09:30 after the first week you settled down and you understood that this was your early training and you had to be disciplined. And oh no, I think that was having woken up to the fact that all these things had to be you settled down and quite enjoyed it afterwards.

And were there any women who decided that they didn’t want to go through with it?

Yes, there were a couple.

10:00 Yes, after about the third or fourth week a couple said, no, that it wasn’t their cuppa tea, and they asked to get out. So they were let out, there was no problem. We just felt sorry for them afterwards that they didn’t stick it a bit longer, and because we’d all sit around and talk and I suppose complain a bit.

10:30 But that was, I think that was only natural because we didn’t understand that this was just going to be a little five or six weeks of your life. We were trained to learn something from that and I think we did. And I think that was the beginning of our self-discipline I think.

How did you

11:00 **cope with the lack of privacy in the?**

Oh, that was hard at first. You were in a dormitory with you know, twenty-eight, twenty to twenty-eight people. You went to a shower hall and no doors on showers. You went to a toilet with no doors on toilets and that we all found the first few days very, very difficult.

11:30 And you had to sort of to undress and have a shower and, but after about the first ten days you forgot all about that and you all became quite friendly. And it was just, well that’s the way it is and we’ve got to accept it. So you did but it was really hard. And just having a little dressing, little wardrobe I suppose it was. There was a little dressing table

12:00 and you’re in bed and another one of those and another bed, that was hard to take at first. But you soon had to.

Were you able to bring any personal items from home?

No, but photos, you were allowed to have photos so long as you didn’t have them on display on panic night. You had to put them away because when an inspection came through

12:30 you just couldn’t have anything around. But you always had your photo. You’d have it under your pillow or when you’d sleep, or just in the drawer beside you. But you couldn’t have any big things on display.

Can you tell me about panic night?

Well, panic night was the night that everything had to be cleaned up. The whole of our rooms had to be cleaned out, swept and cleaned. Your beds had to be properly made

13:00 with your blanket. They had a blue stripe in the middle and that had to be right in the middle of the bed, you're spare blanket had to be folded at the end and your pillow. Your shoes, we were given two pairs of shoes. The one's you weren't wearing had to be tied and put at the bottom of the bed and polished. No washing to be seen. And you had to do the ablutions too. You took

13:30 it in turns for those. There'd be two or three of you, have to clean out the ablution blocks, and this would go on from about six o'clock at night till about nine o'clock. It took ages. And of course, not a lot of us were used to sweeping and you had to, you know, clean, sweep out the wards. There were no vacuum cleaners, it was all done with brooms and dusters. And you dusted down the thing. You had to even dust up

14:00 the top of where you had to climb up on your dressing table to clean. 'Cause they would come along and check if there was any dust or not. One night I stupidly left my pillowslip on and got into trouble for that. And I thought oh well, can't help it. But anyway, I just got into trouble and told not… "If you're going to have it on make sure you put it away." But in the morning when you had

14:30 to dash off to be on duty you know, you had to be at breakfast I think we'd have at half past six. Then you started marching or whatever at half past seven, you often forgot some of these things. But that was our panic night. The next it was usually a Monday night was panic night. On Tuesday morning the officer in charge would come around and check everything in the room and tell

15:00 you if it was properly done or you could do it again. Be better next time. They were the first couple of night times you did it, it was awful. But after that you got used to it and you got into a routine and we made sure each one had a job and you knew what you were doing, so it wasn't quite so difficult.

Did it take a few times to get it right sometimes?

Oh yes,

15:30 I think it took us about three weeks to get it properly right. There was always one of us who made a mistake or didn't do it quite right. There'd always be one of us that but I think we took it in turns. I'm sure because it always seemed to be a different one pulled up for something so. But we thought oh well, we're in it together, so what. We're not going to let it worry us.

And then you started to make some

16:00 **good friends?**

Yes, made some very, very good friends. We'd have our days. We'd usually had a Sunday off and we'd go, we might go into town. We'd like go to church then we'd go somewhere. One time we went to Ferntree Gully by train out from Spencer Street. Spencer Street, I think it was. And there were four of us went out and it poured all day. We had our great coats on

16:30 and it was freezing cold and the storm, we got wet and of course you've gotta try and dry everything out. There were no such things as dryers in those days. But most of those friends we still have those friends. Some as I say, have unfortunately passed away but the majority of people that we met in our early part have been friends ever since and I think that's been that that

17:00 bond for us all.

What do you think it was that actually drew you all very close together?

The fact that we were living together. You had to, you never looked on, you never sort of thought of people, you only looked for the good side of everybody. We were all away, we were all a bond of doing something that we hoped

17:30 was going to give an early end to the war. Whatever we were going to do we felt, I think we all had that same feeling that we were here together to do something and you only looked on the good side of everybody. And we never worried about faults, we all had faults. They never came into the limelight. Never came into

18:00 being. We just, that's why I think we've always had that bond. We shared so much together. We shared our joys and days of happiness, days of sadness and that brought us all together.

Was the physical workouts tough going? Would they be?

Oh, the marching was in the beginning. You marched and you

18:30 marched and you marched. And we did route marches. We used to have to march from… We were stationed in Melbourne in an old mansion next door to the Baillieu people, the Myers people, and we'd have to march from there up to Mayfield Avenue to an old girls school that was taken over. And that's where we did our classes in discipline and the air force

19:00 administration. And all air force ways well, you'd march up there I suppose it was a couple of miles.

You'd march back irrespective of weather. It didn't matter, you marched wet or fine, mostly wet and we marched around, we'd do route marches, we'd thought surely the air force don't live on marching alone. But after seven weeks we realised we didn't

19:30 have to do that any more and that was really good after our passing out parade.

Did you feel it was a good thing to do in hindsight though?

Oh yes, never regretted it. I think it gave us such an insight of life which helped us all in our future life. And I think too the fact that both Mick and I were in the services we had no troubled

20:00 re-adjusting to civilian life and I think you could never, I don't think that could've happened. I just don't know but I feel that if I hadn't been in the services we may have found difficulty in settling back to civilian life. But the fact that we had been through different things although separated it was much easier to

20:30 settle back to, 'cause that's what you wanted to do. But still always enjoyed the years we did in the service.

What sort of things were you taught in the classrooms as part of the training?

In the first training? We were taught the rudiments of the air force. We were taught the reason why you were being

21:00 allowed to be a member of the air force and we had to do first aid. Although I had done first aid previously it was a big help for me 'cause I had to do it when I was cubbing. And we learned mostly administration and laws and regulations of the air force was the

21:30 major training I think.

Do any of those particular rules stand out in your memory?

I think the rule of being true and honest, belonging to a family of people and we were there under a king and queen

22:00 and we were loyal subjects, and to always keep to rules of being, loyalty. And I think they were the main, when I think of it now they were probably the main things. Although at the time we probably thought knowing what air force was about was also a good thing to know. And why we were there.

22:30 **Was there a strong sense of camaraderie within the group women considering you were like the first intake?**

Yes. Yes, there we all came from different walks of life. But you didn't worry what walk they had done before hand, you were, it was just we were thrown in together and we just learned we had to,

23:00 we were living together. You'd go into town, in those days Melbourne people didn't like service women and they just... I don't know but we had a lot of trouble. We always made sure we were in groups. And one time it was just a couple of girls and the tram driver spat on us. And we just were

23:30 horrified and he said, "You'll be out of the services soon. The government's going to stop it." And he just, we just couldn't believe it. And amazingly enough the government did stop recruiting for six months and that was not long after. It was while we were doing our rookies they stopped and they didn't take another intake in then until October. So it was you know,

24:00 it was quite a long while but they just, we weren't very popular.

What were some of the other reactions that you'd get in the streets of Melbourne?

Well, people were. We'd been invited to a couple of afternoon teas and by some of the social people and

24:30 when we were there they just sort of rubbished us for being in uniform. They just thought we were, they had a dance and the servicemen asked us to dance and they thought we were taking the men away. And we said, "Well you know, it was only natural I think that they would ask you to dance, 'cause they were probably just as unhappy being away from their loved ones as we were." And, but the civilian

25:00 girls couldn't see that at the time. They did later come round when they realised but I think it was just the newness that was all. That it was hard too, 'cause we weren't quite used to that sort of thing. And it was a bit hard to take at first. But I must say that the restaurants were very good to us. They knew we were only on little money and there was one place, Florentino's, which was

25:30 quite an expensive place but they used to give us a Sunday lunch for one and six. We thought that was pretty good. Seeing we only got three and four pence a day. It was but those people, they were very good to us. And then as time went on more people accepted us until it was totally accepted.

What about the servicemen that you talked about, that would invite you to dance? What about the servicemen,

26:00 **how would they react to women in uniforms?**

Well, a couple of them at first wondered what we were doing. And we said, “Well we were there to take the place of men, so you men can go away.” Some of them thought that was a good idea, some of them didn’t like it. Thought, ‘cause they had nice cosy jobs, some of them weren’t that happy about. But majority of them I think were just. They were young same as we were and I think

26:30 they thought it was a rather good thing. So that we said, “Well you know, you’d better dance with some of the women.” But I think it was just the fact that it was just being in uniform they thought they didn’t have to be involved with anybody. And I think that was the main. And we didn’t have to be involved with anybody.

So they felt a bit more relaxed?

Much more, yeah

Camaraderie in the ranks?

Yes.

27:00 Definitely.

Now after that you went to Parkes?

Yes, went to Parkes in February ‘42. And we were the first women to go to Parkes and we were told that they’d never, in the annals of history, had a woman

27:30 ever been on the air force grounds. There were 1,200 men there and 20 women it was. We sort of... And they had to put up a special fence, just a wire fence around some of the barracks to make sure that the men didn’t get in or we didn’t get out. I’m not sure which. But it was quite an eye opener. ‘Cause

28:00 there was the navigate, the chaps doing the navigation course chaps doing WAGs and chaps doing some other courses. So you know it was and we did the navigation course, except the flying but we had to do the whole navigation course that the men did, except we weren’t allowed to fly. We were allowed to sit in a plane one day. It was an Anson and we were allowed to sit in it and have a look at it. So we knew what

28:30 we were learning about. But that was as far as we got at that stage.

Was that disappointing? Did you want to?

Oh, we thought we were going to fly, yes, but not really. I mean we knew that we weren’t allowed. But it made us all the more keen to make sure we learnt what we were doing, yes.

Were you told beforehand, before you arrived that you were the first women?

Yep,

29:00 and then the air commodore I think was in charge at the time, and he didn’t like women. Or he didn’t know about women in the services. We were the first lot and he wasn’t sure how we were going to behave. I thought, “He’s got a hide.” But he was going to put all the onus onto us. We had to show

29:30 what we were doing and what we were worth. Not the 1,200 men had to show that they could prove that women could be on the station.

Can you remember what he said to you?

Oh, he just told us it was the first time and he wasn’t keen on it and he hoped we would prove him wrong. Which we did, ‘cause they took, after that, it was then quite a while after it was open for all.

30:00 for all musterings. There would be MTs you know, motor transports women doing parachute folding, parachutes women doing fabric work and that oh, that wasn’t till about ‘43 but it was open then too it, that was the way of leading it and they built proper quarters for the women and proper fence around then and

30:30 they. So we were the pioneers at Parkes for the women.

Was there a sense of pride in the group of women about that?

Yes, yes. Yes, and we stood by it and we made sure that we weren’t going to do anything that he would be upset about. Except one night we knew that there were watermelons over in the slit trenches and a padre was

31:00 looking after them and we decided we wanted some watermelon. And we went out to acquire one. So we just had to make sure that there you know, nobody around so we could acquire some watermelon for us to have for our supper. But one of the girls fell in and so we had to drag her out of the slit trench, pinch the water, I mean acquire the watermelon and bring it back to

31:30 camp. Even the one she’d sat on or slipped on. It was broken so we had to pick that up to make sure

nobody got blamed for it. So we had a nice watermelon supper. It was very hot you see. It was in the February and it was very hot and there was no such thing as air conditioning or anything, it was all fans or what have you. So we enjoyed our hot watermelon.

So you managed to get in and get out without being seen?

Yes, we just made

32:00 sure, we learned how to do it.

That's wonderful. What did you do for recreation in Parkes?

Well, we were only there a few weeks and we didn't have time for recreation. We had lessons all day and we had night lessons as well and we had exams.

32:30 And one day we did, one Sunday, yes one Sunday afternoon we all went to town and we all went to the pictures. They had a theatre's open on Sundays up there for the servicemen and so we went to the pictures one night, and then the last night they had a special dinner dance and passing out for us and our course. So, but that was about

33:00 the only times we went to town. Not very often. There just wasn't the opportunity.

Was there much attention on the women from the men in the base during those few weeks?

Yes, some of them I know had. One of my very close friends, her boyfriend was a WAG there. So whenever June could possibly acquire a little bit of time to go and

33:30 see Paul or Paul could acquire a bit of time to see June, we all sort of, oh she was in the shower or she was somewhere else you know, if ever she was wanted, so. It, you know, a couple of others did meet up with some blokes but I don't think anything came of that. But and June and Bill were eventually married but unfortunately they were only married about five or six days when he went away and he was

34:00 killed on his second trip I think. He was in Iraq? Bill was killed in Iraq, wasn't it? Paul I mean, not Bill. The Middle East, so that was a blow.

Were you with her when she found out? When she found the news?

Yeah. And we'd been friends, she was one of my very close, is one of my very close friends. Yeah.

34:30 So you know it was a bit hard to take at first. Then June went off. She went out of fighter sector altogether and she went, she was very good as a stenographer and then went into the office work of the air force. And she was in Townsville and then she met, quite a number of years after, she met another chap and fortunately had a very happy married life with him.

35:00 So that was good.

Can you tell me a little bit about being posted to flight sector?

Well when we were first, after our course at Parkes we were all told: 1) we were going to Townsville or 2) we were going to Perth, and we thought that'd be good. Going to

35:30 Perth. "Wonder what we're going to do in Perth?" Anyway, we had to go to Bankstown to start with and that was because the place where we were going underground wasn't quite ready so we had to go to Bankstown and we had, at Bankstown airport, aerodrome, we had quarters there, and the Yanks by this time were being ensconced into

36:00 Bankstown. And we were there for about six weeks I think until our place in town was ready.

What was your impression of the Americans?

Well we didn't like them. They were just not our sort, our way of life. They told us that they were the best

36:30 of the Americans, they were the one's who'd joined up and the others in future would be conscripts. And we thought, "Well, if they're the best of a bad lot we're not very thrilled with them." Don't wanna be rude.

That's fine.

37:00 **It's a common reaction. What was it about their behaviour that you observed that you didn't like?**

Well, they were just so brash and you know. "We're the best and we're the biggest and we've come here to win the war for you." Irrespective that you know, by this time it was 1942 and our chaps had been over in Europe working and

37:30 or up in the Middle East or you know. It was a bit hard to take some of that. And the other thing was, there was a big drought on at that time and there was no hot water in the showers. You'd have to go and have your shower. They wouldn't even undress. They told us they only washed their hands and their

face, and used talcum powder for the rest of their wash. But we thought, “Oh blah,

38:00 and we gotta work with you.” So it was a bit off putting anyway. But it was just, we thought “Well, what else do you expect?” We go out and have a cold shower and we make sure we’re clean.

Did the talcum powder work or did they smell a bit?

Oh, we thought they smelt a bit but that might’ve been our objection.

38:30 **We’ve heard lots of stories of the Americans trying to win onto the local girls and women throughout the war. Did they try that with your group ?**

Oh yes, they tried it. Some of the girls fell for it, they fell for them. But they soon some of them did. Yes, I know a couple of my friends really did meet some nice chaps and they have, they’re still in

39:00 America. They went to America as war brides. A couple of them come out regularly for our reunion, just especially our big reunions. A couple got waylaid and fell by the wayside unfortunately. They got into a bit of bother, but… No we just decided, well a group of us, well ok,

39:30 we’ve gotta work with them. They know everything but we know a bit more and we had to teach them the geography of Australia. They knew nothing about it. So we decided well ok, we’ve gotto do that, we’ll do it.

Were they attentive at all?

Well, not really to us unless you allowed them to be. But they knew I was married and that was it,

40:00 you know. They didn’t, but they used to brag about the civilian girls they’d been out with and they’d talk about it and we’d say, “Look shut up,” you know, “Oh be quiet. We don’t want to hear it, we’re not jealous you know, we’re not interested in what you do when you leave the station.” And when they realised we

40:30 weren’t they thought they were being smart and we’d be jealous, they soon gave that away and realised well we were human beings too. And so they started to treat us as human beings.

So it was a good thing to pull ‘em up short?

Yeah, well we did.

Tape 4

00:31 **Betty, I was wondering, yesterday you mentioned about a lot of your work being secret and I was just wondering was it hard to keep secrets?**

Not amongst your own air force people but when I’d go home on leave and people’d say “What do you do?” And in the end my mother realised you know, she wasn’t to ask questions. So they’d ask her, and Mum’d say “Oh she’s

01:00 just a clerk doing clerical work,” or something to that extent. It was much easier to say that than to say, “I’m doing secret work, I can’t tell you.” So you know, you got to that way even like all my friends who weren’t in the services I used to just say, “I was doing ordinary work.” And they’d say, “Why do you have to work such long hours?” I’d say, “Because work has to keep going, it’s ongoing work.” So it was easier to

01:30 make that sort of remark than to say, “Well look, I can’t tell you what I’m doing, it’s really hush, hush.” It wasn’t till after the war, well quite a while after that you could really talk about it.

Was that nice to be able to talk about it when you could?

I don’t know. It just seemed in a distant then and a lot of people weren’t really interested. Some of our own air force people who

02:00 didn’t know what you were doing, yes, they liked to hear about it. They like to know what each person was doing but we found out in the civil life you were in the services you did your job and really it doesn’t matter now. That was yeah, most of their attitude I think.

You mentioned yesterday too that there were times when you’d hear people talking and you’d

02:30 **know they didn’t know what they were talking about. Can you remember any of the things that you heard?**

Well, they’d talk about how all the Japs had already arrived in Sydney and they were pushed away. And, “My son,” or “My grandson, so he was there on duty,” and you knew quite well that’s a lot of utter rubbish, and wherever they got it from you don’t know.

03:00 It just sounded as though they were trying to make all just war talk or just let people think that they knew everything. They didn't know anything. That was quite humorous at times some of the things you'd hear or you'd hear them. Particularly after the submarines were in the harbour, how they knew everything and yes, they almost saw it happen. But they weren't anywhere near it. They didn't know anything about it. You just

03:30 said, "Oh is that so?" Let them think you know, you just knew nothing about it. You wouldn't be game to tell them what you knew.

Can you tell me, you said you were working the night that the, were you working the night that the submarines came in?

That the submarines came in. I'd been on the night before or early morning and, that isn't right, – the early morning of that night.

04:00 Would've been I suppose about three o'clock in the morning, and I had said I'd heard something on the boom, and the captain said, no, I wouldn't know the difference between a shark or a submarine. And then again, after we came off duty, that's five o'clock and then went on again at six o'clock that night, so. You know, I said, "Well,

04:30 was there any follow up?" And, no, there was no follow up because it was just my utter rot. And then when it happened he wanted my... Fortunately I, you had to write everything down in the log and I had it all written down in the log and he wanted my logbook. But I wouldn't give it to him. And that's when I rang the Eastern Area and the next day, I think it was the next day or maybe the day after, they said

05:00 to collect my log. So sort of... Then he disappeared

What had you heard?

Well, it was on the radar, you picked it blimpa blimpa I suppose you'd call it, on the radar. And I mean it definitely wasn't a shark brushing by or something 'cause you'd get that frequently, and they're in a, totally different blimp it makes. A

05:30 different signal I suppose you'd say. So that's how it came about.

You mentioned yesterday that when you got to the base in Parkes there was an idea that you women had to prove themselves to the commanding. Did that ever go away? That sense of having to prove yourself as a as a female in that?

06:00 Not quite then because we… After we did that course then I did my officer's course and then went onto the operations room, I had to prove myself again then as a woman because I was the only woman on the course. And I just had to prove that I could do the work too. It just wasn't men that could do the job, you had to prove yourself then.

06:30 But after that, no. Having passed and done quite well I felt quite proud of myself. But once you got on the job and were doing it, no you didn't have to, you were left to do your work. The officers we had in charge with us then were very good and they knew, well if you'd done the course you knew your work and you were left to do it. They seemed to be but they were the two.

07:00 Twice I think that I felt we've still gotta prove that we're not just silly little females, we could do it.

You mentioned that yesterday there'd been some people who had been quite horrible to the women in the uniform. Did that change over the course of the war?

It did later on, yes. That was because we were fairly new and,

07:30 and sort of coming down, getting down to Melbourne but just because they weren't, I don't think quite ready for us. And I can always remember this lass who was with me, she was a great pianist and her father was a very well known judge as a matter of fact. And she wrote home and told him and he was all ready to take her out of the air force. But no she stayed on then for

08:00 a while but later on she also did something stupid. Wrote a letter and called it "Stalag 13." She then decided the air force wasn't for her, she'd rather be back being a pianist. And she was a beautiful, a very well known pianist and she did play beautifully. So I think she did a better job out than in.

Do did people understand the work

08:30 **like by the end of the war that the WAAAF were doing?**

Oh yes, by the end of the war. See, because we had not only the WAAAF there, was then the WRANS and army and they knew that we were really needed because the men had to be taken off. It allowed the men to go to war and 99% of them wanted to do that. They didn't really want to be around southern districts where there was nothing for them

09:00 all to do, and I think by then there was so many musterings then. We'd had something like seventy odd musterings by then and no I think well people realised, well yes, women can do all these jobs. They don't have to just be typists or nurses or. There's so many other things available for them. So I think we

were accepted very much by then. They found that no, they couldn't

09:30 run the services without women.

In the men's services especially in I guess in the army but generally you have heard men speak of how men didn't join one of the services they would be, there was a lot of pressure to join the services?

Yes, my word.

Was it the same with women?

No. No, I don't think so. 'Cause a lot of women if they would like to join up but some of them

10:00 just couldn't because the family relied on them, and particularly if their brothers and that were away, their parents sort of relied on having them around and weren't in favour of them joining. But I don't think women. A lot of women went into munitions or went into land army, and they were doing that type of work. But no, I don't think there was any pressure on women to join up.

10:30 It just didn't. I never heard of any.

It's interesting. I'd never read anything about it, so I thought it was just... I was wondering if you could tell me about the work that you did in the fighter sector?

When we were underground?

Mmmm.

Well, as I said, we were underground.

11:00 And we had a plotting table and on the plotting table you had little disks, little blocks and we had queues. And the table, the plotting table was made out in the degrees and like longitude and latitude, and when I had been in charge I was up in the little poop deck. Little Perspex

11:30 top and all the signals would come into me and I would tell them where shipping was. Where the convoys were and where we had to send aircraft out on strike or on convoy to look after them. And the girls would move these quite little blocks around. Real play time wasn't it, to the positions where we wanted them to be. And

12:00 that was the type of work we did. And then we'd work out who worked out where the planes would go and where they would do the convoying. Similar to what Mick did overseas. We did it out here in between Bundaberg and Wilson's Promontory I suppose, was our section. And that's where we sort of

12:30 had to guard all that lot.

Who would be in that room?

Well, in the room where the girls were, there'd be the shift then ten of us on a shift, I think. Or nine down doing the work and I would be up top. And there was also, we had an air force officer in charge on the other

13:00 dais across the other side of the table were the Americans. Two, usually two American officers. And when the Americans first came they were down with the girls and they were showing them how to work the operations, how to work the tables and learning about the geography of Australia, which was so different

13:30 for them. That was a bit hard, that.

Did they learn it after a while?

Yes, some of them were willing to. Yes, they did and after they got a certain amount of knowledge they'd be shifted out going out to different parts of... It might be to the Philippines or wherever they were going, and then another new lot would come in and we'd go through

14:00 the same routine again. But no, that was. It was interesting but difficult. It was all right coping with your own girls but sometimes it was rather difficult coping with men who didn't really want to be learning from you. That was hard.

What was everyone doing within the room? Was everyone working on the table or were

14:30 **there people ?**

Well, most of them were. Yes, because it was a very big area. It would've been I suppose about twenty feet long and about twelve feet wide. It was a very big table. It was up high from the ground, that's where the girls got under when we had the problem. And it really was a big section,

15:00 so you couldn't all do, just you had to have areas where you could be because you couldn't stretch across and you had to put them in the right spot. I mean you wouldn't want to be a degree out otherwise you'd be sixty miles out. So each one had their sections. And we did have one girl down

recording the different places. So there would've been I suppose, seven

15:30 or eight working there at the time.

And so your job was to make sure that everything was placed?

In the right spot. And I had to tell them where and when we'd get another signal in, where it had moved to or if we had any sightings where the sightings were, and then you'd have the different colour block

16:00 for a sighting and then we could let the aircraft know. We'd let the controller know and he would be in touch with the controller of the aircraft and they'd know where to look for the submarines.

Did you have a sense at the time how important the work you were doing was?

Yes, we did. We did because we felt that particularly up the

16:30 coast when we knew we were losing quite a number of coastal boats and knowing the Japanese were up and down there and that there was a mother ship out there somewhere. But we did feel, yes, well we've gotta make sure we don't make any errors. And we did feel yes, it was important work. It probably wasn't gonna win the war but. And it,

17:00 we were doing similar work to what later on we found out women were doing in England. The WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] in England were doing but of course theirs was much harder job than what ours was, lots because well they had more bombings, more real things happening. And their stations could be bombed and you know they were under a much bigger strain I think than any of us ever were.

17:30 **Now you mentioned that you were working very long hours. Had anyone worked those sorts of hours before, the women?**

Oh no. You never did shift work you know. And you know you only did ordinary office hours or something. It was a bit of a shock to the system in the beginning especially when you had to be up and ready to go to work at five

18:00 in the morning, and you had to be at work at five. So you left, we were marched up from the Metropol Hotel with two guards in front and two guards at the back and I… It was, we thought bless these guards. But it was you know a bit hard at first and particularly not having any toilets down there. If you wanted to go you had to tell a guard

18:30 and be taken back with a guard. Well, of course, that wasn't all, wait till eleven or twelve hours later and make a dash for it. But it was just incredible how you managed everything. We'd be up you know at four and we'd make our little, we wouldn't go for their breakfast and then you'd have your shower and that was always very quick in

19:00 and out you know, and down and ready to leave by about twenty to five I suppose. You'd march up. And then at night you'd finish at six and we'd be marched back again. And then if you went on at six you came off at five. But they were hours that you got used to them. And I think it probably stood us in good stead when we had our children.

19:30 You didn't need quite so much sleep.

Which was harder, the night shift or the day shift?

The night shift, especially about two o'clock in the morning. If there was a bit of a lull you could feel yourself. You'd have to sort of almost to try and keep your eyes awake and you could feel yourself getting a bit dopey

20:00 and you would've loved to have a cuppa tea or something at that time but there was nothing. And we used to arm ourselves with bits of chocolate and whatnot, take down to nibble to just sort of, to do something. I couldn't come at eating chewing gum but some of them, some of the girls did. That kept them going but I could never come at eating chewing gum. But I could eat chocolate. Not quite a choco-holic but almost.

20:30 **So there were no toilet facilities, any break anywhere to…?**

No, nothing. We didn't get anything, nothing to eat until from early morning to late at night or late or six o'clock at night til five o'clock in the morning. No, nothing. But you soon overcame all that. It was you know that was the job and you did it.

21:00 You just didn't growl although we probably grumbled amongst ourselves. But that's it, I suppose it was a different sort of life. I don't think I could do it now, and you growl now because somebody'd listen to you. When you've joined up and enlisted that's it. That's your job and you've gotta do it.

21:30 **Was there ever anyone who just couldn't cope with the, I guess the pressure or the conditions or?**

Not on our shift, no. There was never anyone on our shift. They were all really good. And we all got on very well together. We'd have our days off, you could a couple were from Melbourne one was from Brisbane and we'd all just go together. And it was better to

22:00 be together then you didn't have to talk about it to other people and you just made your own fun. And I think that's why we've got that great friendship still, because we understood each other.

You mentioned before and yesterday about the incident where the girls had to scoot under the table. I was wondering if you could tell me about that? How

22:30 **it, what leads to this amazing incident?**

Well, we were just doing our ordinary work, suddenly, this we found out later that he was a Dutch captain but he was in the American army, but he was a Dutchman. And he just went berserk. Now whether we didn't know quite what his previous history was. Now he could've been through something terrible. Which at that moment we didn't think of that we just thought,

23:00 "Poor bloke, he's gone off his rocker." And he just came in and sprayed his gun right around. So I got the girls to go under the table, the plotting table and then he was overcome and taken away. But later on when we thought about it. At first a couple, yes we were all a bit upset I must say, but we still had to continue on and finish our shift and I

23:30 think later on when we sort of came to, I think and calmed down we realised, well, maybe he had a problem and we don't know what the problem was and we then felt sorry for him. We're glad he didn't do any great damage. I mean we mightn't have been quite so having the good thoughts about him. If he'd really hurt one of

24:00 us he might have considered a bit more different way. But no, we thought we don't know whether he really intended to hurt anyone or whether it was just to scare us. We don't know. But it was frightening. And we all felt really scared. Except we thought and afterwards we thought, "Oh we've been to battle. But we don't get any compensation."

How far

24:30 **through the shift did that happen?**

I'm just trying to think. It would've been about half way I think. It was well into the morning, yes.

And you all kept working?

Well, you had to. Who was going to come and take your shift? See the next shift would be, they'd be sleeping. So somebody had to, you know. You've just gotta do it. And you know, I think it was good for us too.

25:00 It meant that stopped any panic and it stopped any, it gave us time to settle ourselves and think about it. And I think it was probably good for us. I suppose we were all pretty silly and young but it was. We know we were frightened but nothing happened. So we all came out of it pretty well.

It's a truly

25:30 **amazing story, Betty. I'm must say. I was wondering if you could tell me, you mentioned yesterday that**

26:00 **it was a very close community amongst the women. Were many of the women involved with air force men as well?**

Oh yes, quite a lot and air force boyfriends or. Most of them said that they have had or did have these boyfriends. Some were prisoners of war. Some didn't

26:30 come back. Some had, some were fiancées boyfriends, there were quite a few were married. Some had army chaps too and couple I know had navy chaps. Quite a few of them had navy boyfriends or husbands, so most of us. I don't know of anyone at that time who had a boyfriend out of the services.

27:00 If they had a boyfriend he was in the services, whichever one it was. But it seemed to be maybe some of them joined up because of that or it was because they had people away or going away. We did have a few marriages, had some funny marriages, we had to attend, that we attended to because the chaps were become engaged. One girl in particular Stella,

27:30 she and her husband Apples, we'd never known his right name. But they came from down Batlow way and they owned big properties down there, and they were going to have this big wedding and that was on the following Saturday. And he rang up on the Monday morning, "I gotta…will you marry me tonight? I won't be here for Saturday." And

28:00 she said…but I may have mentioned before that Monday night was panic night, so what do we do? So we were on duty, so I went and saw the madam and I said, "Well look Stella's getting married and the minister can only marry, won't marry her after seven o'clock at night and you gotta be there." And the

only one we could find was this Anglican church at Arncliffe. So she said, “Well all right, who’s going?” And so I told her, “I picked out,

28:30 four of us could go.” And we’d be the attendants. And Apples and his best man had come down to the hotel, Metropol, and the best man dropped the ring and it went down the grate, so they had to pull the grate up out from the gutter to find the ring. And we all had to make a dash for the train to get the train to Arncliffe then up to the church and I think we got there at, five to seven

29:00 we had the wedding. And then we said, “Oh well, what about supper or something?” And so we all came back into town and there weren’t always a lot of places that you could go to but we found a funny little place called the Diablo Inn, down under the thing. We played a few records and that was their thing, and then he had to be back in camp by twelve. He was out at Ingleburn, so we said, “Well go on, you better

29:30 go now.” And she went in the train with him to Ingleburn and we said, “We’ll cover for you. Don’t worry about getting back till morning.” Anyway, the next day he was gone. But he did come back, it was two and a half years later. So that was good but that was all really. And we just went in, we came from work. We didn’t have to change you know, we couldn’t put on any make up. We couldn’t put on a fresh collar or anything.

30:00 We all just had, just went as we were. So it was quite a funny wedding. And we had a few like that.

Was Stella married in her WAAAF uniform as well?

Yes. She said she was going to be a full bride and everything. I said, “Well when he comes back you can be married again.” And of course her family were upset that they couldn’t be there and so one of the other chaps gave her away. The chap, I think he was best man, gave her away and then he was best man too.

30:30 So it was quite a funny wedding.

Was that quite a typical, well that kind set up, quite typical for a war time wedding?

Oh yes, it happened quite frequently. A chap would be given sudden leave and well that was it. He didn’t have time to think of anything, and you just got married. Another one was when one of my great girlfriends,

31:00 June and Paul got married. When they got married and it poured and it poured and his uniform got soaking wet so we had to get out the iron. And I was at her place and June’s father said, “Well he can’t come into this room because this is where June is.” I was pressing his trousers and ironing his uniform to dry it out. And then June’s skirts had got wet, so I

31:30 had to iron her skirts for her. And we all went into town and he’d got a loan of a couple of cars ‘cause petrol was pretty hard then, and I went with Paul in his car and June went with her sisters. But June was in uniform and it’s at St Stephen’s in Macquarie Street we had the wedding. We all went back to June’s place for

32:00 a small supper. And then they had four days and he was away. So you know it was all, everything happened in a hurry. And it had to, it’s just how it was and you accepted it. You didn’t you know think anything of it. It was, we were lucky we had nice uniforms.

Can you

32:30 **tell me your wedding, was a war time wedding?**

Yes.

Can you tell me about your wedding day with Mick?

Yes, it was ours, was four o’clock in the afternoon on a Saturday 13th of July is our lucky day. And my girlfriend was bridesmaid, Mick’s brother was groomsman best man and we had it in the Holy Trinity church, no

33:00 it was St Andrew’s church at Strathfield, because at Holy Trinity they had three weddings. That was the church we went to couldn’t fit us in that day, so we went down to see the rector at St Andrews, and he said, “Yes, I can fit you in at four o’clock,” which, weddings were like that you know. Everyone was getting married. And so we had the wedding down there and I said to the rector

33:30 that there wouldn’t be very many people there, it’d just be the two families. We weren’t having a big wedding and when he met me at the door he said, “I thought you said that the church is full.” When I walked in all our friends and the cubs and the scouts and all our friends and relatives had all turned up for the wedding. And they were all happy to see us married and then we all went back

34:00 to my parents’ place and we had more of a high tea and that was our wedding day.

Did you have a chance for a honeymoon?

No, not then. We had just taken a little flat at Clovelly. Had a blank…I mean I know the place…Don

Raymond. And so

34:30 we were taken out there and we thought well, we'd just have a few days here now, and so we just had a few days there. But then when Mick came back later we had a honeymoon. More or less second honeymoon or the third, I'm not sure which. But that was how it were, everything had to be like now. A friend wanted to lend me her

35:00 bridal gown but I said, "No." I was married in blue. I would've, if we'd have had time and everything, I'd have liked my own to be a bride. But I said, "No," this was…I'd be…and another great friend had married, had made my dress and so I wanted to wear that. I was, we were very happy. It didn't matter what you wore

35:30 or we were thrilled we could just be married. That was it.

I was wondering if you could tell me about you told me about fighter sector but the first area that you were doing operational

36:00 **work in the WAAAF, before fighter sector?**

When I was in the shipping movement, the movements – well that was only there for a short while, doing movements for moving the troops onto ships, the air force troops. I only did air force onto the ships mainly to go to Canada for the Empire [Air] Training Scheme. And

36:30 'bout a month, every four weeks we had a ship going and you filled up with chaps. Not, I shouldn't say filled the ship for the company, they only took a certain amount because they were still running passenger lines. And the servicemen were put into whatever number was available, and so you had to put them onto ships to

37:00 go over to Canada. So often, you'd see names you knew. But you couldn't tell them what ship they were going on or when they were going, you just had to keep all that to yourself. But it was quite interesting. There was squadron leader and myself mainly. And I found it…it was quite rewarding in a way. Although it was awful to think they were going away but it was

37:30 good to know that they weren't just being herded onto a ship. They were at least given sleeping quarters and not like later on when the army was, middle of the Queen Mary they were you know six and seven high. At least the air force going to Canada had a better sleeping quarters than what the chaps going to going to the Middle East or Far East, they

38:00 of course had shocking accommodation, I suppose.

Mick mentioned that you were able to get him a very nice spot when he?

Well, he was on this particular ship the Mariposa. They weren't, they were still doing trade, but of course they weren't doing as much commercial trade, passenger trade, and the American, I

38:30 don't know whether it was Roosevelt or whoever allowed them, the merchants line to use space to take airmen over to Canada, took them to Los Angeles, actually. And it was just the luck of the draw that it was the time he was going. And I was able to give him a decent berth and not to have, be in the four or six berth that we were able to,

39:00 Mick with two of his friends, a state room for them to enjoy their trip to America.

Were you able to do that for anyone else? You mentioned that you knew some of the other names?

Oh no, I didn't. Although I did make sure that they weren't in a six berth. I made sure they had either a two or a four berth. There was a couple of, Errol

39:30 Crapp and a couple of other chaps that we knew were going over, and we just made sure that you know they had nice quarters.

Was that a very nice part of that job just?

Yes, that was good. I would've like to have been in that but then of course that all folded up and that was taken over then by the army took over all that then. It was just

40:00 oh only about three months I think and then the army took over the position so that went by the wayside.

Tape 5

00:46 **Ok Betty, I'm just wondering with the work that you did at fighter sector, what was it, what were the qualities that you had that you think helped make you do a good job?**

01:00 Oh dear, the fact that we were chosen to do it. We didn't know what we were letting ourselves in for when we were chosen to do it. And when we did the course at Parkes, the navigation course, I don't think any of us had great qualifications other than well most of us had done the leaving certificate. I suppose that would've been the one. But we

01:30 just really, when we knew we had this to do. At first we had no idea what we were going to use this course for, 'cause nobody told us you know you're doing this navigation course. But they didn't tell us where we were going or what we were doing with it. And it wasn't till we found out what we were going to do with it that it made us all the more determined to do something with it. But it was more trial and error I think.

02:00 **You were all very determined?**

Yes, myself and the others were all very determined.

Was the fact that you didn't know ahead of time was that because of the nature of the work or?

I think it was just being new. Those who hadn't, this was the first lot doing it. It was just being started and that's why it was probably trial and error for the air force too.

02:30 And it was do it and to put us into these to see if women can do it, I think that could have been one of the reasons but it was all new. We were the sort of pioneers, I suppose.

Now you mentioned before that after you'd settled into it and you were actually teaching others what to do. Some of the men found it a bit difficult to be taught by a woman. How did

03:00 **you cope with those fellows?**

Well, you just had to cope with it and say, "Well ok, you're out here from America. This is the job you're going to do up north and you gotta learn how to do it." And I think that's how we handled it. I think we just took it in our stride and if they didn't want to learn, well that was their problem not ours. And those that wanted to learn learned. And we didn't

03:30 have to worry, we didn't have to test them anything. I think that was left to their own people, so if they didn't want to learn, well too bad for them.

That's fair enough. So in plotting the examining all the shipping movements of the enemy crafts and things like that. How

04:00 **sort of were you getting information in code or ?**

No, it would've come into code to the main controller which was up at Eastern Area. And see we're down under the ground and we got it through on, giving us the positions and a course, and then we'd plot them on the map the positions we were given and their speed and direction.

04:30 And so you knew whether they were going north or heading south and the mileage. They're all about twelve miles out to sea. The minimum they could be in was twelve miles. Most of them were much further than that. Because it was and then we knew how far we had to, then you knew how far the planes had to go out to pick them to be the convoy.

05:00 We didn't usually start a convoy till they'd gone through. If they were going from Sydney until they'd gone out of the heads and then the convoy was started up after they got out the heads. And that's how it was all managed.

So they'd, so what would there be, ships sort of waiting just outside the heads?

Well, if it was in convoy there'd be two or two or three, but sometimes some of these. Just

05:30 some of the smaller ships, the local trading ships they just went on their own. And but then they would have, we'd say when they were going, where they were going, and planes would go out from one area and then a plane would go from another area and check on them. But as they…and at night time of course a lot wasn't done and that's when a lot of the boats were sunk. From mainly…because they

06:00 probably were watching what was going on too and they had spies like we had ours and that's when they knew they could probably bomb some of our ships.

Was there, I mean was there much awareness within what you were doing that, that you had to combat the fact that Germans and perhaps later Japanese but

06:30 **Germans at this stage were trying to intercept the messages that you were receiving and sending?**

Oh yes, we knew that the Japs were there and were definitely receiving them and quite a few had been picked up. I remember one of all places was picked up at on the Hawkesbury River out on the railway bridge. And he had a receiver and a sender

07:00 and he was sending the messages of whereabouts the shipping was. Now he was quite a long way away from the inland but he was able to send the messages and he was picked up from there. And that was, you know, we found all these things out because we knew somebody was doing it and the same chap that was doing the messages from the Hotel Metropol. He was sending everything in code but he was later picked

07:30 up and we don't know what. But he was, but it was in a code.

So what did you know or find out about these men? Were they Germans or…?

No, they were Japanese mostly or working for Japanese mainly. Yes, they weren't Germans, no. They were Japanese or working for the Japanese.

Right, so they'd actually, they'd come to shore and found a way in and? So they were spies?

Oh, they were definitely

08:00 spies, yes.

Wow, and would they be brought in for interrogation?

Well, they would have been but we had nothing to do with that side of it. No, that wasn't, they'd a probably be taken to some army place but it had nothing to do with us.

But with the work that you were doing you, were you responsible for trying to locate where those people were or where those messages were coming from?

No, we weren't really. It was only just by good luck or if we particularly,

08:30 the one in town, it was just by good luck that that was picked up. And the others would be picked up by maybe local people. They'd think you know or some of the army or air force people round think, "Well that's pretty suspicious. Why is that happening regularly, at regular times?" And that's how quite a few were picked up because people notice things. And

09:00 maybe where an ordinary person might not notice it but somebody who was in the services or some sort of work like that would know well that's just not normal. And that's how quite a lot were picked up.

Would you ever have to change I guess the tactics or the way you were sending or receiving information to battle that kind of thing?

09:30 No, we didn't really. No because we couldn't change the movements of the shipping. That was done by, I suppose it'd be the maritime services and the navy would be in charge of all that. And we were only really trying to make sure that we knew where they were and that the aircraft would go out and try and look after them as much as possible. That was our

10:00 main concern, that we didn't send anybody out on the wrong degree, so that they wouldn't be able to get back to base. But we had nothing really do to with the actual movements.

You mentioned also before that one of the things that you were doing as well was pin pointing

10:30 **enemy ships to inform strike positions for air force?**

Well, that was when I was in operations room, that was after fighter sector.

Right yeah, no. I thought so. Can you tell me, actually I'd like to go to that if I could, the work that you actually did in the operations room.

11:00 **How, I mean that obviously that was one difference. What were the other differences with the work you were doing there compared to fighter sector?**

Well, we're getting more signals and we were getting and we were doing the actual sending of the aircraft out. We would work out where the shipping was and we would be in touch with either Richmond or Moruya, or wherever the planes were, and where the shipping was,

11:30 or which way it was going and we would send the ships out on strike and, I'm sorry, we would send the aircraft out on strike, hardly the ships. And well, when we knew where the submarines were and they'd go out on strike and that was mainly a lot of our work. We still had a big plotting table but we only had one girl sergeant and one

12:00 man sergeant manning the table and we would, it was my job to direct them where to put the things. And then when we'd send the aircraft out, we would plot the movement of the aircraft. So really it was our main business. In the meantime too, I would be in the intelligence section getting in the

12:30 cipher, and then would be helping to code it and then passing it on to the necessary places.

What did you learn about deciphering codes through the cipher through the intelligence room?

No, I just learned that through the, well I was taught that in the intelligence section, yes. I didn't do a

special course on that.

No.

13:00 **So what sort of things were you taught?**

Well, you know, the code of the day and then you learnt how to decipher it. I know it sounds a bit odd but yeah, you just sort of learnt. The people who were actually trained well, there was a squadron leader, I think and pilot officer and then they would help

13:30 us and then when we got to know it then they trusted us to do it. It was quite hard at first knowing the difference. Because it came in codes of five in squares and you would learn how to decipher all that and get the message. And if it was of great importance it was sent on to somewhere and if it wasn't of great

14:00 importance most of them were important but some were really to know sort of thing. Others could wait for a little while before action was taken on it.

Can you give me just perhaps a short example of what a code you would get through would look like and exactly how you would decipher it, given the code of the day? This is a test.

I'm trying to remember. There'd be a lot of letters

14:30 and you'd have five then five and five and some of them would have figures in them. But they were mainly letters and figures usually meant it was going to be a measurement or a degree and you sort of when you got the gist of what was going on you knew what the figure meant. But

15:00 it just seems hard after all this time.

I think you're doing extremely well. So the actual message was embedded in all of those different lines?

Yes, and in the code, see they'd have the code of the day and they'd be different, there'd be other colours. There'd be codes of, might be some of them it might be two days. Because allowing for

15:30 the time limits and where it came from and where it was going too you'd often have the same code but it might be from say 12 o'clock today till eight o'clock, the night, the next day but the next night. And that would often happen because on account of the distance and the time limits in the different areas. Even you know, from Perth to Sydney, it was the minimum of

16:00 two hours. So you know you had to work all this out and work out if the time limits and whether we send something back would then be given to the cipher girls to send back. So that's how most of it was done.

Wow, that's amazing. And so would you then take that information that you were helping to decipher into the main operation room and then employ that?

Well, I'd

16:30 give it too the sergeant, the squadron leader in charge of the intelligence and he would decide where it would go. And if something urgent had to be acted he would ring the air vice marshall, who was in charge of everything and from there things would be operated on or discarded, well just depending on the urgency of it. And then it was then they would decide what was going to

17:00 be done and then it would be put back into a code and sent. That's how it, although it sounds as though it's gonna be a long time in between, very often wasn't very long, it was all go, go, go. And in the meantime you're still doing your operations room work too.

So it was a fairly busy time?

It was busy but it was interesting. Didn't give you time to stop and think or

17:30 ponder about things, it just made your night go quickly or the day go quickly.

Did you feel a greater sense of responsibility or pressure after your commission working in those places?

Oh you do. We always felt if, particularly if a chap didn't get back or crashed you'd think, "Oh was it my fault," and you'd go straight to the table and work out where you'd sent him. Once you knew

18:00 that'd you given the right directions you always felt much better about it but sad that something had happened. But you know just wanted to make sure that it wasn't your mistake that would've caused an accident. I don't know what you'd have done. I think that that would've been something you'd never get over if you were the cause of somebody not returning.

But that didn't happen

18:30 **fortunately?**

Fortunately, it didn't happen.

I mean there were an incredible amount of ships sunk off the coast? Was that a difficult, I mean was that difficult operations to be involved in hearing that news all the time?

No, hearing the news was, particularly one where my girlfriend's father was the captain of the boat and it was going up to

19:00 Lismore, and when we got the message that that had gone down it was... I had met him and when Joan was in cipher but I had to go and tell her and that was heartbreaking. And I was very fond of Joan, she was a good friend. But when we were up in Tweed Heads one time

19:30 on the, like up near the lighthouse right around the wall there's writing of the name of every ship that was sunk. And we were up there a couple of years ago, it was quite strange to read all these ships that you knew had been sunk. And like our son was with us at the time and he couldn't believe that there was so many. And I said, "Yes Pete,

20:00 we knew that." And he said, "Well, you never ever talked about it." But we didn't, you just didn't think to talk about it. But if ever you're up that way you ought to go and see all these names of all these ships. About thirty odd, I think.

Wow.

And you know you couldn't think that that happened between virtually

20:30 Gabo Island and just past the Gold Coast, most of them were shipping. Although a couple of American Liberty ships, and of course the hospital ship, the [HMAHS] Centaur, I knew it as well as anything. The Centaur, and when that was sunk and that

21:00 had very few survivors including a nurse. But you know, you don't, it's hard to realise that that happened off your shores. Does everybody good to go and look at it.

And of course, and many of the ships that are written on that wall, you knew about at the time of your life?

Yes, I knew when they happened and

21:30 there was only two that I... One was an American ship and one happened after I left. So, but all the others I knew about.

Wow. I can't imagine having to give that news to somebody.

It's awful. It really is. I had to do that in. And other girls, other friends whose chaps had been killed by the Japs, I had to let them know

22:00 and you know it was often hard to take. But you had to do it so. You'd get these messages in and you'd think, "That can't happen." But it did.

And would people kind of know the sort of news that was coming when?

Well,

22:30 I usually waited a while to make sure that they had heard, I didn't want to be. Although a couple, I couldn't, I had to let them know straight away and then they got the telegrams. But it was just you know a bit upsetting to, because they were there on in the next room working and you just felt. Like I asked our

23:00 officer in charge and he said, "I think you ought to go and tell them." So I did. But I wouldn't have gone just off my own bat because I felt I had to be sure I was allowed to do it because otherwise you could cause a lot of heartache unnecessarily.

Did you get any news of survivors

23:30 **at that time or was it just that the ship had been hit?**

Oh yes, we got news if, but there were very few survivors. Well, there weren't that many people on those boats really operating them. And there were some of them there were some survivors. But I do know that if there was nobody there to look after them the chaps weren't gonna let them,

24:00 they'd shoot them and they'd be drowned. But there were not really, not many survivors of those boats. The Centaur was the only one who really had any survivors. And that wasn't a great number off that either. I just can't and she was the only nursing sister and there might have been about less than a dozen others. That I just,

24:30 I'm finding it hard to remember.

It's all right. It was a long time ago. It was June, was it June who was in the cipher room? So how did she react when you had to tell her the news?

Oh Joan was very upset of course but I think she always expected it because she knew it was he had a dangerous job. And you know,

25:00 I think she always breathed a sigh of relief when he got back other times or he always rang his wife when he arrived at either Lismore or Murwillumbah, or whichever port he was going into. And then when he came back to Sydney there was always that sigh of relief of, "That's good, he's made that one." So Joan's

25:30 mother of course was much more devastated. Oh Joan, she was devastated but I think she knew well boy, that's bad luck. This time he wasn't so lucky. And still it was very, very upsetting for her and she knew how much her mother would be upset.

Did she?

She took leave straight away.

She took leave straight away.

26:00 And her boyfriend was away but then he came back and they got married when he came back, which was good.

Were they some of the toughest days that you had?

Yes, they were tough days because I thought well, it could happen to you. It could be your husband or your brother or somebody else you knew but then you had to put that

26:30 into the background, you couldn't let it take over. Otherwise you'd never do your work. You just had to, you'd have a cuppa tea, and we didn't have Bex [aspirin] and lie downs in those days. So you had a cuppa tea. And you just had to bring yourself together and get on with your work.

Was there

27:00 **a lot of apprehension in people in Sydney around that time with all of the action that was happening up the coast and also the subs in the harbour?**

I think with the subs in the harbour, I think people got, a lot of people got panicky. When they had the few bombs that landed in Sydney, all the people in Bondi all shot through, and there you could of brought a

27:30 flat in Bondi for next to nothing. I thought at the time, "If you'd had the money you could've almost the whole block of flats," because they just shot through and came up to the mountains or further west to get away. And there were quite a lot of empty flats for quite a while. A lot of people got,

28:00 I think they got I suppose panicky in a way. But then that after a while nothing more happened, so they sort of just forgot about it, and the same with the subs when it was known. I think people round the foreshores of the harbour thought we ought to get out. But I don't think they were quite as rushed away as the people from the

28:30 Bondi-Randwick area were.

Where the subs coming in the harbour, I mean given the job that you were doing, was it a surprise or was it something that you were expecting?

No, I don't think anybody ever expected it. I think definitely a surprise. I'm sure we never heard from intelligence of

29:00 anything like that. Except that they knew that the mother ships and the subs were up and down the coast. But I think they felt having a boom across the harbour was protection. And I really don't think it was ever considered a possibility and that this could happen in Sydney and so far away. If it happened say in Darwin or probably

29:30 Cairns there was a lot more shipping, naval shipping was they might of thought something there, but definitely not in the Sydney area.

With some of the heaviest times of fighting and ships getting sunk off the coast was there

30:00 **ever any a sense within your operations that the Japanese were getting on top of the Australians?**

No, I don't think we had that sense. I think we had more the feeling that, "Ok, we've gotta find these blokes or find the mother ship and disperse and get rid of the mother ship." But I don't think

30:30 anyone ever sort of felt that the Japs would be. I always felt that if they were really gonna come they would have come in and landed along anywhere along the coast in a lot of areas if they, I don't think they were really interested in coming down this far. I think it might have if they hadn't been held up further back in the New Guinea area and all that area.

31:00 All in the Asian area, if they had of overcome there and came down then yes, I think they might of but at because they were held back, I think we all felt, “No, they’re not going to come any further.” I don’t think we were frightened or anything, we believed that they had the Coral Sea battle I think, after all

31:30 that, we felt no, Australia’s on top and with the help of the Americans they will eventually win.

You mentioned just a moment ago about

32:00 **one of the aims of what you were doing was actually to locate the mother ships of the Japanese. Can you describe how you would go about that within your operation?**

Well, I think the only way we really could do it was sending aircraft out. When we knew where the subs were and try for them to try and get a fix on if they were sending any messages back to their mother

32:30 ship to try and get a fix on that. There wasn’t really a lot we ourselves could do. They were left in the hands of the aircraft going out to see if they could possibly get a fix. Whether it was out of range of because most of the aircraft were Ansons, and whether it was out of the range of those, I don’t know. But

33:00 I don’t think we ever found it. I don’t think the mother ship was ever found.

How frustrating?

Yeah. Would’ve liked to have heard it was. It might have gone up north and been bombed. I don’t know. We certainly didn’t find it.

Were the Japanese

33:30 **ships and subs that you were fighting against those times, were they using common tactics that you could?**

I think they were just doing the same thing that we sort of never had any contact with them of course. But they seemed to have the same, they knew the routes of the shipping. And we knew that anything like the Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary had a such, they were so fast they didn’t,

34:00 no way could they catch them nor did they try to I think because they would be out of range or. But I think being in coastal shipping they couldn’t change their routes, couldn’t vary that very much. They might be able to go like that, but they couldn’t vary from going from A to B very much because it was the coastal strip.

34:30 And you wouldn’t be able to go too far out to sea or you would never find them, so I don’t think we sort of thought very much of what the actual sub was doing, just wishing they could be bombed that was all.

So did it appear that there were any particularly vulnerable points in those shipping channels? Would like the subs attack at any

35:00 **specific regular points or was it just all over?**

No, nothing regular, just... It just depended on when it was being covered or not being covered. And when it’s not being covered that seemed to be when we lost them and it could be anywhere you know. But it was never, they would never say, “Oh well, that’s where they’re going to be and that’s because he’s knocked one out there, he’s going to knock another one out.” But no, each one was lost in

35:30 a different position but still along that coastal area all in I don’t know of any that would’ve, some could’ve been reasonably close but not close enough to make a pattern, no.

As Mick was saying before, was it kind of common knowledge for your operations that air cover

36:00 **would provide the safety that the ships required?**

Oh yes it, well it would be. Yes, it would be common knowledge that daylight times there would be coverage. Not much, it was done sometimes at night but not all night. It depended on the position and the range too. We didn’t want to think about those but

36:30 we knew that the Japs knew the ships were going up and down and they probably had although the schedules would change they had an idea, they knew that when they would be going or about when they’d be going. I’m sure they, their spies were probably not quite as good as ours but they knew what they were doing.

Was because you couldn’t provide

37:00 **well because there wasn’t as much air cover at night as there was during the day, were the nights a little bit more of a, I guess an anxious time?**

Yes, I think they were anxious. And when daylight came you’d breathe a sigh of relief thinking, “Oh that’s good.” ‘Cause they’d be from early just dawn til dark and you sort of felt, “Well, that’s good.” And the ship, the trips weren’t that long.

37:30 It wasn't as if they were weeks and weeks, they were mostly two-three days I think, three days, four days. But they weren't a long periods of time for each ship going up and down the coast. It just depended on which place, whether they were going to Newcastle or onto Lismore or to Tweed Heads

38:00 or a bit further up. I think that just sort of depended on the cover.

Was there anything else that you could do for the shipping lanes at night time that?

Well, nothing we could do. The navy would've, I'm sure had everything possible that was able to be done. They did have some corvettes that used to run up and down too.

38:30 And some Fairmiles, smaller boats they had some of those that we never really had much to do. Although we had a naval chap working with us we never had a lot to do with their actual movements, that was left to the navy. And if they wanted something special well then we gave it to them. But

39:00 you couldn't tell them what to do, they had their shipping.

Given what you experienced during and what you were doing with operations, did that ever add to your concern about what Mick was up to overseas?

39:30 **Yes, well I knew that there was somebody doing the job I was doing to send him out on trips and I thought well that's good. He would know that I was in operations, he would know what I was doing. And there was operations when in Gibraltar, there were operations everywhere and I always felt, "Well, good that**

40:00 **I'm doing this – somebody else was doing it for him." And that made you feel quite good that you felt he'd be in safe hands from them.**

Ok, but you were never sort of worried that he might find some trouble or not come back?

No, I always believed he would come back.

You had strong faith?

Yes.

That's wonderful.

You'd

40:30 know if he wasn't gonna come back.

So you always knew, so you felt it in your heart?

Yes, even when I got the message, although Mick said he never knew about the message that he was missing because he was up in the Philippines, and I got the message that he was missing but I knew he he'd turn up. And he did, coupla or about two months later and then

41:00 he got, had got, he then knew he had a child. He knew it was there but he didn't know what it was.

So you had to come back to find out?

He had to get back to Darwin to find out.

Tape 6

00:31 **Betty, I was wondering if I could ask with all the information that you were hearing in the various jobs that you had and even just in Australia at the time was there, did any of the WAAAF have a hatred for the Japanese and what they were doing?**

Yes, quite a lot of us, particularly

01:00 when we heard of the cruelty they were doing. Yes, we did, we had a real hate hoping that something could happen to them. There again two of my friends, they had been caught in New Guinea and one of them, the two of them were together and

01:30 one of the Japanese cut his head off. This chap I knew, the other chap I also knew and Bill, one of the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels were there, and they grabbed him and got him away. He was just posted missing for a long while and then eventually, by some means he got back to Australia. And when we heard that we just thought

02:00 that how could you really like them? We just hated them and I'm afraid that carried on for quite a long while even after the war, I just shuddered at the thought of ever having to come upon them. Because it was just, it took a long while and I know it was most probably not very Christian like but just couldn't help it. And that was just one of the few incidents.

02:30 And that was why so many of us. Cause when you knew chaps who where prisoners of war in Changi or parts of Japan, and some who were in Germany, the difference was the brutality was greater by the Japanese than by the Germans, and I think that's why so many of us had a great dislike. And it did take a long while

03:00 to get over that dislike. I'm never sure that I really have but you've gotta think of the younger people. And it's a different ballgame now, different world and you can't just, you've just gotta think of the future not the past.

We were talking about the Japanese and you said that you'd heard some horrible stories especially

03:30 **about someone you knew. How did those stories, how did you hear those stories?**

Well, we got them through on intelligence and that's how we knew. But there weren't a lot of those, weren't broadcast till after the war. And it was strange after the war once we were in London we bumped into Bill, didn't we Mick? He was in the air force, the RAF [Royal Air Force] club coming down the steps and we were just going up the steps and

04:00 we bumped into him. It was quite good to see him healthier and pretty good. But their sons died. But it was just you know, and knowing the two chaps, which was hard to take. But that was one of many, a lot more crueller than that. But you know, you felt,

04:30 "How could I have love for somebody like that?" You just felt the hate, you just hated them and that was it.

Were you hearing that kind of information?

Oh, we got frequently. Oh, I don't know about frequently but we got it, yes. And it wasn't always air force, it was quite a lot of army or....

05:00 Now, quite a lot of it's been publicised since. And to know how the families if they're still alive how the families must feel that this happened to their loved one. It's just beyond me that people could be like that. You just don't ever expect, and I think too, they were probably made to do it. I don't know. I don't know what they were thinking

05:30 and I don't think anybody will ever know it was. It was their way of life, their religion, they were taught not to think of other people. I don't know what they were but you can't imagine people being so hard and doing that sort of thing, never heard of any Australian ever doing the same or Englishman. I don't think I ever heard

06:00 of a German doing it either to be truthful. They may have shot people but I don't think they were doing anything like that. And I hope it never happens again.

What would you have to do with that information?

Well, we would just pass it on to the intelligence people. It would be passed on but that was kept under wraps for quite a long while because, I think it was well after the war

06:30 until I think when the chaps were coming back, I think then a lot of that was announced. But this particular one happened in 1943, so that was quite a while before it was publicised. So just we, after we passed it on we never knew what happened. It had nothing to do with us then. Superior

07:00 people had to look after that.

Hearing information like that and the whole range of, I mean the information that you were hearing, did you have anyway of, was there anybody you could talk to about what you were hearing on daily?

Only with the people you were working with. No, there was no such thing as counselling or anything like that. You

07:30 got on with everything, you didn't let it affect, you couldn't. I mean it did I think to a certain extent but you couldn't dwell on things and you know it was. Not that we were horrible people but you just couldn't, you just had to put that at the back of your mind. I think you never can dwell on any of these things because

08:00 you didn't know what was going to happen next anyway. But you could never talk outside, not even to my WAAAF-y friends. Until after the war you never talked about those things because you, well I don't know why. It was what happened within those rooms happened, and I think too we had to sign a thing that for thirty years you wouldn't talk about it. I think that too you had that in mind. And

08:30 we were very true to that. We would not talk about a lot of the things until they became general knowledge. So I can't say you bottled it up or anything, you didn't. That's just now when you talk about, it awakens it up a bit. But you've never dwelt on it.

Who was in, who would be in the

09:00 **intelligence room?**

Oh there'd be a squadron leader or group captain or might be a flight lieutenant and myself. There was just and the navy chap. Usually there was the navy chap, two air force chaps and myself and then on the table there was WAAAF sergeant and the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] sergeant and we were the only ones in the area.

09:30 **Did you operate in shifts as you had in the other rooms?**

Yes. We had shifts from nine o'clock in the morning til six o'clock at night and the other shift was six o'clock at night till nine o'clock in the morning. That was a fifteen hour shift, that was always a long shift. And you did that for a week. First of all it was a fortnight but then they cut it down to a week and then you had your day sleeping and you were supposed to

10:00 get another day off but half the time you didn't get your day off. And then when it was nine till six in the morning, well then you always got at least one day off. But we got that day off when you finished and that next day but you started at six o'clock in the night, so you virtually had two days then. But that would be the longest period of time you'd have off.

Would you be with the same men generally,

10:30 **in the room?**

Most of the time. Sometimes though they'd change because a lot of the chaps were blokes who'd come back and were resting before they went on to another station, and a lot of them would be there resting. And they might be there for, oh a coupla months and then they'd be moved on. The group captain I think was there

11:00 most of the time but sometimes he might be away for a coupla weeks, well then the shifts would sort of get changed about a bit and have somebody else. But no, I think you know mostly you had the same people until they'd get posted but we didn't we were there.

Did you all get on well as a group? Did you form very close links with the men as well as…?

No, not great friendships but you've got on

11:30 well with them. You were friends you know, you were friendly with them but you never went out with them or anything. Because we had our own WAAAF-ies we'd go out with and but we never. No we all talked together in the officers' mess when there was a dining in night, well you'd all be there dining but I suppose that'd be as far as you'd friendship went I suppose. But no, we all got on well and they always

12:00 respected me: 1) for being a woman and 2) for being married. So you know, they'd always ask when I got any letters or how Mick was going, but yes, I was, I think that would be about as far as a friendship would've gone.

Was there any ever trouble, did you outrank some of the RAAF men at any stage?

Not really. Might of, like only the sergeant on in the room with me. He was the sergeant and he was doing his job. You never had any reason to feel outranking anybody. Most of them were. When I got my section officer, well we did a couple of pilot officers but we never thought there was never any distinction. Didn't know what they were. The air vice marshal was the only one you'd sort of quiver and quake a bit when he'd come in. But no, you never felt you

13:00 were outranking or they were outranking you, no. That didn't work in our work.

What would the air vice marshal come in for?

Oh, he'd have to come in and check on how things were going or if there was a big flap on or he'd have to be there and he'd come in regularly to check on things. He was in usually every portion of the day or night, he'd often just pop in. And he

13:30 could be there for quite a while you're doing something but you'd forget he was there anyway.

What was everyone's job within the room? What would the different people be doing?

Well, each one had a... The navy chap was affecting…with the navy. The group captain would be in charge of anything that came in. We'd sort of tell him what we were doing and what was happening and he'd have a good look

14:00 out and just check that the sergeants were doing the right thing Let me think what the other chap did. We each had a sort of a separate sort of section but all worked in together, and if one of them happened to be out of the room we could attend to what they were doing. Or if I was out of the room they could attend to what I was doing so, I mean we all had the, virtually doing a similar sort of work.

14:30 There was no great distinction between the jobs. And if we had a query we'd say, "Well, what do you think about this?" And then they'd have a little bit of a huddle and talk about it and decide what we

should do.

What kind of things would provoke that?

Oh dear, well if a couple of aircraft were U/S [Unserviceable] and couldn't go, should

15:00 we send them out from another? Were the ships far enough up to send them out from another airport or should we just leave it and just leave them uncovered for that period of time? And those sort of things would pop up, and we'd just sort of probably, minor things but would pop up and had to be considered and thought about and you wouldn't make that decision on

15:30 your own. You'd have to make sure you know that you had spoken to somebody and queried some of these things. I think that that would be some of the main little problems.

So you would have input into those decisions?

Oh yes, you'd all have your say. You'd say, "Well look, these chaps were going to take off from Moruya, but we have got a couple

16:00 of satellite points at Dapto, a satellite aircraft. So let's use them." Well then they'd work out that yes, they were ready to go or not. And you know you'd get in touch with whoever was in charge there and you'd say, "Yes, if they're ready, ok we'll send them off." So those sort of things you could, you knew where aircraft would be and you could work it out from

16:30 where they were and whether they were needed or not needed. And I think we all had a little say.

How quickly were you able to communicate with various?

Oh very quickly 'cause we all had, there was a merging phone to all these places. And you had a priority and you could get onto them pronto. There was never any, just pressed a button and you got onto them.

17:00 There was no dialling, it was just pronto. So I mean it was very good. The communications were very good. And you didn't really have to blame the telephone people or something 'cause you couldn't get onto them.

You mentioned yesterday, a red light.

Yes.

What did the red light mean?

Well, the red light meant it was an urgent, very urgent. The duty pilot

17:30 would have that. When Mick arrived at Amberley and then he spoke to the duty pilot and the duty pilot said, "I'll put him on straight away." Mick didn't know it was going to be a red light. Well when the red light came on of course, we all wondered what was going on. And that's how you knew it was something very urgent. Well, it was very urgent.

Aside

18:00 **from that quite lovely incident, what other things would provoke a red light?**

Well, it could be if something had happened to one of the aircraft, or if there was a sighting of a submarine that was going in to blow a ship up or something, those sort of things. If a pilot saw something that needed urgent attention he could get in touch with

18:30 his controller and the controller would send the urgent over. But those sort of things, they just happened you know. It was hard to say just what would cause it. They're the sort of things that would happen. Or if a chap was having trouble coming back or where would he land? Well, we'd be able to give him, the controller'd tell us where he was and we'd be able to let him know, such and such an airport was ok, land there. Those type of things would happen.

19:00 **Were you constantly needing to be alert and ready for anything?**

Oh yes, you always… Never had time to have a snooze or anything. You had to be alert all the time. So no, I don't think we ever… You always were alert. You were on duty so you stayed alert.

19:30 **I guess the nature of your work was there set, was there ever a, I mean routine? Was there any such thing as a routine day?**

No. You never knew what was going to happen until you get there. And even if it was say dull in Sydney you might think, "Oh well, that's good but, no." Just didn't know what a routine day was. There was always

20:00 something different happening. There was always something, ships would be moving or something. There was always something different. But you could never, say you'd go in and between six o'clock at night and eight o'clock at night, you'd do this because you could get in there at six and find there was something going on or nothing going on. But you still had things to catch up on signals and whatnot.

Never a routine, no.

20:30 **Did that…?**

But that made it interesting. It made the time go quicker.

You were mentioning that at times you had to either hear bad news or deliver. Is there something that stands out as the hardest thing?

21:00 I think just delivering, letting somebody know that somebody wasn't coming back. That was hard because as you know we're not, we weren't used to those sort of things. We weren't as old as we are now and a bit more knowledgeable. We had to learn how to handle these things and you had to handle yourself before you could help somebody else. And

21:30 I think that was hard. Because we soon learned, we learned very quickly how you could help people and how you could handle things. And I think that's always been really good training for our future life.

Was it, I mean you were a young woman, was it difficult to compose yourself?

Probably, the first time it would have been.

22:00 You know thinking back I never really thought about it. But maybe you soon learned to compose yourself. You knew you couldn't give way, you couldn't upset other people, you would have to handle yourself. But I can't remember. Possibly the very first time probably was. I just can't remember that to be truthful. But it was,

22:30 it wasn't always easy, particularly when if you're very close to a friend. That was always harder. But no we learned to handle things.

Was there a comfort for them to have someone?

I think so. I think we were, we soon learned to be 'cause when you're with great friends you can just give them a cuddle or a hug

23:00 and you felt that helped you and helped them. And it did mean a lot I know, to quite a few of us. Same as you would today. Big hug was a thousand words.

That's lovely, thank you.

23:30 **You've mentioned several times and Mick did too that faith and religion were such an important part.**

Definitely. It's always been a part of my life and always will be. Through lots of things: service life and civilian life, some things I'd never got through without having a faith.

24:00 **Can you tell me about the time when you I guess when you received the telegram that Mick was missing?**

Yes, it was the day after our son was born. And our doctor, I had a lovely lady doctor and she said, "Oh, I'll send you a telegram, just went to Darwin," she said, "I'll send the telegram to let him know he's got a son." And then the next day I got this and I thought, "Oh, that was quick."

24:30 And actually my mother got it but she hadn't opened it. She brought it in to me. And at the same time two of his friends had called in and they didn't know I'd had this. But no, I thought "No, he's right." Like I knew if it hadn't been you'd have known but I just felt, "No, you'll be right, they'll find him." And when they did he didn't know anything about it.

25:00 He was just delayed in these, they, 'cause being with the Americans, they didn't send any, have any communication with Darwin. So that was it. It all ended up really happily. But it was hard, it was two months but I still couldn't, I didn't believe it. I knew he was right. You would've known if it wasn't.

25:30 **Did the people around you, I mean Mick's friends that were there?**

Oh, they came in thinking, I didn't know anything about it. And they were going to sort of just be, they made sure I was all right if they told me and then when I showed them. They said, "Oh, you know?" And I said, "Yes." And they said they were trying think how to tell me. So that, but I told them not to worry, that things would be right.

26:00 And they were.

Was there a sense with somebody away that I mean like in situations like that, that friends would look after you know each others wives or girlfriends or…?

I'm sure so. I'm sure that was. I'm sure they'd be. I know when Sid had his big accident I knew about it. Well Mick had let me know about it but I didn't know whether Nance knew. So I got in touch

26:30 with her mother first and she said, "Yes, Nance knows." So I was then able to communicate with Nance and we did have some time together and then as things got better it was great news for her. And so, and

then he came back after he recuperated for six months. That was good. But that's how you know,

27:00 you're just close friends.

I'm sure that was just welcome support for everyone.

I think so. I think we all supported each other. That was a part of life. Still is.

I was wondering, both you and Mick have mentioned that when he came back to Australia before the end of the war

27:30 **and you'd decided to have a child, what did you say, how did you communicate, what did you say to each other?**

Well, we said, "Look, you're going away again, you mightn't be so lucky a second time, so let's have a child and be sure that

28:00 I've got something." Otherwise you've got nothing. And I think Mick quite agreed with me and that's why we thought, "Well yes, lets. We'll have a child." But funny enough I never ever thought of a girl's name. It was always going to be Peter, I don't know what I would've done if it hadn't been a boy. But it was just what we decided and because we'd decided, yes that's what we were going to have.

28:30 **What were you thinking about the possibility of?**

Well, I thought he was going up north again. Well, was going up north for the first time and boy, you'd gotta be pretty lucky. I mean we knew enough about what service life was and about the, what he was doing and what he was going to do. And we thought, well you gotta be lucky to

29:00 come back and do another tour and come back again, and I think that's really what we thought about. We just sort of, "Lets…at least we've got a child and that's something that we'll always have."

Do you remember when you found out that you were pregnant?

I was glad, quite thrilled. Thought oh, isn't that good.

Did you

29:30 **write to Mick straight away or…?**

Yes, he was… Just trying to think where he was at that stage. You were at Bairnsdale I think? I think he was, or you might have been in Adelaide. I was able to send a cable anyway, saying "Right, we were on the way."

How long were you allowed to stay in the WAAAF for?

I got out at the end of November,

30:00 so it would've been bout four months.

Would you have been able to stay longer or did they have a…?

Oh no. It's just your uniform wouldn't have fitted you. A lot of them got out straight away but the work I was doing I couldn't get out straight away. I had to wait for a replacement

30:30 and so I was there for a bit longer. But no, I would've got out, I wouldn't have wanted to stay much long than that. I would've got out really, hopefully in the first two months if I could've. It just didn't happen that way. But oh no, I don't think any of us were in much longer you know. I don't know

31:00 of any.

Did many WAAAFs leave to have babies? Was that the reason?

Well, when, oh well when they got, if they got married most of them got married or when their husbands came back a lot of them got their discharge before they had children, when their husbands came back, and if their husbands were discharged, particularly the army ones, they got out straight away. A couple of my friends got out when they got married. Because they said, "Oh no, their

31:30 husbands are going to be around, they'll get out." And that's what happened to quite a few of them. Others, there was quite a lot stayed in until they became pregnant or decided they'd had enough then they'd get out. Used to hear about all these pregnant women and I thought I'm not one of these numbers that they talk about. But very few were

32:00 pregnant without being married. Few could unfortunately fall by the wayside or got into trouble not because we were all so innocent. I think that's what happened to a few. It wasn't you know, the great numbers you used to hear them talking about. You used to laugh to yourself.

So there is great numbers of…?

Well they'd… You'd often hear somebody say oh, in the WAAAF or in the army, "Oh, all those girls

32:30 who are pregnant. They've got special hospitals for them." And we said, "Have they? Where are they?" It was just you know, how the gossip goes and gossip, the gossip adds on a bit more and there was always, this big place. I don't know where this big place was that was going to have all these women who were pregnant.

These were presumably single women or

33:00 **unmarried women?**

Well yes, well this is what supposed to be but we didn't know where they or who they were or where they come from but all these hundreds of, it was amazing.

Did you hear, this is just an aside, just in the forces about, I've read about well in civilian woman as well as women in the services falling pregnant to Americans and then?

Oh yes, some did.

33:30 I knew of a couple, and a couple died.

Just, they died because they died in pregnancy or…?

Because they were manhandled before leave. One particular one was just manhandled and she died. Would never say she was murdered. She died.

34:00 But that was, there were I know, there were a couple. And I know there were a couple of girls who were pregnant to chaps but they never married. They weren't in great numbers and I know a couple who did marry chaps and went away as war brides and lived happily ever after. So you know, one story can be twenty people but it's only one person.

34:30 **Was there ever anything done about the woman that was…?**

Oh, I'd rather not say, because that became a legal matter and I just don't talk about it.

Oh no, that's fair enough Betty. I just wondered what happened.

Well, I know what happened but no way will I, no.

No, that's ok. It was just such an amazing… So

35:00 **I guess getting back to your pregnancy, where did go when you, after you left the WAAAF, where did you live and?**

First coupla, first little while I went home to my mother and stayed there for a while but I knew that when I had the child I wasn't going to live at home. My sister was also living there with her two children. Because her husband was away he was in the army.

35:30 And so I looked around for a little place. You couldn't you know, by then you couldn't get anywhere because so many of the men had come back and everybody was looking for somewhere, and I found a little tiny flat in Lawson. It was a little tiny flat about as big as this room. It had a bedroom there and a wall there, kitchen, oh a little kitchen off with a pot belly stove.

36:00 And after I had Peter I took him up there to live. And everyone thought… Oh my mother and Mick's mother said, "He'll die up there in April-May." Well it was May and June. And I used to put him outside to have his daily sleep and freezing cold, and but he was always well wrapped up and he never died. He just, he put on a pound a week and I'd lose a pound a week.

36:30 **It all balances out in the end.**

Yes, but he thrived and he never looked back. But I didn't know anything about a child even though… I knew you had a baby and you put nappies on it and you fed it and that was it.

Had you ever had to look after small children?

Oh no, never. I never had anything to do with them. Because see my sister had children but I was never home. See I was away all the time.

37:00 And I knew nothing about babies. All I knew is they had feed time and nappy time and sleep time. And if they're asleep you don't pick em up and if they cry you've got to, you don't pick them up straight away. I knew, read that in the book.

There were books around to help your…?

Well, there were but that was the only thing, I, the clinic gave me a little book to read you know, 'cause I didn't have much about… Knew nothing about babies to be truthful.

37:30 So he did grow and trial and error. But no one was going to tell me how to bring up our child. I thought the two mothers you know, they weren't going to tell me that I was doing the wrong thing. They're old

hat. They didn't know how to bring up babies.

Was there anyone at the hospital when you gave birth or...?

No. We

38:00 went to the hospital and had the baby. I mean, I went to King George V in town, and a nice private room. My discharge money paid for all that. I spent it all on the baby on the hospital and whatnot. And my mother came in the next day you, but you didn't have people round when you had babies. You know, not like today. You've got

38:30 the husband and the mother and half a dozen other people. That just didn't happen in those days. Didn't happen to any of our three. You just went in and had your child.

When did you write to Mick I know you got the telegram the next day but did you?

Oh yes, always. I wrote all the time. Every day I think, or every second day I always wrote.

39:00 **Do you remember what you wrote about Peter or the first things you wrote to Mick about Peter?**

I told him, "What a wonderful child he looked, and couldn't tell you who he looked like. But he was a darling, fat, little baby. And he was going to be the best child in the world." So that would be the type of thing you'd write about. And each time you know you'd say what he'd done or hadn't done or. So you always

39:30 had something more to write about.

You and Mick mentioned, and you've mentioned yourself that you used to number...

Yeah, I used to number every letter

The letters. Do you remember what number you got up to?

Would've been something like two hundred and something I suppose or three, yeah it would've been, well... No but when he came back from Europe, no I started numbering number one again because

40:00 that was that phase of his life and I started numbering at from number one again. And I think altogether I would've written probably three hundred letters, might have been more. I don't know. They just went on and on and on. It was just. The PMG [Postmaster General's Department] did pretty well out of all the people who were writing letters. I think it was only about five pence a letter or something because you sent them to a base and they would deliver it.

40:30 But I think they must have been upset when the war finished and all these letters weren't sent.

Tape 7

00:30 **Betty, I was wondering if you could tell me about when you heard that the war had finished?**

It was just heaven to know that it was all over. And we knew there would be a waiting period for them to come home but it was really a great relief to know that at last it was all over. And I know that in the May before

01:00 it happened in England and relief there was wonderful but the relief here to know that the whole thing was complete, you just couldn't believe it. Just thought there must be a mistake but it wasn't. It was wonderful.

How did you hear the news?

Well, I'd been in town into Sydney and I was on the train and the train stopped at Valley Heights and the

01:30 porter, the guard called out all along and everybody got out of the train. Got out with Peter and we all sort of did a little jig on the platform and all got back in again. Everybody was just, I just couldn't believe it. It was just wonderful news. I know I cried. It was just, I thought "Isn't that wonderful?" It was just that relief of knowing well at least

02:00 now, we've got our chance of getting back and there wasn't going to be any more killing and everyone at least were able to breathe again. It was, just you can't believe the relief. Just something, oh wonderful.

After the war we always ask the ex-servicemen about settling back into, I guess civilian life. Did the WAAAF have any, did you know of any of the WAAAFs having any trouble?

No, I don't know of any, no. Most just were glad to get back to civilian life. A couple I think, a couple found it hard to get jobs some of them. But most I think

03:00 were glad. All the people I knew were really glad to get back out of uniform into some pretty clothes, and just have your own bed and your own meals and just to be back again. I know a few who sort of missed the people around them but because we had then, the association everyone

03:30 came flocking into that and I think that was a big help. Where you could still meet people and most of us I think had no problems at all getting back into civilian life. And doing the things that we looked forward to and, "Won't it be wonderful having husband home and being able to have a life together," with, well first off one child and hoping

04:00 we would have more to follow. Not too quickly but more to follow. And we could be able to afford to buy furniture and those type of things which and things were so more difficult as regards setting up homes but I think we were all glad that at least now we've got the opportunity and the chance. And we were fortunate being able to buy my mother's home and

04:30 have a house. Although it had to have some things in it but they came eventually and you just bided your time and we got all the things then that later on, that we wanted, many years later. But not all of us that I know of were glad we were really glad to be back into civilian life. I mean maybe it was different for some men but most women

05:00 were really happy.

Did you mention that you had an association? What did that association do?

First of all we started of with we were called WAAAF Wings and we couldn't be a part of the Air Force Association at first because oh, there were some reasons and their constitution etcetera, and so. But we would have meetings and we would all

05:30 meet together and we were able to get back into, a lot of our friendships were still there of course and we were able to keep that going. We'd have our meetings and then once a year we'd have our birthday reunion and you'd have a Christmas and then with children we had Christmas parties at Centennial Park and you soon, it was still good for people

06:00 but we were civilians but we all had that bond of friendship. And that's why I think if anything happened to one of them we were always sad for them but we were able to help each other. And that's been going on ever since. It's just wonderful.

With some of the returned servicemen, it can be a time to reflect over what you know, things that happened during the war. Is

06:30 **the WAAAF association the same?**

Oh yes, we often talk about things we had, we're always there for Anzac Day marches and, yes. At our luncheons and dinners and we'll, often somebody you hadn't seen for years pops up and of course there's always a lot of chatter I can tell you. It's not, you get when we've had our reunions and you get a thousand women in a,

07:00 it's like a whole lot of parrots gone wrong, you know. But it's really and then the excitement of seeing someone you haven't seen for yonks and then suddenly they're there, and even now you'll meet somebody and I've had a couple in the street people have said, "They're mad these old ducks." Sort of greeting somebody but it did, really is always there, that's

07:30 friendship. It's a wonderful thing. And you know in sad times we've been able to help each other. In happy times we've been able to enjoy the happiness with each other and there's always somebody there for you to give you a helping hand.

Did you realise at the time what I guess what pioneering work you were doing?

Well, we didn't at the time. After the war we realised

08:00 that all these things that some of the women did you know fabric work. And some of them were helping to load the bombs. And some of them were the girls doing the weather and you'd let the balloon up. And all sorts of work that had never ever been parachute folding, never been done by women and now all these jobs they work quite good at photography. Quite a few

08:30 different sorts of work but altogether about seventy two different musterings. Which was a big field and all of them were jobs they had learnt in men had done and so they were able to let them go. Some of them even became mechanics and the girls those who are transport drivers, they learned how to look after cars and trucks.

09:00 They didn't only just drive cars, they drove some of those really heavy trucks. So all that was open to them and I think that we then felt, yes this was thing is a women didn't have to leave work when she was married and teaching, all the valued were still able to be teachers and be married. And but it was all this sort of

09:30 things that opened up to the women and we felt after we knew about this we felt, "Oh yeah, we pioneered those things."

Were many of the women especially women working in things like mechanics or, were they able to continue in that work, do you know?

Only a few. I don't really know of very many that continued with mechanical work. They,

10:00 a couple's husbands owned garages and they sort of helped but I don't really think many continued. And there wasn't really outside of the service, there wasn't any work for fabric workers or that sort of work but they at least had that knowledge. And there were other fields that they could probably branch out into – sail making which had always been a man's job.

10:30 So there were openings for some of those jobs but it was just the fact that they could do these things. Some of them did rejoin the services when they started again in 1951, I think and some of them did go back into the services because they just wanted to.

Do you think many of the WAAAFs,

11:00 **given that women couldn't do overseas service and do you think many of them, I mean would they have been keen to do that sort of overseas front line?**

Oh yes, we all were. Well, when we enlisted but unfortunately they said we could only be within Australia. But I think we would've all been keen to go if there were no men left to go. I think yes if we'd been given the opportunity quite a number

11:30 of us, I think would've been happy. I don't know about being happy but I think we would've gone.

It's, I mean just from what you've said it sounds like the WAAAF were a bunch of pretty tough women? Do you think they would've made good front line air force?

Oh not front line, no.

Or active?

I think active, probably doing the work that they were doing. In cipher in operations in

12:00 probably and probably the air fields being fabric workers and that sort of thing but not front line, not right up in the midst of all that but at the back, so the ones that who were there could go further a field. No, I don't believe, I don't think any of us would want to be right up in the midst of it. No, I disagree with the women today doing that, especially those who have got children

12:30 and away for months on duty. I don't hold with that at all. I just don't see how you could do it. And I don't agree with the services allowing them to do it.

I read that you had or I think that you mentioned that you had two medals?

Just the Defence Medal and the Victory Medal. Only two.

Do you

13:00 **wear those on Anzac Day?**

We wear them Anzac Day and when we have any, the cenotaph, when we have other special days. The wreath laying days wear them there and sometimes when you're at a dinner they might ask you to wear miniature medals. They say, "Medals to be worn," so you wear your miniature medals. And the men have got all these rows of medals and we've got two little ones.

13:30 But no, we're proud to wear them, we really are.

Can you tell me, we've heard Mick's story about coming home but you mentioned yesterday very briefly that you used to show Peter the photograph?

Yes. I would every day, every night from the time he was born. I mean he didn't know, from the time he was born I'd show him the photo, that's his Dad,

14:00 and as he got older and older and he was about 10 months old or just after 10 months old, and that was his Daddy. Every night he'd have to kiss his Daddy goodnight. I'd hold, I wouldn't get the picture down, I'd leave it up there and he'd have to kiss his father good night. So when Mick came home in the middle of the night, and then he was in bed with his pyjamas I brought Peter in and

14:30 I said, "This is Daddy." "No." "Daddy." So he got up, put on his shirt and his hat sat up in bed. Oh that was Daddy. So, he was right from then on, he's, it's always been his Dad. Even though now even today, he's, that's still his Dad. So we were fortunate.

15:00 **How did life change when Mick came home for you?**

Oh, I suppose it changed only in the fact that the thrill of having him home. And we then moved down to Concord West and we had a house to live in, to look after clothing extra to wash and iron. It was learning to cook proper meals and

15:30 I suppose that would be just the thrill and wonderful feeling of that, knowing that we were safe together and that we had all our life ahead of us. Didn't know how long it was but just that feeling of happiness, joy and love that's shone through. And I don't think we've thought of any other way of life,

16:00 it's just been our happiness to be together. To have gone through some of the things we've gone through, we've both been there for each other and I think that we're very fortunate to have all that experiences.

16:30 **I guess looking back, I mean we asked Mick the same question, looking back do you consider your time in the WAAAF a positive experience?**

Oh yes, I think it was, it helped so much in our in our life, in our civilian life, yes. What we learnt. We learnt to be with people, to live with people, learnt to,

17:00 you never looked for faults, you looked for the good points, except the Japs. And I think it really did help, it made us grown and grow together and I think we've always regarded... It would've been awful to have missed it. I don't think we would've ever forgiven ourselves or each other if we hadn't

17:30 had that wonderful experiences of knowing that we've helped in our country together. And we hoped it was going to be peace for Iraq there, was of course that never happens. But we do feel, yes we did a job and we were part of that job and it was well worth every bit.

18:00 **I guess was there ever a moment when you regretted joining the WAAAF?**

No, no. No, I don't think so. No, I don't because that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a part of doing something, I couldn't have sat home and twiddled my thumbs

18:30 or just done an ordinary job. You just felt that for King and country, and the country was at war, that's just what you had to do. But I never ever regretted it. No, I can't say I ever did.

How hard would it have been, you mentioned being in the service, how hard would it have been to not have been in service? What would you have known of

19:00 **Mick's experience overseas?**

I would've known nothing. I think it would've been much harder for both of us. Because I wouldn't have always understood quite what had been going on. You'd know that, yes he'd been in the services, yes he'd been flying and he'd been here and he'd been there. But if you'd only been living a mundane life in the city and just going to your job, no I don't think, I

19:30 think it would've been harder. I think we both would've won through but I think it would've taken probably a bit longer. We would've had to get established together again, whereas now we didn't have that problem, we just came together without any problems. So I think may have. Knowing what some of my other friends did, went through yes, but

20:00 I think our love always stood out and it has never been broken.

Did you talk much about your experience to Mick or did Mick talk much to you?

I don't think we ever got around a lot to talking about those it was. When Mick had any of his reunions I got, you'd listen to what they were saying and I think it would be the same with Mick when we had our reunions or a group of us together. We never

20:30 talked a lot about some of the things we did because we used to think it'd be getting pushed further back into the past and we have so much living to do. So much joy to look forward to and that was part of that life and this was our new life. And that's what we wanted. And that's why I think you never ever dwelt on lots of things. But then, now and again, you'd just say something but never

21:00 any great long screens.

Did the children ever ask you about what you'd done?

Sometimes they did because we'd take them to the Anzac Day marches. And I remember my grand daughter, one grand daughter was doing her HSC [Higher School Certificate] in Adelaide, and she rang me up the night before her history exam and she said, "I know Nanna, I'm going to get a question on women in the air force women in the services. Can you give me

21:30 a story of what you did?" So I told her what I did. So she did get a question and she said, "My nanna did so and so, and my nanna did so and so," and she said, "That was just so wonderful that." No the children do ask questions now and again but they've never asked a great deal. They always like to see the photos and Mick bought home his helmet and

22:00 a few other things and then one grandson's got that. And another one wants his Japanese sword that he's got but we haven't given it to either of them yet. We felt they've got to be a bit older and a bit more sensible. But yeah, I think the children like to hear what was going on but they never wanted to just sit down and say, "We did this and we did that." They just liked hearing snippets and if they wanted to know something they would ask

22:30 and you'd tell them. But we never dwelt on it. But I think they were always proud that we did it. Because you'd hear the teachers at school say, "I believe you're marching. Yes, Elizabeth told us that you were going to be marching." They'd ask you to talk to the children and you'd take your uniform and show them off and the kids felt

23:00 that they wouldn't say it but you knew they were really thrilled that you could do those sort of things.

What would you say to the kids' classes?

Well, we spoke to children, they were mainly in the fifth and sixth grade classes and they wanted to know what women did in the services. And you'd usually pick a girl to put on your jacket and hat because that was a girls' one. The boys would be envious

23:30 but they would ask you questions about what you did and where you went and they were learning. Because a lot of them if their parents hadn't been, they had no connection. And it was good for the children. And they're still doing that in the schools today on just before Anzac Day, there's always in the public, private things, the primary schools, sometimes in

24:00 the high schools, but mainly fifth and sixth class children. It's amazing what they do learn and what they do know and the questions they do ask. So you feel that's probably doing a lot of good.

Were there any questions that have really surprised you that you can remember?

Oh yes, sometimes they ask you things that, "How many did you shoot down?" or, "Did you ever get shot at in the planes?" And we'd say, "No, we didn't fly planes, we

24:30 were air force but we were ground people." Oh, and then the boys were disappointed because they wanted to hear a bit of blood and gore, they didn't want just to hear of some women just pushing things around on a table. They were much more interested where they know guns could be fired at. But then, that's boys.

Do you have any funny stories or the favourite stories

25:00 **that you tell the kids?**

No, it just depends on the children. You don't ever, you never went in and spoke to them with anything prepared because you'd know that that's the wrong thing to do. They soon, when they see or you took pictures and you showed them pictures and things, so the questions came

25:30 and you answered the questions. But yeah, it was much better than being something absolutely and kept it to the letter. You never did because a lot of them anyway would not understand what you were talking about. But I was amazed, even now you read about Anzac Day children know so much about Gallipoli. Which you know, years ago the children never knew

26:00 anything about it, so it shows that these children are learning and they're picking things up maybe on the internet or what, but some of their questions and some of the stories you read that they, when they're asked to write something about it, I'm just amazed at how well a child of eleven and twelve can write such a well put together essay. I think it's wonderful.

26:30 Hope for the future.

One of the questions that I wanted to ask you was, I mean if a young woman came to you now in the same circumstances you know with war breaking out before you joined the WAAAF, what advice would you give to her, saying that

27:00 **she's saying she wants to join the women's air force?**

I'd ask her, "Well, if that's what you really want to do, yes. But just make sure, and if you're going to do it, do it properly. Just be part of it and really go and do it." But you couldn't, you wouldn't advise them to do it. But if that was their choice, yes I'd say, I'd agree with them and say, "Well, I think that's a wonderful

27:30 idea and if that's what you'd really like to do go and do your best." I think that's all you can do. You can't tell them the things that you did because that was a totally different war. Different ball game altogether. But I think yes it would be wonderful to see some of the girls. A lot of them now do join the permanent air force and they do very well.

28:00 A lot of them, particularly who go to Canberra, they can do their university course there and they, I think they would prove themselves very well.

Do you think being in the WAAAF changed you at all?

Made you grow up. Didn't change you, regards you always had your dreams and your thoughts but it did help you with growing up

28:30 and understanding life, understanding that there were other people besides yourself and made you

realise yes, you are now an adult and you can start to live a proper life. I think, I don't know that you would have learnt so much about life if you hadn't been in the services.

29:00 **After the war you had stayed at home and looked after the children and then you said that years later you opened a travel agency?**

Yeah, when the children were grown up and done well two of them had finished university, the other one hadn't quite got there.

29:30 I thought I'd like to do something. I'd never wanted to work. And I started a travel agency in South Hurstville, 'cause there was nothing around and the day it opened it never looked back. It grew and it grew and it grew and it grew. And in the end I had the four girls working and we'd moved to bigger premises, and the TAA [Trans Australia Airline]

30:00 had quite a lot of the agencies and I decided, "No, it's too big. This is not what I want, I've done that. I proved I could do it." So I sold it and I was quite glad. It was, I had it for about five years I suppose, but now that was time to give up and I didn't want to get any bigger. I didn't want it to take over my life and it could because I know the person I sold it

30:30 to, it's been her life and she has grown into a very big business. Her husband gave up his job and working, and she's got nine girls working for her and you know. That's not, wasn't what we wanted. We just wanted, just something to sort of give you something to do I suppose. Get your brain grey cells working and then of course,

31:00 I had many other interests though. But I did enjoy those few years but that was enough. And I don't regret having done it. I started from nothing and was able to sell it and that was good.

Did you always have a love of travel?

Always had a love of travel, yes. Whether partly from my mother I don't know or my father, it probably was. But always wanted to travel,

31:30 always wanted to do things. We always travelled a lot round Australia. We always did like took the children to different places. We had caravans and we'd shoot off to all round New South Wales and Victoria and Queensland, and we'd always, we'd go camping, we'd always go somewhere different and take the children so they'd

32:00 learn all about their own state and they've all had the travel bug too.

You mentioned to us during one of the breaks and Mick mentioned to us that you went to England and met up with a lot of his crew?

Yes, that was wonderful meeting them cause by the first time they were all, the whole crew were still there. They put on special dinners and things and

32:30 we really had just that instant bond with the wives. And it was lovely having the men all there together and they were able to talk about what they'd done. And we went to one of the reunions at Pembroke Dock, and these sort of things but it was really wonderful to think that we could do those things and see these chaps. Then,

33:00 unfortunately now there's only Mick and two others of his crew left. And one of them we're a bit worried about. So, but it has been a wonderful experience both for Mick and myself to think we could meet these people again and that all the wives could meet each other and we just all got on very well, and we all communicate with each other, so it's

33:30 wonderful, isn't it? It wasn't only Australians, it was also overseas as well.

Had you heard a lot about these men before you actually met them?

Yes, I'd heard about the crew and Mick always got letters from them, so yes I felt you knew the people. And I know Mick had been to the wedding of one of his crew and that and I think we felt

34:00 meeting them, I thought, "Oh yes, I know you. I've seen your photo," but you didn't feel a bit shy at all in meeting them again. It's wonderful now we can still communicate with each other. And that's the part I think is wonderful.

Did you feel like they knew you already?

Yes, I do. 'Cause they knew what I looked like apparently.

34:30 They had a photo, they knew what I looked like and they knew I'd been in the services.

Just before we finish Betty, we do give you a chance. Is there anything else you'd like to say? Is there anything we haven't talked about?

Well, the only thing I think is, since like after the war and we had our WAAAF association,

35:00 we still keep together and we've still kept that friendship. Mick has it in the RAAF association and I

think that was wonderful to think that all this time we can still meet and still have a wonderful time together, and thankful yes, we're all still here.

They say mateship's...

The mateship was just terrific.

35:30 I'm glad we didn't miss it, I'm glad we've had that and it's something we'll always have. You just can't live without your friends.

INTERVIEW ENDS