Australians at War Film Archive

Patrice Dow - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 16th April 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1701

Tape 1

00:41 **As I asked you just before if you could just provide us with a bit of a summary of your life at this point?**

I'll just talk until you stop me, all right then? I was born on New Year's Eve in Manildra and my father had served in the First World War

01:00 and that was his first appointment as the station master at Manildra after the war, and we lived in the station house which I understand today is a museum for the Manildra Group. I stayed there with my parents until I was about five to six when we moved to Werris Creek where my father was the

01:30 assistant station master at Werris Creek. Prior to Werris Creek we had very happy days in Manildra. My brother was born three and a quarter years after I was born and we were actually born in the railway house, a Dr Mollison and a Nurse Pridders. In Werris Creek my parents built their own home up on the hill overlooking the creek and

02:00 we had a beautiful view straight out the gap in the Great Dividing Range. I started school in Werris Creek at the local primary school and when I turned 12 my father didn't want me travelling to high school in Tamworth each day so I went to boarding school at West Maitland. The college is now known as All Saints College because it's

02:30 co-educational, but it was a Dominican Convent in those days, and I had a very happy childhood at the school. For the last two years of my period there I was the senior head of the school and from there I got a teacher's college scholarship to Armidale, but in the meantime my parents had moved from Werris Creek to

03:00 Sydney where my father was one of the first people to be employed in the new train control system up on top of Central Station. Well the year I left school war broke out and we had applied for my teacher's college scholarship to be transferred to Sydney, but that

03:30 took 1939 and I was pupil teaching waiting for that to happen, in Elm Court, Moss Vale, another boarding college for girls where I got a lot of experience umpiring hockey matches and doing all sorts of things like that. In 1940 I came back to Sydney and

04:00 I really didn't want to go on with the teaching career at that stage and I went to the Newton Rapid Business College. My father always said that everyone must learn to touch type and I found through life that it's been a very handy asset, even to the days of doing a little bit of computer work. But from

04:30 the Newton Rapid Business College I took a position with Cadbury Fry Pascal in the statistical department and from there I joined the navy. During the period in Sydney after I left the business college they were calling on women to do all sorts of World War work, and my father, because he had been a Duntroon

05:00 cadet in the First World War and was in the 45th Militia Battalion between the wars, he was actually called up a year before war broke out and he was away from home. My brother was at boarding school in Bathurst. There was no need for him really to go to boarding school because my parents now lived in Sydney, but because I did he wanted to. So after he finished his intermediate he did two years

05:30 at St Stanislaus College in Bathurst. At Mrs McKenzie's Emergency Signalling Corps, once we'd been trained in sending and receiving Morse, and that was no trouble to me because my father was a signal's officer, when we spent our leisure time, even Saturdays training the Empire Air Training Scheme boys.

06:00 And also anyone who wanted to learn Morse code at that time, the police, the fire brigade, the merchant navy, everyone was sent either to the post office or to Mrs McKenzie's Emergency Signalling Corps. She was the most wonderful woman and the only woman electrical engineer in Australia at that time. I also joined the queues of the VADs [Volunteer Aid Detachment] that used to go to Lewisham

06:30 Hospital at 6.00 o'clock every Sunday morning until 2.00 or 3.00, doing home nursing, and that was a wonderful experience which helped me through life. In 1942 the world was in a very grave position and particularly the Royal Australian Navy were desperate for trained telegraphists, so much against it's will,

07:00 the navy accepted a telegraphist, the first twelve as a more or less experiment to do the telegraphy work for the navy. And eventually I joined the navy at the end of 1942, and although I was fully trained in normal Morse when

07:30 we went to Canberra they were desperately in need of enemy intercept operators, so various people did various Morse codes, but I did the Kana Morse which was the Japanese Morse. And I had had a teacher at school whose parents were wool buyers in Tokyo and she was always putting on Japanese plays and

08:00 things. Well, for the next short period while we were under instruction we also had to learn the geography of the Pacific which no one knew anything about in those days. It was tragic really, and they're still not taught the geography of the Pacific, which was vital to our war effort at that time. However, we studied the geography of the Pacific and we studied

08:30 Kana [Japanese equivalent of Morse code] Morse and eventually we went on watch as enemy intercept operators. Very shortly after that I was chosen to do an officer's training course when they needed women officers, but I couldn't be spared because of the work I was doing, and I wasn't spared until much later. During my naval career I spent most of the time at

09:00 HMAS Harman outside Canberra which was the main source of information for the west from the rest of the world at that time. I also spent time during my officer's training course at Flinders Naval Depot and Navy Office Melbourne and also at the big American,

09:30 very sensitive area in the navy where they broke the codes and did all that sort of thing. And then I was actually to go to Adelaide River, take a group of WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] up there, which is south of Darwin where the Americans had a big radio station. But by that time the Japanese were being pushed further north and we couldn't get the signals that were needed and the Americans moved

10:00 to Manus Island, but we weren't allowed to go to Manus Island at that stage. Had the atomic bomb not been dropped, probably yes, but not as things turned out. In January 1946, the 26th of January I married. My husband was part of the British Pacific Fleet which came out

10:30 to Australia at the end of the European War, and he was in charge of the high speed station at Molonglo which was part of Harman, and I came back on the troop train. I was the only woman on the troop train I think, in March, be about March 1945, and I'd been travelling all

11:00 night and I was met in Goulburn because the troop train was going back to Sydney, and taken back to Harman and at breakfast the next morning I married the man that was sitting opposite me in the ward room, and that took place on the 26th of January 1946. Earlier in January my husband

11:30 received an appointment to go on the staff of Sir Bruce Fraser as he was then, to do the farewell cruise of China and Japan and we were actually at a ceremony at the American ligation, which was not an embassy but a ligation in those days, and that was where we got word that there was a signal requesting that he go on the farewell cruise. They would've thought of course

12:00 he was a single man. Everyone else was trying to get back to England at that stage, and I was asked to stay on in the navy for a short time, and when my duties in the special unit ceased I took on the job of executive officer. And I had the honour of leading the women's services in the Victory march in Canberra on

12:30 the 10th of June 1946. Well my husband took passage after the farewell cruise to thank all the people of the islands, including Cocos Islands. They came back to Fremantle and went back to England, but prior to that, on the 3rd of July 1946, I sailed for England in HMS Victorious

13:00 and voluntary help with some of the British and Dutch war brides who were taking passage to England, and eventually we arrived in Plymouth Sound on August bank holiday, August the 6th, 1946. And Plymouth Sound is a beautiful sound to travel up but when we got close to Plymouth it was just one heap, a huge mountain of rubble.

13:30 They'd got to the stage of clearing all the bomb sites. There were no wharves, we had to go ashore in lighters. Well, my husband eventually arrived back in England and he was in the communications branch, but due to the technology learned during the war years they had a special new branch, the electrical branch. And he transferred to that

14:00 and did a long L [electronics] course at HMS Collingwood. And then Australia wanted someone back out here at the end of the two years, so back to Australia we came and he was working at navy office and we were living in Melbourne. Well, at the end of that two years we went back to England again in the [SS] Orcades and

14:30 there was a world situation developing then with the Russians and the Berlin Corridor, and the ship had been booked out, but by the time we sailed we practically had it to ourselves so many people cancelled. Well we arrived back in England in the middle of all this trouble and my husband was eventually appointed to

15:00 HMS Sea Eagle which was the Fleet Air Arm Base in Londonderry, Northern Ireland and we lived there for over two and a half years. He was support radio officer in Londonderry. After two years we came back to England again and he was on the instructional staff at HMS Collingwood until about December 1958,

15:30 and then in 1959 we came out to Australia. In the meantime of course, at the end of the war anyone who had been an officer in the services was given a short teaching course of about 18 months, and I actually did that in England and was teaching over there

16:00 on and off for five years. And then when I came back out here I did the upgrading course for three years, four years trained, but that was partly Armidale and partly the Catholic Teachers' College. Well when we came back out here they were desperate for teachers so I took up teaching again and my husband worked for Pye Telecommunications over at Artarmon, Chatswood.

16:30 That was when we bought this house. There was nothing available in Sydney. 1959, Sydney hadn't recovered from the lack of building during the war years and all the western suburbs were white ant eaten and the Epping- Carlingford area wasn't sewered. This place was only sewered about two years before we arrived here, but I've lived here ever since.

17:00 My husband retired from Pye Telecommunications and at the time there was a great employment shortage in Sydney and he worked in a retirement job for Phoenix Prudential in an insurance company, and he loved going into the city each day and looking after the computer stationery,

17:30 mail and that sort of thing for the insurance company. And I retired after on and off 34 years of teaching in 1985 and my husband died in July 1986, and I've been now 18 years a widow doing voluntary work. I did a lot of voluntary work in the schools

18:00 with English programs when I retired, Wiley Park Girls' High, Mortdale Primary School, St Raphael's Catholic School down the road, and also I'm a member of Legacy [Association caring for families of war veterans]. I was, at one stage, president of the Rosemary Club at Legacy. That's a nice club because a lot of the ladies in that club were still working

18:30 and they couldn't get to meetings during the day so they'd get to meetings at night, and currently I'm the welfare officer for the Legacy Rosemary Club. My mother died in 1988, two years after my husband, but she had been a widow for nearly 30 years prior to that, because my father's war injuries from the First

19:00 World War were rather serious, a bullet through the lung and another one through the leg which left him permanently stiff legged, but I think that's about my life.

What a wonderful life.

Well, it's been a busy life.

It certainly sounds like it, and that was a very effective summary of it. Thank you very much. So what we're going to do now is

19:30 **go back and pull a lot more detail out of the whole thing. What do you remember of your time in Manildra?**

Well the main thing I remember there, and I think it was my first memory, was going into the front bedroom, and I can see it still, when my brother was born. That's about, I would've been three and three months then, but the main thing I remember about it

20:00 is all the visits we had from grandparents and relatives. And a strange thing happened to me in Manildra because the railway in those days, of course we had a rail motor and there's a picture of me on it out there, and the station master used to go out on the rail motor, like people would today, to give quotes to the farmers and see how many trucks they

20:30 needed for their whatever, and also Dad had a lot of money apparently. I don't know whether it was farmers' money or just money from the rail tickets, but he would go over to the bank every afternoon with money and sometimes he would take me with him. And it was a little front, you know

21:00 the bank was only across the road, but apparently on one occasion there was a roll of paper, newspaper and I picked it up and was either playing with it or something, and a whole lot of notes fell out of it, quite a large sum of money fell out of this packet, but it was never claimed. Apparently the shearers, that's what they do,

21:30 or used to. They had nothing to do with their money or nowhere to put it, they used to roll it up in newspaper. But anyhow this was never claimed and my father gave it to Fairbridge or a child training

farm or something, but that caused quite a lot of stir in the village. But behind the house there was a

22:00 creek, I think it was the Mandagery Creek, and we've got lots of photographs of little picnics down to the Mandagery Creek and then going off to church on a Sunday morning, mainly with grandparents and that sort of thing. And mother and Dad had a lot of friends because my mother was a brilliant pianist. She had all her certificates from

22:30 the Trinity College of Music, and if there hadn't been a First World War she probably would have gone to London with a position with the Trinity College. So she was very much in demand at social gatherings and that sort of thing. During our time there, they were raising money to build a soldiers' hall and I think they used to have lots of little functions, just sing songs

23:00 and things like that, and mother used to play for them. I have a beautiful silver tea and coffee service here engraved by the people of Manildra. But on the last occasion my niece was here from New Zealand I got her to take it back there because it's got, my brother had four children and they're all living in New Zealand so that's more use to them

23:30 as an heirloom than it was to me. But I do remember waving to Dad each day as he went down the station path and looking for him to come home at lunch time. And also in the yard at Manildra, it looks dreadful these days, but pictures we had of it it had a lot of trees, pepper trees and other trees and

24:00 we had lots of swings and things to play on. And I remember my mother put my brother out in a cot or a pram and we had a little poddy calf [calf still with its mother] and the poddy calf got the blanket off the cot half way down it's throat. I can still remember the panic over that. But that's about all of Manildra. I didn't go back for years but I have been back a couple of times

24:30 recently and when I go back, I don't remember any more. I do remember the Nurse Pridders, she lived there and she was a great friend of mother's, and later on my mother and father lived in Bexley and Nurse Pridders came and lived in Rockdale. But apparently she never forgave the doctor because he put my birth time down as 10 minutes

25:00 to midnight and I could never understand why there was a problem with that, but apparently all the babies born on New Year's Eve got a mention in the local paper, but she said, "The station clock said it was midnight, but Dr Mollison said it was 10 minutes to." I do remember a fire. The main street burnt out. Now I don't know what year that was, but everything

25:30 came over to our front garden. When we woke up the next morning we had all the goods that had been saved from the fire in the front garden and there was, I think his name was Jim Kamesis, the Greek who had a shop opposite, he gave me a huge teddy bear after the fire. It was bigger than I was and I had that for years. I think

26:00 that was the name. And also there was a bank manager there by the name of Longley and Dad befriended him. He did the wrong thing with the books and ended up in jail and I remember Dad used to go and visit him in jail on and off when he heard about it, when he was living in Sydney. But he came out

26:30 of jail and learned a trade and did well after that. But apparently one of his sons still lives in Manildra. But I do remember the, well I don't remember the actual happening but that happened when we were in Manildra apparently. And I also remember the train trip to Werris Creek. We had to change trains at Blayney

27:00 and I don't think I've ever felt colder in my life than I felt on Blayney station waiting for the train to take us to Werris Creek.

It's a common reaction in Blayney. What did your father do in the First World War as far as you know?

Well he was the station master at Mumbil. That's down south, I think it was Mumbil

27:30 and he joined the, I've got all his letters there from the First World War, he joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and was sent to camp in Goulburn, and while he was in Goulburn he was chosen to go to Duntroon to a special course. And when he eventually left Duntroon he was a signals officer with the

28:00 55th Battalion and he went to England via South Africa. I remember he wrote all his life to people he met on his way to England, from South Africa. And when he got there he was seconded to the Dorsetshire Regiment and it was dreadful because all the

28:30 U-Boats [Unterseeboot – German submarine] that used to get the shipping, they used to see it from there. And in his letters he says, "There is another ship gone and our boys at the front won't get their mail." But he seemed to have, I don't know, it might've been sensitive work, I don't know what it was, he seemed to be sent around England to various places and he doesn't seem to have done it with other people.

29:00 He seems to have been on his own, like the whole battalion didn't move. And then eventually when they were getting ready for the Great Push of 1918, for victory they hoped, he eventually went to the front and he was wounded at Hellfire Corner in Belgium in March 1918.

29:31 And he, well he was very, very ill because the bullet had gone straight through the lung at the lobe of the heart and out the other side fortunately. So he had a wound mark front and back and he'd also been shot through the calf of the leg and he, the English, when you read those letters, were absolutely marvellous.

30:00 A plague of flu broke out about that time and if it broke out in the south they'd move these lung cases to the north, and if it broke out in the north they'd keep moving them around England to castles and all sorts of beautiful venues trying to save their lives. And eventually he was sent out to Australia in convoy just towards

30:30 the end of the war. And being the signals officer of course, he was still employed as the signals officer although he was convalescent, and it was a huge convoy which left England. And then they split up, and the night they split up they signalled 'goodbye good luck', and he eventually arrived back. The ship broke down in New Zealand

31:00 and then they eventually got to Melbourne and they came up by train, a hospital train, to Randwick Hospital, and mother at Junee went to meet the train because they'd known one another as small children. But his name and his two brothers is on the war memorial in Gundagai. That's

31:30 where his father was also the station master. Although his father came out to Australia from Ireland and he was teaching at Riverview College because he trained to be a priest and decided at the last that he didn't have the vocation, and then he got duodenal and all sorts of ulcers and the doctor told him to get out into the country, so that's what he did.

32:00 But Dad always, that, he was in the Second World War too but he couldn't travel overseas because he was not medically fit. But that was his battalion, I just can't read from here what it says, but by then he was acting captain. He couldn't be confirmed because he was not medically fit, but he could be

32:30 acting.

When he was wounded was he serving with the British or the Australians?

The Australians. Oh no, no, he was always, they seemed to, well they still do, they have like some of their officers come and work with the Australians, like my husband did in 1948 and earlier in the war during the war years. But no, he seemed

33:00 to be, he was with the 55th Battalion. And there's a very sad letter there from a Captain Wren, a great friend of his, Dad's batman, who wrote to my grandmother when he was wounded, he was killed practically the day before Armistice Day. Oh no, it was an Australian battalion, but he was seconded

33:30 to the Dorsetshire Regiment, I wouldn't know.

OK. Did he talk much about life at the frontline to you kids?

No, not a lot, no. He was a great believer in teaching us the geography of the First World War. I knew exactly, I've been over there to the battle fields of the First World War, and

34:00 I knew exactly what he'd been talking about and particularly this Hellfire Corner where the trenches are still there, they've left them. And then of course always on Anzac Day, but he wasn't a well man. He used to get this awful quinsy. I've never heard of it from that day to this, but anything to do with

34:30 with the lungs he was badly affected. But as I say, apart from Anzac Day, and always my father was in work in the Depression years, but we were always giving food and meals, not so much in Manildra I don't remember, but in Werris Creek he would've come across, he used to call them an old

35:00 digger. He'd come across someone that was down on their luck and anything in the way of clothing or food or any spare money he always handed it out. He didn't have much respect for those that were drunk, but the others that were genuinely down on their luck. And of course the Depression years in Australia,

35:30 you can't describe them. The local solicitor in Werris Creek, I forget his name now, I knew it for years, he used to get the people who were unemployed to come around and work for us, for the families, because money was just taken out of people's salaries to share with those who didn't have employment.

36:00 And this solicitor got people as a thank you for those that were working and giving, although it was compulsory more or less I think, to do jobs for them, for the families. It was a wonderful spirit in those country towns. Probably still is, but they all worked together.

What about in your family, how

36:30 **did the Depression affect it?**

Well it didn't really because my father was in employment, and apart from the fact that their salaries, I don't quite understand how that worked, but I know that money was automatically taken from those that were earning to help give something to that weren't, but

37:00 I come from a very saving family. They don't waste things, even though they might have the money they still wouldn't be wasteful. But we had a mortgage on the house and they lost heavily on that when they moved to Sydney. It was a beautiful home, a country home, but in a lovely position and when they came to the city

37:30 you couldn't rent it. So they sold it at a great loss. The figure was £500 or something like that, and then they had to get accommodation in the city and build again, and today my brother and I still look after that house. We still have it. We don't make anything from it but we hold it.

38:00 **What can you recall of your primary school days in Werris Creek?**

Lots of friends, and the thing that I can't understand is all this trouble we have with the indigenous people. We had a schoolyard, we had a little Scotch boy who was called Snow White and we had an Aborigine boy who was called Darkie Bamble

38:30 and we had, we all got on so well together. What had happened? I don't know. The primary school was more or less at our back fence and we used to come home for lunch and we all knew one another's families. I was particularly friendly with a girl called Cathy

39:00 Hardy. Her father and mother had the local shoe store and they had really good quality shoes, and they also used to mend the shoes. And every Saturday or nearly every Saturday, I was allowed to go down to Cathy's home because she was an only child and occasionally she'd come up to me. But she was frightened of me because I had a brother and another boy who was a terror that used

39:30 to tease the life out of her. No, I did well at the school. In those days we had to sit for a primary final where you didn't get into secondary school. That's all been abolished which is tragic. However, I was too young. I did the first year and I was too young they thought. to go to boarding school, so I repeated it and got a better pass and then went

40:00 to boarding school. But we used to have school concerts. I also learned music at the local convent and we had music exams. We had school picnics. One tragedy was when the lovely lady, a friend of my mother's, who had a little orchestra went to Gunnedah one night to play for a ball and the local farmers, all the local business people seemed

40:30 to be in the band. And they hit a ditch and Thelma Delaney was killed, and her little brother and herself lived with us for a while until the family settled down. But the day the mother died, the mother had a streak of grey in her hair which was pulled back from her forehead, and the little girl on that day had this streak of grey and yet she never seemed to have it afterwards, and yet that day

41:00 I could see it. And then of course there was a big, we didn't go to the cemetery, but there was a big thanksgiving for her life, in the school hall. I remember things like that.

Tape 2

00:33 **What were your thoughts about going away to boarding school?**

Well, most children in country towns in those days, you know, expected to go to boarding school because there weren't a lot of schools available, other than travelling in the train. And the behaviour in the trains was a lot better then than it is now, but it still

01:00 wasn't good. You know, the toilet rolls flew out the carriage windows and they misbehaved, and my father used to see what happened of course. And I was quite happy to go to boarding school. My mother had been to boarding school before, years before, and it just seemed the right thing to happen.

01:30 And they chose a school which was half way between Sydney and where we lived and I came home for all the school holidays or came to Sydney. No, it was just something I accepted and when you got there of course, you met people from Walgett, from all over, Gunnedah, all over New South Wales, which I found very interesting. We used to go to one another's

02:00 homes for school holidays or weekends. There were a lot of children from the Hunter in those days, from the Cessnock area, and their parents would be able to come and visit them on Sundays, and if they were going out for a couple of hours they used to take the ones who lived further away. It was something we just expected and I was quite happy about it. My brother

02:30 was jealous because I'd been to boarding school. There was no need for him to go because they lived in Sydney by the time he was due for secondary school and they just let him go. He had to change schools anyhow because the school he was at was only an intermediate high and in order to do his leaving certificate he would've had to go to another Sydney school. But no, I was quite happy.

03:00 **What were the boarding house conditions like?**

They were beautiful buildings and it was dormitory accommodation with hospital type screens for privacy if you wanted it, and then there was a beautiful glassed-in balcony and if you wanted to sleep out on the balcony you could. And

03:30 the study hall and the whole area was quite comfortable accommodation. Lovely playing fields, tennis courts, hockey fields. It was in about 20 acres of ground and there was a second, a day school. There were boarders and day students. But the

04:00 day school where we did our study was removed from the boarding area. But of course at night if you wanted to do any reading or fancy work or play games, that was in the boarding school area in a big auditorium type building. But apart from that life was quite pleasant.

What was your school uniform like?

04:30 The school uniform as far as I can remember was a navy blue rather nice tunic. I can remember it had pleats here with a button and had a big bow in the summer and a tie with the school colours on it, a little thin tie in the winter.

05:00 And then over that we wore a blazer, and as far as I can remember it had braid around the outside which again was the school colours, blue and gold, and a badge on the pocket which was, the badge's motto was 'veritas' which means truth, truth in our hearts, truth in our minds and truth on our lips,

05:30 which I thought was a very good motto and I've never forgotten it. But I don't remember what colour stocking we wore or the shoes, and we just had a felt hat with the school badge on it.

What were the subjects that you took?

Well, different subjects were learned in the different stages. We tried a little

06:00 bit of German in first or second year. We tried a little bit of Italian, but eventually I did French. English, French, history, economics, botany, art and music, those were my subjects, and lower standard maths. I was never very good at maths until I left school and had to relearn

06:30 it to teach it. But at school I could never do the top level maths. We did have a teacher, our French teacher, I think she taught us more Japanese than she taught us French, but her parents had been wool buyers in Japan I understand. But then I don't know why they lived

07:00 there for so long, but I thought wool buyers came and went, but that's what the parents did and she actually lived in Japan. And I remember we produced wonderful music, The Mikado, over and over again at the boys' school, at the Town Hall, at the nursing homes, the hospitals.

07:30 We were asked many times to produce The Mikado for different things.

What was your favourite school subject?

English I think, yes, English.

Do you remember what texts you studied that you liked so much?

Oh dear, I can't say I do. We didn't do novels in detail

08:00 like they do today. You know, they pick three novels and study them in detail. We did more a period. We certainly did a different Shakespeare every year. I don't even remember which one we did for the leaving certificate. But no, A Midsummer Night's Dream, I always loved that at school, but

08:30 I can't say that I remember the last one I studied. Probably King Lear but I'm not sure.

When you were at school what did you imagine that your life would be like afterwards? What did you want to do?

Well sadly, pre-World War II, when you did modern history you learnt nothing

09:00 but the rise of Mussolini, the rise of Hitler, the trouble in Spain with General Franco. And I always took, I said English, but I did love history too. And probably because of my father and the geography of Europe and in studying history I got always, well I got an A in the intermediate and the in the leaving. I didn't

09:30 do history honours but I probably could've done because I had extra knowledge about it. But that used to worry us, it really did. When you saw all this massing of arms. And I remember when we heard, it was about 1936 that General Franco had actually got into Madrid and settled things there, that was quite a

10:00 relief for us. But then all the other things we learnt about the rise of Mussolini and particularly Hitler, you used to wonder where it would all end, and of course it didn't take us long to find out. It was just amazing the information that came out, particularly about Hitler, and how could the world

10:30 survive with his regime?

So what were you taught about him at school?

Well it was modern history. You were taught how he rose to power, what he promised the people. In some cases, a few cases, he helped them. But then all this massing of troops and ammunition and shipping,

11:00 what were they going to use it for if it weren't for a war? And after the First World War they'd shown aggression which we thought probably would happen again. Our history classes would often lead to discussion about what could happen.

11:30 **What kind of discussions did you have about what might happen?**

Well we used to discuss the lesson, and one thing that we couldn't agree with was all the men… what were the women doing when all these young boys were taken to these camps, the Hitler Youth Camps? And it involved the men of the country. We used

12:00 to discuss that a bit. What were the women doing? Were they doing nursing or were they, what were they doing when all the boys were taken away to the Hitler Youth Camps? But no, we used to just, well, we would have class discussions about similarities

12:30 in techniques of different countries in relation to what Hitler was doing, just as perhaps they do today in what's happening in the Middle East.

What did you think of Hitler at that stage?

I don't really remember, apart from the fact that I couldn't understand him, but I had a

13:00 fear, had a fear of the power, of the power of this man, and he was on everyone's lips, just as Saddam Hussein was in earlier years. No, I think it was the power that he seemed to have over the people, over power, over everyone. And he got his way,

13:30 whatever happened Hitler had to be right. And all this militarism, we didn't like that.

How aware were you then of the gathering storm clouds in Europe?

I'm sorry.

How aware were you of the gathering war situation in Europe?

We were very well kept up to date with that, yes.

14:00 Probably better than the ordinary civilian because what you were studying in the schools, there was a syllabus and the information was there and we were expected to know it. So that, and all the newsreels at the time. You didn't get information as much as you do now of course, on a daily basis. But whatever

14:30 information there was about what was happening in, particularly Germany and in Italy and in Madrid. We had a teacher, a retired nun, an old teacher, and where she got her information, I don't know. We did have radio but that was about all. But the morning that General Franco reached Madrid

15:00 we were told at breakfast by, I forget her name now, she was absolutely ecstatic, "General Franco's in Madrid," and we knew she was right even though she was old nun. Wherever she got the information it would be right. So no, there was a queer atmosphere to me. I mean I used to do a lot of talking to the

15:30 school children, like invited around about Anzac Day, various schools, and some of them were boys 17, 18, had that don't care look about them and what's she going to talk about. And immediately I would get their attention by saying, "You imagine that at your age, within one week of your leaving school, you're going to be confronted with

16:00 a world war like the Second World War." It brings them to their, to your attention or seems to straight away. But I was very aware of it. I don't know why. Probably because my father was in the 45th Militia Battalion between the wars. When he came to Sydney that's the battalion that the men gave him the clock when he

16:30 retired. But I mean, to see him going off at least once a week in full military uniform, training the militia and going off to a camp instead of going on holidays once a year. And also about 12 months before the war when the heads of countries met and talked Hitler out of the

17:00 war for 12 months, the worse thing he ever did of course. It gave them 12 months to prepare. Well, my father had to get released from his job. And all the beaches, not the main ones, but all the beaches in New South Wales were barbed wired and preparations were being made 12 months before the war actually broke out. So perhaps

17:30 that was sort of, although I didn't fully understand what it was all about, perhaps that's why I was conscious of the world preparation for the Second World War.

Do you remember where you were when you heard about the outbreak of war?

Yes. I exactly remember. I was on holidays from Moss Vale where I was pupil teaching in 1939,

18:00 and it was the 3rd of September. And my parents lived in Dunmore Street, Bexley, and we had great life long friends of my parents who lived in Monomeith Street, Bexley, and I was in their home about 9 o'clock at night when Churchill's message was relayed and war was declared, and it came over the radio

18:30 while we were there. I think I was there on my own. I don't think my brother was there. I think I was just visiting Mr and Mrs Martin and their son, Kevin, who was doing dentistry at Sydney University. I think it was just us. And Mr Martin, he was a very grave, sombre man and he

19:00 just said, "God help the world," and that was that. And I went back to Moss Vale, didn't get much information. My father used to move around from place to place. We didn't know where he was, but that's what they were doing, all the unknown beaches. They left places like Cronulla and Brighton and those until the last, until the war was actually declared.

19:30 But there was a lot of preparation that went on before that.

What were you teaching in Moss Vale?

Well, I wasn't teaching. I was supervised, more or less like a teacher's aid, and because it was a boarding school we did the banking and took the children to the dentist or the doctor. They called it pupil teaching but it

20:00 was a sort of teacher's aid because I'd just done my higher school certificate or leaving certificate as it was then, and I was waiting for a transfer from Armidale to the Newtown complex, but I wasn't all that keen when it came through, to do it. So I went to business

20:30 college instead.

Can you tell us about the business college where you studied?

Well, it was called the Newton Rapid. I don't know where the word 'rapid' came, and it was over Fay's building in the city. And the subjects there of course, I really went to learn touch typing. My father had the idea that everyone… and of course I could see that afterwards when the Americans

21:00 threw away all our pencils and put in typewriters for us to receive Morse code. I learnt business principles and office English and typewriting. That's about all I learnt. What would be the other thing? Oh, shorthand, some shorthand, and then I got a position in the statistical department of Cadbury Fry Pascal,

21:30 which was up near Sydney Harbour Bridge.

What did that job involve?

Oh well, all the, they were a very big firm and of course their headquarters was in Tasmania, and all the travellers when they go out getting orders, at the end of the week all the orders come in and you do the statistics of their rounds,

22:00 like how this week's takings, the figures for this week compare with the previous week, or their trip three months ago or six months ago. Anything to do with figures, but mainly the actual orders of the travellers. And they all had to be prepared and taken down to the manager on a Friday afternoon.

22:30 **What did you like about the work?**

Well I looked on it as a gap. I thought, I always wanted to do teaching and I thought it was war time and it was a gap and of course the teaching profession by this time, they were beginning not to let the men enlist, particularly if they were

23:00 keen men, in teaching. I kept my eye on that, and had my father been at home he would've insisted that I take up this scholarship, but of course he wasn't at home.

Where was he?

In the army. He was, well, you needn't quote me where they were, I mean he would sometimes be at the Walgett Camp, he would be up at Rutherford. That

23:30 8th Division that got captured in Singapore, my father was the in-training officer for practically every ship that left for there. That meant that he would, with other officers, bring the men down to Sydney or up to Sydney and take them to the ship before it sailed and that. He knew the 2/30th and the

24:00 2/19th Battalion men very well because they prepared them and then they brought them to the ship. And after the war for many long years my father would be asked if this was his signature, because up the men went up the gangway, they would sign their wills and he often would witness wills of men that never came back. And for a long time

24:30 after the war he was being asked by solicitors if that was his signature. But no, they would be in various

camps. I mean he might move suddenly. You didn't, I mean I wasn't at home, I was in Moss Vale in the early part, but my mother would often not know that he'd been up at Rutherford

25:00 for three or four weeks before he went back to where she thought he was. But he was called up. If you'd been at Duntroon you were on a supernumerary list which means that you can be called up in an emergency. Like when my husband came out to Australia he had to report because things were still not good in 1959. He had to report immediately to the

25:30 Royal Australian Navy. They've always got people ready that are experienced.

How did your decision to join up come about?

Sorry?

How did your decision to join the defences forces come about?

Well I was at Mrs Mackenzie's Emergency Signalling Corps just doing voluntary work and in 1942 things…

26:00 How we ever won the war I don't know with 1942. But the navy was short of personnel, very short of personnel and they knew of Mrs Mackenzie because a lot of their telegraphists had been trained by her. Even the men from the Empire Air Training Scheme, we trained them before they went to Canada.

26:30 Well the navy took 12 women. The navy was always very slow to do things. They didn't want women in the navy but they took 12 from Mrs Mackenzie's Emergency Signalling Corps to begin with, and they were so successful they just kept asking for more and more.

Let's go back a bit because I didn't realise it was actually 1942

27:00 **when you actually joined the navy. How did you get involved in Mrs Mackenzie's Signalling Corps?**

Well, when war breaks out they want volunteers for everything. The whole place was in turmoil. You're told to put shutters on your windows and you're told to build all the ovens outside because there'll be no gas or electricity, and they wanted women for everything. My mother

27:30 learned to drive ambulances but before she did it she had to do a producer gas course because there was no fuel. So I really don't know how I became initially involved in Mrs Mack but it would be a newspaper article or radio appeal, or I had a friend who was in the Emergency

28:00 Signalling Corps. And then when you've got an air force and a navy and no one's trained in communication, you've got to have somewhere. The post office did a little bit but they needed people for their own work. It was a purely voluntary organisation. And you'd get Qantas

28:30 pilots, you'd get all sort of people after the war, all went to Mrs Mack's. She was just the most amazing woman. And I went there voluntarily every day after work, Saturday mornings, because there was a need. The need was for then navy, the army, the air force, the police, the ambulance, the merchant navy. They were all told, and Mrs Mack, she was not

29:00 a very big woman, she would stand at the top of the stairs in number 10 Clarence Street in the city, and she'd say good morning or good afternoon. She'd have a cup of tea in her hand and she'd say, "Bay number 3," so you went straight to bay number 3, and you sent Morse all the time you were able to spend there to the people that wanted to learn it.

OK. So what

29:30 **training did you receive from Mrs Mackenzie?**

Well, because my father had been a signals officer I knew Morse code from the time I was very little. He always, protect yourself, make sure you know how to send SOS [Save Our Souls – emergency signal] with flags, with bits of rag on the ground, in the sand, wherever. And Morse just used to intrigue us. We'd spell our names out

30:00 in Morse and Dad would often, he'd pretend he didn't want mother to hear something, he'd talk to us in Morse, in dits and dashes. So Mrs Mackenzie trained the girls, and it wasn't only Morse code, it was visual. You know, the lamps, the navy lamps and the flags. So there were people there learning flag communication.

30:30 They were learning the lamp communication and they were learning the Morse code, depending on which one. But she had been a very successful electrical engineer in business. She'd written cookery books and she'd done, what else had she done? She had her own business like selling electric stoves and that sort of thing. And then these rooms in Clarence Street, it was

31:00 an old wool shed and the walls were lined with hessian, and then when the boys went away and got in touch with her and sent photographs, she covered the walls with photographs of all the servicemen that had been to Mrs Mackenzie's Emergency Signalling Corps. But you went there really just to learn

Morse and when you were proficient in Morse yourself, or the signalling

31:30 or the lamps, well then you gave people practise in receiving it because once you learn the code it's the speed that helps you and the practise that helps you receive it at speed. And of course you've got to be very good at receiving it because when you put the headphones on you're going to get all sorts of interference

32:00 that you've got to read through, and that's what makes it distressing.

Where were you getting the signals from when you were decoding Morse from Mrs Mackenzie's, where were the signals coming from?

Well we were sending them. Like you might be the pupil and you had a pad and pencil and I was sending the Morse for you to practise. That's where the signal, the signal came from you,

32:30 the person instructing.

So did you work as a teacher there from day one?

Yes, yes, from the time that I finished training there. It was like the Voluntary Aid Detachments, everyone was expected to do home nursing in case of an emergency and you volunteered to go out to Lewisham

33:00 Hospital in my case, to learn how to make beds and look after sick people, and we did that voluntarily on a Sunday morning. In England they've got all the schools, the school I was at, it was in Southsea in Hampshire near Portsmouth. If there was an emergency the children are immediately taken over the CES [Community Emergency Services] or the Civil Defence and the teachers have to

33:30 stay. And they've all got a job, a VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] or an ambulance driver. Over there I did the ambulance driving, but everyone had a job ready to do to take over in an emergency. We should have it here. If an aeroplane fell out of the sky no one would know what to do.

What did Mrs Mackenzie teach you in your training before you started teaching other pupils?

Just

34:00 the Morse code, and Mrs Mack herself probably didn't do the teaching. It would be someone else that was proficient in the code.

When you were a teacher there what were the classrooms like, can you describe them for us?

Her classroom? Well it was one big open wool shed and there were bays there, like table and chair

34:30 each side and just the Morse key and the earphones.

I've never seen a Morse key, can you describe one for us?

Haven't you? Oh dear, I filed one the other day, a picture of one. Well a Morse key is a flattened piece of wood and you've got this key on it which has a little thing that moves up and down and makes the sound. Are you Christine or Kristy?

35:00 **Kirsty [interviewer].**

Kirsty. Well Kirsty would be like, K would be dah da-da, I would be dit dit, R da-da dit, S it is S, S it is S dah, Y dah da-da dah, and that's very slow Morse of course. But you do that with your wrist all day long and

35:30 you send the message and if you're ship shore, you send the message and the ship replies and then you keep on doing that. It's just talking on the telephone only you do it with the voice, and here you do it with the Morse key.

How do you tell the break between the letters?

Well, that is a very good question. When you're spy work,

36:00 just as you can recognise my handwriting if you knew me for a long time, you begin to recognise other people's Morse. But there are people who run the whole thing quickly through. In an emergency you don't know how quick it's going to be, but you've got to break between them. Like Kirsty,

36:30 there is a break between the letters and if you're a good sender that break is very distinct. But it's only in the last two or three years Morse code has been wiped, of no longer use to any of the services. That's why so many

37:00 books are being produced now. I mean I wouldn't talk three years ago, even though I only signed my life away for 30 years, because it could still have been used, but it's no longer used now. But if you hear, there's someone like a call sign, someone still uses a call sign on the radio, but like if

37:30 you're sending SOS you can print out SOS on the sand or you can tear up your garments if they're black

and put them on white snow if you want help. But SOS would be like S which is three dits, O which is long dahs, SOS. Can you hear the little dah dah dah? That's how it's done.

38:00 But there are Morse keys around and that's all they are.

How did you learn Japanese Kana script in Morse?

Well a lot of people having been trained in ordinary Morse they just can't make the change, and there again you've got to learn it. You've got to

38:30 learn it and have a lot of practise, a lot of practise with it. But you didn't learn that until you went into the navy because it was a highly sensitive area of intelligence and you didn't talk to anyone about what you were doing or anything, and you just had to learn the different Morse, which was not easy but with practise

39:00 those that could manage it succeeded and succeeded very well.

How easy did you find it to teach to other people, Morse code?

How easy did I find it to teach other people? You mean at Mrs Mack's? I didn't teach it in the navy.

39:30 Well, they were so keen to learn and it's never hard to teach anyone that wants to learn. No one can teach anyone that doesn't want to learn, but they were so keen to be wireless operators or wireless telegraphers or to communicate, to be able to communicate, that they just tried very hard. And all I had to

40:00 do was keep giving them practice and if they had certain sounds that they found difficult well you kept practising and practising. And see, sometimes a volunteer, and Mrs Mack would be continually supervising, she'd say, "How are you going?" And I'd say, "Well this gentleman is having difficulty." She'd say, well, you know, "We might try him with someone else." So

40:30 it's like with school children, you know, you change them around to see if they can get on any better anywhere else.

Who were you teaching?

Who? Well, service personnel. Like the Empire Air Training Scheme were our air force men who wanted to be air force pilots and they trained in

41:00 Canada. See, the only way aircraft had of getting in touch with one another was a wireless operator, and it's not easy when there's interference. We were teaching the navy boys, the police, the ambulance, anyone in Sydney who wanted to learn Morse, it was all done at Mrs Mack's.

Tape 3

00:32 **Pat I just wanted to talk to you a little bit about those couple of years of the war before you actually were formally enlisted. When the war first began in Europe how would you describe the feelings of patriotism in Sydney?**

Well, I think in my family, my brother was at boarding school in Bathurst, but in my family immediately everyone jumped

01:00 to some sort of war effort. My mother started to learn to drive ambulances and because fuel was going to be short you had to do a producer gas course, and to see mother done up in overalls learning to do whatever she had to do. I don't know anything about it but I know that it wasn't easy. So that was her war effort and as

01:30 the troops gradually came back from overseas too, she used to go to the hospitals, particularly Randwick still in those days, to play the piano for them. Then I became involved, I really don't know how I did become involved in Mrs Mackenzie's Emergency Signalling Corps. I think it could be I had a friend whose brother was, he was air crew,

02:00 I'm not just sure. Marie Hartman was her name, she lived in Kogarah, and he joined the air force very early in the war and one of the things he had to try and learn off his own bat was Morse code, because if your radio operator gets shot you've got to keep in communication and follow instructions from someone. So the whole crew used to learn the

02:30 Morse code even though they did have wireless operators. And I think it may have been that Marie and her sister became involved. Her sister was senior to us and a teacher and I think that she may have been the reason I found Mrs Mack and went to Mrs Mack's. But I went there very early when I returned from Moss Vale. I was quite unsettled

03:00 I would think about settling down, you know, to study to be a teacher when there were so many other things needed to be done. So, and then of course we were asked to become VADs and I joined the VADs first of all to serve comforts and meals to the troops when they

03:30 were on leave. There were a lot of country boys and a few from interstate and a few from overseas and they had some sort of hut in Hyde Park. I think it was organised by the churches, I'm not sure, and initially I used to go in there and wash up and serve meals and mend socks and do things like that for these country,

04:00 interstate, overseas troops, and then we were asked, they seemed to get plenty of volunteers for that eventually. And then we were asked to do the home nursing course at Lewisham Hospital. All the hospitals, everyone, seemed to do something for the war effort. Sydney really became, well almost a war zone

04:30 of people wanting to do things but not knowing quite what they should be doing. But those were my two things.

So a lot of your peers were doing stuff?

Yes, yes, the peers from Cadburys, but they found that, apart from one lady, Beryl, they found it very difficult. See, it's not everyone that's suited to this

05:00 headphones on for hours and straining. I mean it could become very stressful, particularly where I was in the Y hut. I mean they kept impressing on us that every signal was important even if we didn't think it was. But what you didn't realise at the time, they had several people around Australia, New Zealand, wherever, Singapore until it fell, reading the same

05:30 frequency, and then they pieced all these messages together you got a whole. I did see that when I eventually went to Melbourne, but it was quite worrying to come off watch at 2 o'clock in the morning and think oh, I missed this, I missed that, I missed something else. But one lady that I worked with at Cadbury Fry Pascal, she was an invoice typist and she was very good at Mrs

06:00 Mackenzie's, and she stayed there all the war and afterwards because she wanted to join the navy. And she had a spot on the lung so she was medically unfit and had to spend a year in bed. And then she went back to Mrs Mack's and she worked at Victoria Barracks for the army for the rest of the war. I keep in touch with her today. She was my bridesmaid at my wedding.

06:30 **When you were working at Cadbury what were the working conditions like there?**

Our working conditions were very good. They were very good and after the war I got a beautiful letter from them offering my position back, or some other position in the firm, and then when I wrote and declined because I'd married they wrote another beautiful letter wishing me well in the future and congratulations. I never kept

07:00 those letters but I often think about them because we had a chief accountant there. He taught me a lot about figures, Mr Bradfield. And I don't know whether he was injured in the First World War but he either had a wooden leg or a very bad, he was handicapped but he was a very clever man with figures, and I often wish I found out more about him.

07:30 **Did you get free chocolate?**

Yes, yes, if they, well not free. They had a display room for the travellers and their customers to come in and look at new lines, a beautiful, really we were all too busy to go down there much, but it you wanted a nice box of chocolates for Mother's Day or something you bought it and you got a discount. I don't know what

08:00 the discount was. But then also up in the store room if they happened to break an outer, because a lot of the stuff came up from Tasmania, if they broke an outer and people wanted to buy that half price or something else, there were two possibilities for getting chocolate. But of course in those days it was Cadbury, Fry and Pascal.

08:30 One, I really don't know, I wasn't real interested in chocolates or sweets in those days apart from the odd gift, but Fry I think had all of the fancy lines and Pascal specialised in the toffees, but I think they're just Cadbury today. I'm not sure.

And can you remember what you got paid?

Oh, I can't,

09:00 no.

Do you remember it as being enough, not enough, sufficient?

Well, I lived at home and I had aunts and uncles that were in good positions and kind to me. No, I think it was adequate. We never seemed to worry about money in those days. I suppose we would've done if it hadn't been enough.

09:30 I remember when I came back to Australia and I was a full-time teacher by this time, I was at a school but I wasn't working on one day a week. That was their sports day, it was a boys' primary school, and I didn't get, I got five cents less

10:00 than the salary so that I didn't have to pay some sort of tax or other, but I don't really remember.

Now that we've silenced the dog we'll get back to the, were you keeping company with any men at this stage?

Yes, I did have a special friend who was in the air force, yes. Not seriously, but he was a

10:30 very good friend.

What sort of things would you do together?

Every Saturday night we'd go into town to the pictures, to the State Theatre or one of the theatres which were lovely venues in those days, mainly. And then we would also play tennis on Saturdays and that was about it.

Any tea or going out to eat or anything?

11:00 No. Quite often on the Sunday I'd be invited to his home. I would be invited to his home for Sunday night tea and then often he would come to my home, but more often than not it would be his home because there were five young children there or younger children. So that was where we had a Sunday night, but that

11:30 was the sort of thing we did in those days. I don't really know of any venue in Sydney that I ever ate out at. It was always at a home.

Were you conscious of young men disappearing to join up?

Oh yes, very, very. With the troop ships leaving, and we had a terrible incident

12:00 one night in the navy. 2HD Newcastle [radio station] at midnight, and stations up the coast connected with 2HD, had arranged to put a song out, 'Life on the Ocean Wave', to let families and people know that a convoy was leaving. We were very conscious

12:30 of eyes and ears open, but lips sealed, even before I joined the navy. Everyone was suspicious of everyone else and particularly my father because he knew they were local boys that were, after the fall of Singapore. So many families from this area had people in the 8th Division

13:00 and were very conscious of that.

The establishment of Mrs Mackenzie's seems a kind of amateur way that the Australian Defence Forces relied upon to get training for people.

Well it was but there was nothing else. HMAS Harman when I went there was Harman Naval Wireless, and it's

13:30 a village with cottages for the families and it wasn't until the WRANS started taking over the families had to be all re-housed in Canberra and it became a naval establishment. But it wasn't commissioned until the 1st of July 1943, and apart from the post office, and I mean the post office people were flat out there. Their employees were working a full-

14:00 time job and doing a little bit of casual work, like voluntary work, but there was just nowhere. This was the vision of this woman. You know, she was highly trained. She was the only woman electrical engineer in Australia. She'd been a successful businesswoman in an electrical store. She gave me a copy of her cookery book when I became engaged.

14:30 But I suppose they came and they inspected it. I mean we always had, we had Commander Newman there who was the head of naval communications. There were people coming and looking at what was going on, but it was, it was just really odd that there was no better place for training telegraphists. You know, it was a voluntary

15:00 organisation. It just set out really as a place to give people practise. I mean I'm learning Morse and how do I know how good I am, or if I'm any good at all, unless I can have someone practise for me. So that's how it all started. I've got the history of her life somewhere here.

15:30 Where else, what else could people do?

Was she paid by the navy?

No, no.

So this was completely out of her own pocket?

This was a completely voluntary organisation. Oh yes, you wouldn't dare mention money to Mrs Mack, no. I suppose her husband carried on her business because it did carry on, but that I don't know for

sure. Oh no, she was

16:00 given some honour. I suppose it was a BEM [British Empire Medal] at that time after the war, I think she was. But no, there wouldn't have been any money, no money. It was all, it was Women's, WESC we were called, Women's Emergency Signalling Corps, and they wore a uniform. We wore a hunting green uniform with a forage cap with WESC on it.

16:30 I don't know why that had to be, but I suppose a lot of organisations, if you were going, like when we were going to Lewisham Hospital at 5 o'clock in the morning of a Sunday, there was a girl from Penshurst called Frances Massey. And I got on the train at Rockdale and then we had to go to Lewisham Hospital and it was dark, but we used to get some sort of concession. Like they signed out,

17:00 I do remember that, the railways gave us some sort of concession to travel to voluntary work. But I never required anything from Mrs Mack's because I used to go from Cadburys previous which was near the bridge next to St Patrick's Church. I forget the name of the park, and just walk along Clarence Street and she was in number 10 Clarence Street, a wool store.

17:30 But it was beautifully furnished. People donated tea, coffee urns, chairs, tables and it was all set up. There was a lecture room for teaching people and everything was there. But usually you just went, she met you with a cup of tea and she said whichever bay you were wanted at and you just introduced to whoever was there. It could

18:00 be anyone. They were nearly all men, I never had any ladies. I don't know where they trained, during the daytime probably. But when I went they were all men, young men, middle aged men some of them.

How did you fit all this in around your working hours?

Well that was tricky, the Scotch church, there's a Presbyterian church somewhere in York Street.

18:30 They sell books and I don't know, I think it's an office block belonging to the church. I don't really know, and they had a cafeteria. I suppose it was to serve the people in the block. I don't really know, but it was on my way and I went in there and I used to get just a snack and then when I got home my mother always had the evening meal

19:00 ready to reheat, but it would never be anything heavy like a roast dinner or anything. Sometimes it would only be a healthy plate of soup or something, but that's how we managed.

So how many evenings a week were you at Mrs Mack's?

Well I really don't remember. Sometimes if I wasn't doing anything it would be every evening, yes.

19:30 **So it was casual, you could turn up when you wanted to?**

Oh well, no. She would know if I were meeting my father, was home on leave or something, other than that she would expect me every afternoon. 5 o'clock I'd be into the Scotch church for a snack and then I'd be at Mrs Mack's by half past five.

Where did you change into your uniform?

Well, I

20:00 didn't of a weeknight. I never changed into the uniform. Actually, although I had a uniform I very rarely wore it at Mrs Mack's. I wore it more in the navy because when we joined the navy we were just so unprepared really. We just wore ordinary clothes with a white arm band with WRANS on it. So those that had any sort of like

20:30 Mrs Mack's uniform, not any uniform, when we wore that we wore it out in the navy.

Was that Mrs Mack's uniform at your expense?

Yes, yes. Nothing, I don't know, we've become a funny society these days. We want the government to provide everything.

What did Cadbury think

21:00 **of all these hours you were spending doing these other things?**

They were very much into the war effort too because a lot of their orders were to canteens and they would give favourable discounts I think, around the country, and they wouldn't have cared what you did after your work hours. I mean, I would get to Mrs Mack's, 5 o'clock seems to

21:30 strike, I would get to Mrs Mack's about half past five , twenty to six, and depending on the number of people who were there I'd leave for home again at perhaps 8.00, 8.30. I'd never be later than 9 o'clock home, never, because I had a day's work the next day and my mother didn't want to be there on her own all night. So I would never be later

22:00 than 9.00.

There was no problem in a young woman coming in a train at night?

No, none at all and none going off to Lewisham Hospital at that hour, and when we were in Canberra there was no transport. We were, Queanbeyan, on the border of Queanbeyan and Canberra, I suppose it would be five miles, perhaps a bit more. It was an unwritten law in the [Australian Capital] Territory that people pick up

22:30 service personnel from Fairbairn, from Duntroon or from Harman and the guards were at the gate. The road now doesn't go past Harman. Harman is just off the main road to Queanbeyan. But we had one friend who was in charge of the Shell oil depot in Queanbeyan and he used to stop regularly at the guardhouse to take anyone into Canberra that

23:00 needed to go, and also he would invite us to his home. No, and we all had bicycles. I mean I used to ride home on a bicycle. We had to be back at 10 o'clock at night if we were going on watch at 8 o'clock the next morning. And I'd ride from Civic Centre, Leave House in Civic Centre all the way over the bridge, there was no lake, out to Harman,

23:30 no lights, on a bicycle, and no problem. We never had a problem.

Do you recall the night of the 31st of May, 1942 when the Japanese attacked the Harbour?

Yes.

What are your memories of that night?

Well, I was actually at home. We didn't know where my father was, but there was obviously activity in

24:00 Sydney. I don't know whether there was word on the radio or word of worth that we did know that something was happening. And one of the men in our street climbed a tree in the park near where I lived to see if anything could be seen, but nothing more than that. I was actually at home that night.

24:30 **What suburb did you live in, sorry?**

Bexley, Bexley.

So you were quite a long way from the Harbour.

Yes, yes, quite a long way.

How would you describe the change in atmosphere among the people of Sydney after that attack?

Well, it did what the Japanese wanted it to do. It did scare people and make them realise that the war was a lot closer.

25:00 But of course what people didn't realise then, Exmouth, Broome, Darwin had had many more raids that people weren't told about. I mean they knew nothing of what was going on in the western, northern part or Western Australia or in Darwin. But it certainly alerted the people of Sydney that there was something happening and of course they became aware

25:30 that there were submarines off our coast. I mean if you read Lou Lynn's books there were 16 submarines off our coast that night. People didn't realise the gravity of the situation, and then news kept coming in about the sinking of the [HMAS] Kuttabul and the casualties and that sort of thing. But it did

26:00 change. People who broke rules would, not blacking out their homes at night and turning off lights and lighting fires out doors, it was the best way of making them aware that they had to do that sort of thing.

Now describe in detail the process of how you eventually became a proper enlisted WRAN?

26:30 How I became?

Yes, what was the process? Can you describe again that system of how Mrs Mack's, the WESC women were transferred into the navy?

Well the navy decided that they needed trained telegraphers and Commander Newman, the director of signals, came up and interviewed the first 12 and that was Anzac Day,

27:00 1941, and they were… Mrs Mack actually travelled to Canberra with them in the train, the 8 o'clock diesel as we used to call it. And it was gazetted, strangely enough the gazetting date was a Sunday, but it was war time and I've checked and re-checked that date for that archive's article. And then

27:30 on the 28th they were accepted on trial. And obviously the navy, they'd been with Mrs Mack's, they were highly trained, the navy not only accepted them but immediately asked for more, and the next lot were sent to Melbourne for the special Kana Morse training. Gradually the navy decided to take people other than

28:00 telegraphists, and about, this is where this enrolling and enlisting, the navy's forms have always said

enrolled in the navy, even the ones that I signed, everyone signed. But then they realised that although they did come under KR [King's Rules] and KI [King's Instructions] which are the important rules of the services, they did realise

28:30 that if they took in a lot more and other categories, they would actually have to have the word enlisted. So from about October 1942 all these that had enrolled earlier were given a chance to enlist or were enlisted, and then all the others from that date were enlisted

29:00 personnel in the RAN [Royal Australian Navy]. And before we went to Harman the navy had a headquarters in Loftus Street in Sydney. I don't know what's there now, but they did have a naval office in Loftus Street down towards the Quay end, and we did a medical there and we'd already done a buzzer test at Mrs Mackenzie's and then we were just enlisted

29:30 in Loftus Street. And then on a certain date we travelled by the diesel, the parliamentarians' train, to Canberra.

Were you in one of those early drafts from Mrs Mackenzie's?

No, no. I was at the end of the first 100 and then at that time they started taking

30:00 people in other categories from other states. No.

What made you decide that this was the time now that you should?

Well 1942 was a terrible year in the war and people were just needed and it was sad that the men who served in the First World War, their families were of an age where they were needed for the Second World War.

30:30 And most of the families or a lot of the families I knew, the sons were either prisoners of war or they'd been killed or they were very active, mainly in the air force over Europe. And I was the oldest, my brother was still at university, he was nearly three and a half years younger than I was. There was a need and I just

31:00 followed the need. I think that was more or less what it was. When I did my OTC [Officer Training Course] they asked me if I'd ever had anyone in the navy and I said, "Yes sir." And he said, "Who?" He was a cousin who was an ordinary seaman at Flinders, a training ordinary seaman. But there was no connection with the navy whatsoever, it was just the navy needed people. I knew all the people that were down there

31:30 and I followed them.

What do you think your parents felt about you enlisting?

Well, I'm not sure. My father always said, you know, "Well, you might have joined the army." But in a joking sort of fashion and my mother, of course that

32:00 would've been 1942, they'd moved to Sydney in '36 and they'd built a lovely new home, and I think she felt well, what's this home for? There's no one here. I think she thought that for a while, but mother was always neutral in most things that we did.

So you enlisted and you got the train down

32:30 **to Canberra, did you say?**

That's right, yes.

So where did you arrive there and what happened subsequently?

Well I really don't remember whether we arrived at Queanbeyan or Canberra. I know I think it was probably Canberra station. I know we did have a senator's daughter with us and we got a tremendous amount of publicity. The senator's daughter was Val Ashley. Senator Ashley, I don't know what he was minister for at the time but

33:00 we got a lot of publicity both leaving Sydney and when we arrived in Canberra, but I really don't remember the detail, whether we were taken by bus, car. We only had ever one station car which looked like a big hearse, but that part of things I really don't remember.

So what sort of training did you get in Canberra then?

Well, most

33:30 WRANS who joined about the time I joined used to have to go to Flinders Naval Depot to do what they called a rookies' course, but we were desperately needed so we did no training. We didn't know how to salute, we didn't know how to march. I didn't march until I came out of the navy. No, we didn't do anything like that. Our training was purely for the job, but we did have all the inoculations

34:00 and issued with gas masks and all this sort of thing when we arrived. We were housed in these cottages that belonged to the shore wireless people which was very comfortable accommodation, but of course it

was a long way from the signals station. We used to have to walk up the hill. There again, you know, in the middle of Canberra or the outskirts of Canberra on a frosty

34:30 night to go on watch. And you had to know the password because we had army guards who guarded the stations. I don't suppose the navy had enough. Their trained men were wanted elsewhere, but the army seemed to be senior men who were probably no good for active service, but

35:00 they were very good. They were part of the community and they did all the guard work on the gates and up at the station, because it was a big area and to climb up the hill to go on watch and come down, of course we worked around the clock.

So what job training then did you do initially?

Well, we were already telegraphists so the only job training we did really was the

35:30 Kana Morse.

What are the challenges in learning Kana Morse?

Well to forget, the big challenge we were warned, was to forget the other Morse and just try and remember the signals, and of course when you hear someone sending Morse, even the instructors, they were

36:00 all senior petty officers and naval men, but when you hear them sending Morse it's a different signal to what you get when you hear a Japanese sending Morse. And also the signal can be surrounded by interference, so a lot of the time we would just listen to sets and pick up the Morse

36:30 in that way once we'd learnt it, once we'd actually learnt the features of it.

How does it differ? I mean Morse is a code for each alphabet letter, does Kana work in the same way?

No, Kana has vowels which are joined, that's the main difference. Instead of A's and I's and O's as ours would be, they have symbols

37:00 that are joined together and they're figure Morse. I forget how it finished. We have five zeros or we have one zero and they have five for zero, I just forget. But I don't know why the Kana Morse is different because when you learn Japanese every consonant has a vowel following it,

37:30 but in the Kana Morse they've got combinations of vowels which read as something else. That's the main difference, and the rhythm of it is different. We might have four digits to a bar, like you send Morse in groups. I think they had usually five to a bar,

38:00 but apart from that there wasn't all that much difference. The biggest enemy was interference and weak signals. We were trying to pick up very weak signals and also very inexperienced operators and that's where the radio, the, I just can't

38:30 get the term.

Fingerprinting?

Fingerprinting comes in.

When you were receiving Kana how would you then transcribe it? What would you be writing down on a piece of paper?

You write down what they send. The message that you get actually goes to the cryptographer. That had to be sent to Melbourne by teleprinters. Ever seen one of those? Yes, well the

39:00 messages were all then sent to Melbourne.

So what would you write down, is it a vowel sound or something?

Well, yes. Most signals, it would be only like the to whom and from that would be in plain, wouldn't be in plain language but in code with the

39:30 letter symbol and the rest of the message would be in figure.

So they'd be in numerals?

Numerals, yes, usually. You could get a mixture. You get some funny signals that were a mixture of both. You never quite knew what to expect but they always seemed to have a long introduction and then quite a long ending.

40:00 But the rest would be a mixture or digits.

So you would never know what the messages said?

No. It wasn't until I became an officer and saw how our signals would come down and it would all be pieced together on a big map. I mean various places would send in a signal from the same ship or the same base, like Truk [Japanese naval base Micronesia]

40:30 broadcasting and then you would see how even one signal you might get, that no one else got, fitted into the pattern.

How long did it take you to learn Kana?

Well, two months but a lot of people took longer than that.

Why do you think you were quick?

Well, they say because you'd studied music. I don't know. I don't

41:00 know why. If you can get into the rhythm of Morse, of any sort, Indonesian, Russian, and we started on them at the end of the war. If you can get into the rhythm apparently it helps.

Tape 4

00:33 **What were your living conditions like in Canberra?**

Well they were quite good actually, because as I said before, it had been a shore wireless station and on shore wireless stations the staff were able to have their wives and families and it was like a village, our living area, with cottages. And some of the cottages

01:00 accommodated seven people and some accommodated nine. Well, the ones that accommodated nine, the lounge room accommodated three beds and the other three bedrooms, two beds in each and some of the girls were very crafty. They would sort of bring in their own curtains, cushions, bedspreads and they really made them very comfortable. The worst part of it was

01:30 we didn't have any hot water. The hot water systems were the old fashioned chip heaters and in order to get hot water you had to chop the wood, the deal, and chop the wood. Initially some of the guards and the older sailors did it for us but in time they were required for other things and we became quite good at

02:00 chopping the wood. So once you got the chip heater going and you kept it going, you relied on one another to keep it fed, you had plenty of hot water. But apart from that the actual living conditions themselves, our kitchens, we were not allowed to cook main meals in them. We had to go to the galley for those proper meals, but the

02:30 girls could make tea and toast or when they came in from shore they'd have a little snack. But there again the stoves were wood-fired. There were no electric stoves or that sort of thing, and we had our own little gardens, the girls would grow flowers. And we had to keep them neat and tidy of course. They had

03:00 inspections two or three times a week to make sure that the living quarters were respectable, and there were no facilities for anyone else coming in. You kept them clean yourself, and then the galley, we used all naval terms. The galley was like a restaurant

03:30 and had, I don't know what they used for fuel. They must've had something other than wood, but a quite stable diet, good meals. You always had a meal ready when you were going up on watch, and apart from the night watches you had a meal ready when you came down. The living, and there was a recreation hall and the

04:00 only civilian on the ship as we called it, was the postmistress. We had a wonderful lady called Doreen Kershaw and she looked after our mail and every time we have a reunion we try to get in touch with Doreen when we go down to Canberra. She was a Canberra lady and she was from the local post office and looked after us during the war years, but she was the only civilian.

04:30 The commanding officer lived on the station and the officers lived in the wardroom, and I'm not sure about the sailors. We didn't have many Royal Australian Naval men at all. We had a lot of Americans, a lot of American sailors and some Dutch, and British towards the end of the war, but you wouldn't think you were in the Australian navy because of the lack of Australian

05:00 sailors. The Americans, the first group of Americans came to Harman after Pearl Harbour, after their radio station in Pearl Harbour in December that year were all brought down to Harman and then they took over the Pacific responsibilities from Harman.

How close to the sea

05:30 **was Harman?**

Pardon?

How close to the sea was Harman?

Well, Harman is a long way from the sea, but that doesn't matter in communication. The further you are from the sea probably the better. I mean we were doing, our service certificates are signed active service in Australia and it was active service in Australia. We don't benefit in any way from the fact that it was active service

06:00 in Australia, but it wouldn't have mattered where you did the work. It was the same work that was vital to the war effort. But Pearl Harbour, their radio station there was not actually close to the base where the ships were but it wasn't safe for them to stay there any longer of course, and their next headquarters

06:30 was down with us.

How much fraternisation went on between yourselves and the American sailors?

Well, very little really because of the watch keeping. You worked alone for the eight hours on and you didn't really see the people, apart from relieving one another.

07:00 When you went on watch you didn't see the opposite 48 watch, and if you'd been on a long 48, you know, you're working around the clock for two and a half days, people used to take leave and go into Leave House in Canberra, only the telegraphists, I don't know about the other categories. But we were very tired and

07:30 we had the most wonderful woman in charge of that Leave House, a lady called Mrs Coles. Now, who set it up, whether they got government funding or what, but it was a most beautifully set up place to go to sleep, and you just slept for 24 hours. And the first morning she would come in with a beautiful tray of breakfast in bed. So

08:00 that, and that night, in fact you'd be off that night, you might go down to a hall in Canberra for service people and there'd be air force lads and people from the army, but people were continually on the move. The men weren't anywhere for any long period of time, so that a few

08:30 of the girls did marry Duntroon cadets. A few of them did marry sailors, American sailors, but not many. No, there was not a lot of fraternisation. The men on the establishment as I said, were mainly Americans, and then the British. I think one or two girls married a British

09:00 sailor, apart from myself. But I really don't know. I didn't see much. We would go for a picnic day on our day off, out to Cotter Dam for a swim and we'd bicycle out there. See, other people, when we were working other people were off duty. We'd bicycle out there but it would be mainly the people that you worked with,

09:30 the watch that you were on duty with. Not all of them would do that. Some of them had relations or friends in Canberra, or some of them didn't have a bicycle and never wanted one. But no, there was not a lot of fraternisation.

Did you ever hear of girls falling pregnant?

Only, I never ever heard of girls falling pregnant until I went back there as

10:00 an officer and I saw the pregnant WRANS file, and no, there weren't any pregnant ones other than ones whose husbands had come home on leave. But some of them had been out for a night and thought they were pregnant, but we had no doctors on the base, only a nursing sister, and if you wanted to send them to a doctor you sent them to the doctor at Duntroon. Apart from people

10:30 thinking they were pregnant, there were no pregnancies that I knew of. I mean I did know of the odd one whose husband had come home from a commando unit and they got married and they couldn't stay in the navy if they were pregnant in those days. Now they can, but in those days, no, they left, they wanted to. They left the service immediately. But until I was an officer I never knew

11:00 there was such a thing as a pregnant WRANS file. We got lots of lectures during our course for officers and all sorts of medical things to do with women, but nothing that I ever required.

Do you remember the details of those lectures? Was it VD [venereal disease] or pregnancy, what were you taught?

Well, it was mainly women's

11:30 physiology. Mainly, you know, you get women… For instance, there was a compulsory drill occasionally and there would be some women that wouldn't be able to do some of the drill exercises like climbing up ropes and things, and if they expressed a wish not to do that you'd have to go into the reasons. So the doctors that lectured us

12:00 during the OTC were mainly on the physiology of women, but I hadn't heard of VD. I don't know about anyone, well, I suppose I had, but no, nothing like that, and I mean I mixed with the other officers in the wardroom and it was just not

12:30 there otherwise it would've been discussed, and they wouldn't have sent anyone to Harman that, you know, had that problem. It wasn't the sort of place where they could be looked after. It was just a very specialised area of communication and everyone that went there had to be well vetted before they did go there. That's as I see it.

13:00 **Tell us about the building that you worked in?**

Y hut as they called it was not a hut. It was a very, very solid building with very thick buttress walls and no windows to the outside world and then it was just a succession of radio receiving,

13:30 in the Y hut, mainly receiving-only bays, not sending because you weren't in touch with the enemy other than with your ears. So mainly it was set out, it was set out in a special way, the area where you received ships, the area where you received big bases like Truk broadcasts,

14:00 and then there was a very special bay where you searched for submarines. Then the room through from the receiving room was where they did the work in connection with the radio fingerprinting, and then there was another room where the teleprinter operators worked. They kept in touch with Melbourne

14:30 the whole time. Messages were going to and fro, but mainly going to Melbourne because of the signals received, and that was to a very special area where the Americans were at Albert Park. Nearly always went to the American headquarters. But apart from that there were just bathrooms

15:00 and nothing else, but a very, very strongly built building. It's all gone now, all gone. It's the wardroom for the officers, but they haven't got the buttress walls.

How many of you worked a shift?

Oh, on watch. Well I suppose there'd be 40 to 50 all told, but some would be going

15:30 to the main station. Some would be going to the Y hut and some would be going to the DF [Direction Finding] station where they get bearings. If we got a signal that we were suspicious of, you send, you ring the DF, the direction finding people and they try and get a bearing. I mean it might be a ship whose identity you don't know and they'd get a bearing on that signal

16:00 and send it to the proper authorities. At peak busy times there could be up to 70 people on the move. That's every, during the night you worked from 8 o'clock at night until 2 o'clock in the morning, and then the new lot came on at 2 o'clock until 8.00 in the morning, and so it went on four hours around the clock.

16:30 So there would be approximately 70 people going up the hill and 70 people dropping off at the main station or the Y hut, or going over the hills to the DF.

What happened in the main station that didn't happen in the Y hut?

Well, the main station is you're keeping in touch with your own fleet. You're sending out, I mean the supply

17:00 ship's got to meet up with the ships, fuel ship's got to meet up with them, they're transferring personnel, all the management of the navy would be happening. You'd be in touch with your allies or your own people. In the Y hut you were trying to find out where the enemy was, whichever enemy.

17:30 **What very significant messages did you intercept working in the Y hut?**

Well you would never know, except you were continually told how important the work was and how you didn't talk to anyone. I mean you didn't even talk to the girl who was at the set beside you. You didn't say, you know, "What sort of an operator did you

18:00 have last night?" You just didn't talk. It was just uncanny, the secrecy, because that was what was expected and that's what everyone, well I didn't talk until about two years ago. If anyone asked me I would just say, "I was in a special branch," that was all. But once Morse became no longer useful to

18:30 the armed service and all these books that are published showing exactly where we worked and how we worked came out, did we begin to have anything to say at all, and generally I wouldn't carry on a conversation like this. Only if the navy or the Veterans Affairs thinks it's any use to someone in the future. But strange,

19:00 a night early in 1944 I happened to be leading hand of the watch. That's the person that collects the messages, and you don't go stamping around the floor in a radio station because someone's straining. You wear actually soft shoes so no sound is sort of, interference is picked up, the people trying to get messages. Anyhow,

19:30 a lady I see until this day, I didn't tell her until July last year but she hadn't remembered anyhow, there was a group of islands and there was a very interesting program on television here recently. The island of, oh dear, Truk is the, T R U C,

20:00 T R U K, they now call it Trook or some name, but Truk Lagoon is a magnificent harbour and the

Japanese had a lot of their fleet there on this particular night, supply ships and an aircraft carrier and I think at least one submarine. I think about 20 to 30 ships all told, and the Americans, and their transmitters,

20:30 you loved reading them because they nearly blew your head off they were so powerful. They were British transmitters that the Japanese got hold of early in the war. Anyhow, this particular night the Americans bombed Truk and the ships to smithereens. They're still looking for some of them. They've found a lot of the locations of them. Anyhow,

21:00 this lady, Nola, was on Truk broadcast and she screamed out, she said, "Truk's off the air!" And I said, "You silly little girl, Nola, it couldn't possibly be off the air." I put the headphones on and I couldn't find Truk either. So I immediately got rid of the girl in the teleprinter room and got in touch with the duty officer in Melbourne and he

21:30 said, he just came up with, "Ignore Truk, don't even man it." And that was a very, I did man it for a little while, then I thought well it's no use. But I didn't know for years, about 1972 in the library at school the librarian, I never stayed with my class when she was doing a library lesson.

22:00 They were good kids and there was no need to, but Marlene this day asked me to stay. So I just stayed and went up the back of the room and picked up a National Geographic and I thumbed through this National Geographic and there was this story of what happened on that day in 1944, that night rather in 1944.

22:30 All the supply ships, the aircraft carrier, the submarines, any warships there plus their transmitters were all attacked by American B something or other, American bombers, and actually that story was on television. I don't know if you may have seen it, Channel 2, about six weeks to two months ago. And also the night, the week before that, a Wednesday night,

23:00 the bombing of Broome and what happened in Broome. It's a shame really they don't publish or show these things oftener. Anyhow, that went back to 1970, about '72, and when I took the class back one of the boys said, "Miss, are you all right?" It gave me such a shock because I knew that that was

23:30 the night that this bombing took place, and it was, but see, I mean, didn't say anything to them or I didn't say anything to anyone. But gradually things are coming out because the years now, we're nearly all dead anyhow. But you didn't know, they kept reassuring you that, you know, do try,

24:00 and we might even put three people on the one ship frequency. One might get it and one might not get it. Well we always knew when they asked us to double up that there was something wrong. See, the night they [HMAS] Centaur went down they would be looking because of other shipping, for the submarine that got her. And if we could get a signal the DF people

24:30 get a bearing on our signal and then you can tell the air force where, or ships in the area where this submarine might be. It's all very difficult work and very painstaking for the people that work it all out, but it does work and if there had been no atomic bomb it still would've shortened the war by at least two to three years. I said earlier about the Carolines,

25:00 the Americans, that battle was a success although we lost the [HMAS] Canberra and they lost ships, but some American newspaper got hold of the fact that we had the Japanese signal telling us that there would be an attack on the Coral Sea, or a battle in the Coral Sea.

25:30 So many of these thing tie up when you've sort of lived through history. We feel it our duty when we've lived through history to put something into the archives of the early days of the WRANS because some of those girls, particularly for girls at the station in the early days when we were losing so much shipping, did wonderful work which will be

26:00 never known really.

How did you feel you were accepted into the navy being a woman?

I really don't know because everyone that dealt with us at Harman couldn't have been harder trying to accept us. But I think the navy, when it was suggested by Commander Newman

26:30 who, I don't know whether he knew Mrs Mackenzie or just knew of her by all these telegraphists who told him about this wonderful set up in Sydney, but the navy really, they didn't want to have anything to do with women in those days I'm sure, in the navy. But that was navy office, but as far as Harman itself is concerned, they couldn't have been more

27:00 helpful, even though some of them were retired from sea. You know, old hardened petty officers that had lived their life at sea, and the commanding officer was excellent. His wife and young daughter lived on the station. But no, once they were established, once the first hundred who were all telegraphists, were given jobs at the main station or enemy intercept,

27:30 I mean there were other enemies but I can't, my experience doesn't go into that, but once we were established and they took women in all around the states, the WRANS were really, you know… And after the war we were thanked profusely by everyone who had anything to

28:00 do with us, mainly the British and the American and the Dutch, but even our own naval board was sorry to see us go. And then of course three years elapsed and they took women again, about 1952, they reformed the WRANS. And then in 1980 something the WRANS were abolished and the men and the women belong to the

28:30 RAN, and I think it's a disaster, but still.

Can you tell me why it's a disaster in your eyes to have them merged as the RAN?

Well, I don't, I look at some of these American ships going to the Persian Gulf and they've got women, tough women screaming at the men in the boats going out to

29:00 join the transports, and it just doesn't seem a woman's role to me. We know the problem that you have with Muslims and they've got women in the ships that are checking the oil coming out of Iraq, and they've got women boarding the boats, that go eventually to board the boats that are illegally

29:30 carrying oil out of the place. Well I think we should have more common sense than to send women to that area knowing the ideas of the Muslims that might be in the ships that are running oil illegally.

In terms of women's personal safety?

Yes, yes. Well in terms of their personal safety and what they think of women.

30:00 They haven't really much respect. I hate to think of any of them getting captured. And I think, well I think some of the jobs, I mean you've got women captains now and they go into a dinner and they put their sword on the table. It just doesn't seem, I don't think I'd join the navy today. I might

30:30 as a telegraphist in an odd corner of the world but I don't think I would. They're mainly the reasons, but women getting around in bell-bottom trousers and they haven't got the option of wearing a skirt. I mean we were overalls on watch but at least our dress uniform was a skirt and jacket. But I mean some of them, and have them standing up at the cenotaph

31:00 on Anzac Day and days like that on guard duty. I'm not wholly in favour of it.

You said that your each watch was four hours?

Well, six hours during the night but in ships at sea they worked four hours on and four hours off. But in a shore establishment it's not really practical to have cooks and people

31:30 preparing meals every four hours, so at night you would go on watch at 8 o'clock and come off at 2.00, and then the new watch goes on at 2.00 and comes off at 8.00. When I say, you have to have half an hour's turnover so you're really expected to be there at half past 1.00 and you take over at 2.00, and in the morning you're expected to be there at half past 7.00 and take over at 8.00

32:00 But then during the day it will be 8.00 till 12.00, 12.00 till 4.00 and 4.00 till 8.00.

And how many watches would you do in a 24 hour period?

I never counted them. Well, you would do 8 o'clock in the morning until 12.00 and then you would come on again at 4 o'clock until 8.00 and then you would come on again at 2 o'clock in the morning.

32:30 So that would be three. The only thing is in shore establishments, they quite often split the dogs. The dog watch is from 4.00 till 8.00 at night, and to give people meal time in the big galleys you would go on at 4.00 and come off at 6.00 so that you could have a meal and then go on at 8.00. So if they split the dogs it would be four watches in the

33:00 24 hours, and then there'd be 8 in the 48, and then in the 48 you worked 8.00 in the morning until 12.00 the next day, so that would be nine. In 48 hours you'd work nine watches and then you'd have 24 hours off. A lot of people can't get used to watch keeping. It's not easy if you've

33:30 had a hectic and a busy night filling in forms for eight hours in the first watch at night. And if you were on some of the broadcasts which you have to read, if you were on some of those you'd be writing for the whole eight hours. There were no coffee breaks, no smokos. When the Americans arrived in Canberra the CO [Commanding Officer], you

34:00 never knew when he was going to appear, he appeared up about half past 1.00 one morning apparently up at the station after the Americans from Pearl Harbour had arrived, and he saw the coffee urn bubbling and he cut the lead. He apologised afterwards, but no, they used to keep awake with coffee. But no, we didn't get coffee breaks. You

34:30 would only get someone to relieve you if you wanted to go to the bathroom or something like that, but that wasn't very often either. But no, there were no breaks. Sociologists often wonder how people put up with what they put up with in war time, particularly in an establishment like that, but everyone was happy, everyone shared letters, shared parcels.

35:00 There was no problem with the staff in any other way. Very little sickness 'cause we were all young and

healthy. A few of them got problems from the station sending Morse. They tend to get a tight wrist or something like that, but then there were other things to put them on.

35:30 No, I can't think of anything that was a problem in any way. Wonderful commanding officer, very strict, but you knew exactly his expectations and people were only happy to fulfil them.

What did you enjoy most about the work you were doing?

Well, the news.

36:00 When we got good news of a war effort, I think. That was what we enjoyed most and when the authorities came and visited the place, like being Canberra of course, we had the Duke of Gloucester who was our governor general at that time, and all his staff. His wife was wonderful to the women's services.

36:30 We used to get invited to Government House quite often if they had a garden party. Some of the stewardesses and people like that would be invited to help with the refreshments and we'd be invited just to be there, to follow her around with the little princes. I think they're both dead now. Prince William was the older I think and then there was the younger one. I remember I had a job once.

37:00 Rear Admiral Bracegirdle of course was RAN, and he was the aid of the governor general, and I had friends called Morrisons, or they were friends of friends of mine and they had a farm, a property out on the Queanbeyan Road and they wanted a black sheep, a black lamb for the younger prince. I think the older one had one. Anyhow, I had to go

37:30 out with the driver and collect this little black lamb and take it to Government House for the prince. But there were lots of sidelines like that. Another night, my husband had served in a ship with a Lieutenant Merry who was the aid to Sir Bruce Fraser. He later became Lord Fraser but he was Sir Bruce Fraser out here

38:00 and I think it was the Packers had a home in Canberra, in fact I'm sure it was. And when they'd come into Sydney by ship to get them away for a little bit of leave, they used to let some of them use his home in Canberra, like people like Sir Bruce Fraser, and when they arrived there was no beer. They wanted some

38:30 beer, so I happened to be duty officer with one of the men and after we did rounds at Molonglo we had to take this, we had to go to Belconnen. It was the high speed sending station, and then we came back and delivered this beer to a beautiful home in Mugga Way and they invited us in for a drink, and there I am on one end of the lounge sipping

39:00 Curacao with Sir Bruce Fraser talking on the other. But little incidents like that, you know, made life very interesting.

Speaking of sipping Curacao, what did you drink? Did you drink a lot in the pub?

No, no, if we went out, occasionally after I met my husband we'd go out to dinner at one of the hotels in Queanbeyan for a dinner and then

39:30 we'd probably have had a drink. I don't remember what. Of course, in the wardroom they had drink but you'd just have a drink with your meal and a port afterwards if it was a special occasion. But no, I wasn't, I'm a social drinker, that's about all.

What about smoking?

No. Some of the girls smoked. They couldn't smoke on watch. There was no smoking in the radio stations,

40:00 but some of them did smoke. But I, my father of course, because of his lung wound, had smoked in the First World War, but had to give it up, and there were no smokers in our house because of that probably.

Speaking of your father, how much were you hearing from him at this stage?

Well, after about 1943

40:30 or later than that, after the fall of El Alamein and a lot of our troops began to gradually come back, before the New Guinea campaign, people like my father who had been called up for instructional duties and duties early in the war were gradually being released if they wanted to, because their other work was beginning to become important. So my father, about,

41:00 I suppose it would've been about the end of 1944 came back, took his discharge from the army and came back home. So I'd get weekly letters or we'd occasionally make phone calls but letters mainly in those days.

Tape 5

00:33 **What worries did you and the other interceptors have about mistranslating or missing a signal?**

Well, that was a great worry. You'd go off watch after a long 48 particularly, and people were really stressed. You could tell the ones that hadn't been kept flat out. They never said anything

01:00 of course, but you didn't realise until a few weeks later when you read some in the paper or hear of something that had happened, and you'd go back in your mind and you'd think, yes, that was such and such a night. And the night that the Japanese broke out of Cowra Camp we didn't know what was wrong, but all leave was stopped and there were great goings on.

01:30 We were sure the Japanese had arrived in Sydney Heads or that they were knocking at the gates of Canberra. But see, you didn't know. You weren't told anything apart from the fact that they might change the passwords everywhere to get up on watch. No, in hindsight too, there was a lot of stress that you had that you didn't realise at the time because you were so young

02:00 I suppose. But most of the girls that did the work they weren't like 18, 19, 20. The earlier ones were quite a bit older, and then the others were 21 and 22 and beyond. They didn't have them very young doing it, but it was, it kept praying on your mind. But then you'd get people arrive and say, "Every signal

02:30 counts," but why they didn't tell them. Because the girls working at Monterey which was the navy office side, that was the special name given to where the Americans were, I mean they knew the pattern but they couldn't tell others. I mean there was a ship went down off Gibraltar, of English WRENS [Women's Royal Naval Service] coming out to do similar work in Singapore, but they would've arrived too late anyhow,

03:00 and there were a number of girls in New Zealand. I'm very attached to them. I go over to their reunions, but they were stuck up in the mountain, Mount Ruapehu area, and they hardly came down from there at all for fear of what might be said or that sort of thing. But in talking about it to them last year or the year before, that was one of their

03:30 worries too. But why they couldn't tell us, they used to keep saying even if you only got one digit it was still important. You'd hand in a pad and all the ship would do would be come up with it's call sign and give one digit. Well, to them it meant something but it didn't mean anything to us, until I went down, and of course I went down, they didn't know how long the war was going to

04:00 last. but I worked in every section with the men and with the girls as background knowledge and I'd actually been appointed to Adelaide River and that never happened because the war took a turn and the Japanese were sent further north and the war took on a different venue.

The fact that you never knew what you were actually transcribing,

04:30 **what it meant or how it fitted in, was that disappointing or frustrating?**

Well, you knew that you were only part, and of course the cryptographers and the people who did the coding, and when you studied the whole, like you did initially of what happened to our signals… You first of all had the coders who coded the messages and then you had the people

05:00 who either sent them flags or light or telegraphy, and then you had the people at the other end who had to decode them. When you understood that, you realised that you were the middle part of the sandwich as it were. But no, that didn't worry us so much. You were still, it was still hard work getting some of the signals.

What sort of person

05:30 **made a good interceptor?**

A person with very good hearing, that found out the people that didn't have good hearing. We all ended up with bad hearing. We've never complained but in later life, the people, the few that you meet that were there in the early stages. I'm all right like one to one or

06:00 if things are loud enough but I couldn't hear a thing that would be given at a lecture or anything like that, and a lot of us seem to have had a similar problem later in life. But at the time some people just wouldn't hear a signal through interference. Now I was always lucky. I always seemed to hear things that other people couldn't hear and at the time I couldn't understand

06:30 it. But that made a good operator. When we transferred from pen and pencil, mainly pencil, to the typewriters my father's wisdom in saying that everyone needs to be a touch typist, doesn't matter what you do in life, that paid off because I was able to touch type. So that was another thing that

07:00 we trained people to do and even the young men that came on at the end of the war. I had that job after my job had finished, training. They were farm hands, they were bank boys, I think they were 18 year old call ups but I'm not 100 percent sure of that. They certainly came into the navy at 18 to take the place of the girls and men who were due

07:30 to retire and I had the job of teaching them to touch type. Farm boys with covers, they wanted to do it so they were let do it, with wooden covers over the keyboard and they really worked hard to become touch typists. But apart from that I can't think of anything else. They had to be people who could stand the hours. The watch keeping broke a lot of them. They were given

08:00 day jobs for a while, but of course you had to take your turn at everything. But managing to work around the clock, that was important, but I think that's about it.

In your earlier days at Harman there what sort of signals were you personally trying to find?

Well, they knew the frequencies that a lot of the ships would

08:30 have, and of course in the main station there was always someone twiddling for odd signals. Well, mainly the signals would come from known ships or sources like Truk broadcasts, submarines. There was a special submarine frequency that you expected them to come up on. But also you twiddled the dial

09:00 for any unusual, I mean it might be a German ship in our waters and if the DF people found that it was a signal and there was no one they knew of with that signal or it shouldn't be in that area, well, you finished with it. They took over, got a bearing if they could and then they let whoever know, know.

So in the case of

09:30 **you suddenly finding a submarine signal what would be the procedure?**

Well, when a signal comes up first there is a name for it and it's a distinct sound and you pick it up immediately, and immediately you get that sound you yell, "Six bells!" And the six bells ring over the mountains to where the DF people are

10:00 and they'd know to get a bearing on that signal, and you'd just hope they come up, and then if they're going to send a signal it would be a very short one so you haven't got long. So it's too late once they've really come up. When you get that, I wish I could think of the word for it, when you get that sound you immediately take action. But the trouble

10:30 is of course, we might get the signal but the time the bearing get the position and the position is relayed to their air force or to ships in the area, it's still not foolproof however hard you try.

I guess at least ships then would know there was something?

Oh yes, something in that area, oh yes, and if they're in the area they know

11:00 to get out of it or take care, or do what they have to do.

So in that case the content of the message is not as important as the fact that there is a message?

That's right, and the message in my experience, would never be long. They might come up, you might do an eight hour watch, they usually seemed to be, well, whenever I got one it was always between 8.00 at night and

11:30 2.00 in the morning, but other people might've had different experiences. Whenever I got one it was always in the latter part of the watch and quite often they'd come up two or three times, but a very short message and that would be it.

Did you ever receive any signals that were in clear?

Not clear? Oh lots,

12:00 oh yes.

No, were sent without being encoded, that were in clear…?

Oh, in plain language. Possibly yes, but I don't, yes, the odd one but we wouldn't understand it. Yes, the odd one came up in plain language, yes.

Where were all the antenna arrayed for receiving?

12:30 They were everywhere. The area, as you look at Harman, the area to the right, they've all gone now, they're radar dishes, but just field and fields of aerials and the transmitting towers at Belconnen, huge, huge towers, they're quite a landmark in Canberra, they're just about to come

13:00 down if they haven't already come down, the Belconnen Towers. Well that of course, our signals went to them and then they went off from there. But no, the aerials were absolutely everywhere. That's what made Harman, and in our, there's a stained glass window in the naval chapel at Garden Island dedicated to WRANS and you'll see these, all these aerials

13:30 with the signals coming from them as a symbol of what most of the WRANS did.

What was it like, sounds a silly question, but for a woman to be involved in something so

technical in those days, must've been quite groundbreaking?

But we had nothing to do with the technical side. In all those groups of watches

14:00 you will see at least two or three men and they were the technicians, electricians. I don't know what branch of the navy they were but they were always there to do the technical things and the sets were always kept in as good a condition as they possibly could. I don't know how we ever worked with them really when you see how antiquated they are now in

14:30 the War Memorial or wherever. But no, we knew really, some of the girls were pretty good at technical things or would be able to say it's so and so that's gone, but that wasn't my line, no.

Nevertheless it's still different from being employed as cooks and cleaners?

Oh yes, yes. Yes, well, the thing is everyone's life changed. Everyone was doing something. Like the

15:00 Land Army girls or the SES [State Emergency Services] people. It didn't matter who it was, was doing something that wouldn't happen in peace time. Well before the war it wouldn't. It's happening now but before the war it wouldn't have happened.

I'd like you to describe to us in as much detail as you can the concept of radio fingerprinting

15:30 **or voice fingerprinting?**

Well, radio fingerprinting, it's a funny name for it, but just as after a while you'd recognise my handwriting and I'd recognise mine, in the case of enemy intercept operating you'll get used to an operator. You'll get

16:00 used to their Morse. I mean we all send it differently. Some are excellent, some are mediocre and some are terrible. Well if suddenly very good operators get moved from a frequency you're used to you sense that they're changing their tactics or they're sending more

16:30 people to build up an area where they're needed in communication. And you'll find that someone's that's been operating from a ship and is a very good operator will suddenly be sent to one of the main broadcasting stations. And you can recognise on paper the distance between the spaces and the way they send 'X' or they send 'OA'

17:00 or whatever, and basically that's what it is. I mean it required very dedicated people to do it. There is a word for people who do that too, particularly the Bletchley Park [codebreakers] people, and we had one marvellous Australian naval man even before the war who was very good at doing that sort of thing. But basically

17:30 that's what it means. You're tracing radio through the way they send Morse to where they might've been and where they've gone and why they've gone there particularly if there's a build up of operators from one place to another. Are they moving camp or are they assembling for an attack or whatever, and it was very successful

18:00 apparently. I don't know all that much about it except that I could recognise different senders, mostly I could recognise someone that was regular on a frequency, but basically that's all it is.

So how would you report the information if there was a change?

Oh, well there

18:30 was a special form for that and then you let the people who had to work that out work it out. They might have a query or they might check it, you know, another night or another day or ask someone else to check it, but all you did was said what you found and suggested that operator whoever, they all had a symbol,

19:00 was now operating from, and put down the from frequency. That was left to the experts, the cryptographers and all the other people who had to do the decoding and that was done mainly in Melbourne.

So you had people that might disappear off the air for quite some time and then pop back up again?

Yes, yes,

19:30 quite often you'd recognise someone that you read regularly and then for a while they were missing. They were probably operating from somewhere else but you hadn't got, but then you'd catch up with them elsewhere and then you might get a group of frequency all suddenly, the frequency might close down, it might be dead and then the same group would start operating

20:00 from somewhere else, and then you wonder what's going on. Well, they did.

And I guess somewhere down the line all that was pieced together?

Yes, yes. That was the difficult part, but it was interesting really to see them doing it. They had an area at Albert Park in Melbourne with all, it was like Fort Knox to get into it. I was living at Lonsdale and

20:30 used to have to get a car up every morning and you'd go inside the main gate and then you'd go inside another gate and have to wait until you were identified and then you'd be escorted to wherever you were going for the day. That was all decided in a place like that. We never really saw the end results, and it was a branch that I think they kept finding more out about.

21:00 Probably as technology improved they began to see the different types of radio sending gear was being used, or perhaps they were depending on old stuff that they were running out of new stuff. But all those factors came into it I believe. And there was one man, a Dr Hendy who came out from England, and I know that

21:30 when he came there were a lot of changes made in that section and I think they got better results in consequence.

Did you have nicknames for any of the regular enemy?

No, because we never talked. We'd come off watch and you might've had a wonderful run, you know, you never missed a dit or a dash and you'd think, well that's good. But then you'd come off and you,

22:00 interference and jamming and you name it, you didn't have a very, but you didn't talk about it. You lived in, it's like that article, that paragraph I read, that was Bletchley Park actually, that one, but ours was exactly the same. You just didn't talk about it and then you'd be quite low and then some of the authorities come around and

22:30 say what a wonderful job you were doing. "Keep it up and send us everything you get. It doesn't matter if it's garbled, still send it." So that's how we carried on.

All those intense hours of listening without saying anything, did you chat a lot when you got off duty to each other?

No, we were looking for a bed. No, it's a weird

23:00 existence really. You'd hope it wouldn't go on forever, but no, every, as I say, when your watch was on duty, we were C and D watch. A and B watch were on leave or resting, and then when they'd come on you'd be off. So you really never got to know the people, in my case A and B watches, but you got to know everyone on C and D,

23:30 and it was great. They were from all states, they weren't all New South Wales. You learnt a lot about the states that we wouldn't have learnt except for the war. You were in a very confined area. You didn't travel much or that sort of thing all those years ago, not like it is now. So it was exciting to meet someone from Mount Gambier or someone from

24:00 Nedlands in Perth, or that sort of thing. So that yes, I suppose we did chat a lot, but then it wasn't about work. Canberra had the School of Anatomy, it had Parliament House, you could always go there and fill a few hours and we had bicycles to ride out to Cotter Dam. No, it was a very active life really. We made the most of our time off.

24:30 But all those hours, it was sheer drudgery really. If it hadn't been that you thought you were winning the war you wouldn't have done it I don't think.

Did you see examples where this almost subterranean existence affected the girls' health?

Well there was no one to appeal to, it wouldn't have been much use, but no, they

25:00 were very healthy really. I can't think of anyone that had anything wrong during those years. If they did there was a nursing sister resident. She was a hard case. I remember there were two girls when I went back as an officer. I don't know what they complained of but they were Tasmanians and they were the most difficult of all, but

25:30 they had to be excused watch for some reason. So I rang the nursing sister and Bess went around to the cottage and she rang me back and she said, "Tell them to change their sheets and I'll come back." So that was what Bess thought the problem was. But no, I think looking back on the years it's really a wonder that there wasn't more stress, but I don't think we knew

26:00 the meaning of the word in those days. I don't know that stress was sort of a complaint. But no, they were really, you know, we were young, you shouldn't be sick when you're 20 to 30, 35.

You mentioned to me in the kitchen before that a lot of the girls put on weight down there. Why was that?

They all put on

26:30 weight when they went to Canberra, yes. I think the cold weather and you know, the regular meals and a lot of them were a bit fussy of their food in the early days. And there was a communal toaster and I

think they ate too much bread until they learned that it was made by the prisoners at Goulburn Gaol and came up on open trucks to Canberra for the services. I think

27:00 they changed their minds after that, but a lot of them did put on, well I did too in the early days. It seemed to be a combination of weather and change of diet, but you couldn't complain about the food except that some of them, as I say, got around the toaster, and jam. And I think when they'd come off watch sometimes in the early hours of the morning, if they couldn't sleep they'd go out and make toast

27:30 and then they'd line up for breakfast, and just too much food. You can't say not enough exercise because if they wanted to go on leave to Queanbeyan or Canberra they had to walk it.

Did you notice differences between the girls from different states?

Yes, yes. That was another thing. My hearing was uncanny, it still is. Even the children

28:00 at school, if there was something they didn't want me to hear I'd hear it, but I could tell immediately when a draft came in where they were from. Victorians, I don't know why, because they're rather, it's rather a soft climate generally, but they had the harshest voices, really harsh voices, and the Tasmanians have an accent all their own, and the Western

28:30 Australians and the South Australians have got a real drawl. I'm not too sure that I remember much about the Queenslanders because we didn't have many from Queensland. I don't know why. I think because it was a forward area. Any that the navy got they kept up there in other categories. I know one South Australian girl, her father was in the navy, and she wanted

29:00 to join the navy and her mother didn't want her to, but if she didn't join the navy she was going to be manpowered and sent to a canning factory on the Murray. So the mother quickly changed her mind and let her join the navy. But I don't know why, I think the only reason is it was a forward area and they wanted them for other categories. We did have a few we sent to Cairns

29:30 and a few went to Townsville, but not the Brisbane area. But no, they all have, according to the state and their schools in those days, they mix more now, but in those days when they hadn't travelled between states they really did have a different accent and lots of words were different. But the Victorians particularly, they were very harsh,

30:00 very harsh voices.

And differences in attitudes or behaviour between the states?

The Tasmanians were an unruly lot. Yes, they were a law unto themselves. Don't know why, but they were the only ones that were really a problem. They weren't amenable to rules. I think on

30:30 watch they were all right. I'm not sure, but I remember just before I went down to do my officers training course, I was put in charge of a cottage of Tasmanians and they, some of the things, you know, unheard of, that we would never had dreamed of. Like going out, you daren't leave the station on a long 48, you know, you didn't go out even for a walk along the Queanbeyan

31:00 Road, but they would. They would, unless you spoke very sharply to them and watched them very carefully, yes, but whether they've changed or not I don't know. But they were good workers, there's the odd Tasmanian who did really good work in the Y hut.

Why were the Tasmanians all living together that you looked after?

Well probably they were a draft that came

31:30 up together and they wouldn't have stayed together. It was just while they were doing their training, they would've been divided A, B, C, D watches. This was just when they first arrived, and when they first arrived, even though they'd done a rookies' course they still had to do a course, a short course in coding and telegraphy and whatever category they were in, but that's the reason.

32:00 **With the listening being such an important talent, was there a difference between people that had come from the big cities and the country in their talent?**

I don't think so. All the people that came from New South Wales would've come through Mrs Mackenzie's. There was no one else from Sydney went through anywhere but Mrs Mack's.

32:30 Now in Victoria they went to the Marconi School of Wireless. I think that's where they mainly came from and the other states I don't know.

I was just wondering whether growing up in a very quiet environment would make you a better or worse listener than someone who'd grown up in the inner city?

I think really it's something in yourself. I mean if there's a lot of

33:00 noise now, I can't pick out what I'm trying to hear because of the other noise, but once upon a time I would've been able to, but I really don't know whether that would be so or not. But it's very difficult, but once you get a signal you don't lose it, even though there's a lot of interference around it. You seem

to be able to keep it if you're concentrating, but you

33:30 have to be able ignore what's going on around you. People can't stamp through the place. Well, no one's allowed in the place except the leading hand of the watch or a technician and they walk very quietly, but some people would panic. They'd get a signal and then they'd panic because they lost it, but if it was an important frequency there would be another person. There wouldn't only be the one

34:00 person if it were really a ship they were looking for or an important frequency, it would be manned by more than one person. You wouldn't know that perhaps, but that was the case.

Why do you think or know, why do you think that you were selected for officer training?

That I wouldn't know. I was selected very soon after I went down there,

34:30 and you had all sorts of forms to fill in. I really don't know, unless it was background and my father, or the fact that I'd been head of the school for two years. It was very unusual for people to have done their leaving certificate in those days, particularly girls. I don't know what qualities they were looking for, leadership type qualities which

35:00 is pretty easy to discover in a group. But that, I really don't know what they were looking for and I really don't know why I passed and others didn't. So you know, it's just one of those unknowns to me.

What reaction did you have when you found out you'd been selected?

Well I don't know. I think I just expected

35:30 to be selected because I think it was the gunnery officer on the side told me that I'd topped the course in, I don't know what he called it, but managing a group of women. We had to march them around the parade ground and make sure they changed step off the right foot. I can only put that down to my music ability really,

36:00 because most people would give the order too late or too soon and then have everyone skipping to catch up, but I don't know. My reaction, I was no doubt pleased and I was pleased that I wasn't going to go back to Harman and that fell through, so I don't know.

Why didn't you want to go back to Harman?

Well, I joined the navy and see the world,

36:30 sort of attitude I think. Well I didn't mind going back to Harman but I really looked forward to going to some other establishment.

I believe there was a delay between your acceptance for officer training and your actual transfer out to it.

Well that was because I was trained, especially trained and they couldn't spare me at the time. Yes, there was quite a delay but that was the reason.

37:00 I was told I couldn't be spared.

That was because of your Kana skills?

Yes, yes, and shortage of trained people too probably.

So when did you get transferred off to officer training?

The beginning of 1945.

Wasn't until '45? '44 or '45?

37:30 It would've been the beginning of 1945. I'm not absolutely sure.

And where did you go?

I went, because I was the only one, I went to Flinders Naval Depot. That's where they did their officers' training courses, the men too. All these things were wonderful experience for

38:00 life. We had some excellent lecturers and it was a very good course. You could say you were lucky to have had the experience of being in the navy.

What sort of things were you learning at that officers' school?

Well you were learning, as I said earlier, a lot of physiology which was really important if you were going to be dealing with other

38:30 people, and you learnt a little bit of navigation, you learnt discipline, you learnt naval tradition. You learnt how to take people for various drills and all the ropes and things that were in the drill hall and what the exercises were supposed to be, not that the women did them all but it was interesting

39:00 to learn their uses. And some of the ladies didn't do those, but I managed to do most of them. But it was a good general knowledge background as well as being a background for the navy.

Did you find the training appropriate?

Yes, yes. To be in the service the more you could learn about it the better.

39:30 No, I found it very appropriate and a lot of the things were useful later in life with my teaching and just general knowledge. I don't remember everything we did. We seemed to be up at 6 o'clock in the morning and still going at 8 o'clock at night. Supervision too, supervision of some of the things that were happening at the base and

40:00 drilling one an another. That was unusual because none of us had ever done a rookies' course.

What do you think makes a good officer in the navy?

Fairness to everyone, loyalty to fellow officers, get as good a general

40:30 knowledge as you can about the community in which you're working and don't know what else. You've got to be fair to everyone, in teaching and in an officer in the navy. Good discipline but not harsh. That's about it I think.

Tape 6

00:34 **Who was the senator's daughter who worked for you?**

Senator Ashley. Val Ashley, her father was a senator at the time and she joined the navy with us and she's one of the ladies we've never been able to trace. We don't know what she did. She was a Sydney girl,

01:00 but we don't know, even the school, she went to one of the North Shore, far North Shore schools and one of the other girls knew her at school, but even the school doesn't know what became of Val. And we did have a Victorian girl too, her father was a senator, Senator Brown, but I don't know what his portfolio was.

01:30 **What significance did this have for you? What publicity did you receive?**

Well, it didn't mean a thing once we were in the navy. We got separated and went into different watches, but when we joined the navy we got a lot of publicity. You know, Senator Ashley's daughter had been at Mrs Mackenzie's Emergency Signalling Corps and was now joining the WRANS and it got in

02:00 the Canberra papers and the Sydney papers and there was, just a thing of the moment really. It didn't make any difference, although it did to some girls because I'm not sure what watch Val was on, I think she was on the A or B, the opposite watches to me. I think that some of the girls got invited to special sessions of parliament or visits to

02:30 the interior of Parliament House and little things like that on their time off. I think it did make a little bit of difference that way. But I mean I lost contact with Val because when I'd be working she'd be off and vice versa. I did know her at Mrs Mack's before we went into the navy, but I didn't know her father was a senator until we were actually on our way to Canberra.

03:00 **In terms of confidentiality, did you ever feel the need to talk about what you were doing with other people?**

No, that was just something that was taboo. You just didn't talk about it. Even when you came, I mean my husband, he was busy of course at Molonglo which was another radio, but he didn't know what I'd done

03:30 in the past. He being a telegraphist himself in the past, he knew exactly the types of work people did but we never asked questions of any sort whatsoever of one another. It was easy because you were constantly reminded, and at that time in Australia people were really

04:00 conscious of the fact that there was a war going on and in war time it's so easy for the enemy. You don't know who the enemy is. You certainly wouldn't know today, but you don't know who's going to be a traitor and if you're made conscious of the fact that traitors exist and traitors are weak and give away information, you just didn't talk about it. There was

04:30 extreme secrecy in everything. Even the girls from the station, you know, didn't talk because they had a few friends that had boyfriends or brothers in some of the ships and if you said, "Well, the [HMAS] Perth is leaving in the morning for so and so," it could endanger the life of someone they knew.

05:00 No, it was something that you, and even now I'm sorry that all this business has come out in books, etcetera. The German and the Italian sort of hit the headlines earlier than the Pacific secrets, but it

would be much easier if it were just forgotten. It's not very nice spying on other people wherever they come from.

05:30 But I feel with the Japanese they were doing horrible things before the war even began when you read some of the books, and I had no idea as I said before, that the Germans and the Japanese diplomatically were so much in touch with one another. You thought that one country was on one side of the world and the other country was far away, but diplomatically they were well and truly

06:00 in touch.

Talking about reading books, is war a subject that you followed?

Yes, the house is full of stories. See, my husband was in the war the very first day it began and through a stroke of luck he was there the day it ended. But he was at the fall of Singapore just around the corner from when eight British ships were

06:30 sunk and they wouldn't give them oil or fuel to Tanjong Priok to get all their survivors from Singapore into Colombo, and he just doesn't know how they were missed. He was on all the Russian convoys and I've just finished reading the bombing of the Tirpitz, and he was in an aircraft carrier, the old [HMS] Furious, which he ran down no end, but the Furious was a wonderful old ship. She just eventually fell to pieces.

07:00 She was worked through the whole war, got out of every trouble that she got into and in the end just sort of gave up. She was never sunk, never damaged. But no, I read a lot of the…and all these, the story of how they got the Enigma [German code machine] and Lord Louis Mountbatten's ship, the [HMS] Kelly which was, that was one of the…. When the Germans, when Hitler

07:30 gave the Allies 12 months longer to prepare for the war, I mean he didn't know he was doing that but he virtually did, the British got busy and built K class and G class ships, and the Kelly was one of the first ships built in that period of preparation. And it was Lord Louis Mountbatten's ship and it had terrific experiences

08:00 right through the war until it was sunk off Crete. No, I just, I've always liked history and some of the puzzles of the Second World War I'm now seeing in books that have been published. Another one that I thought was tragic was the preparation for the D Day [June 6, 1944] landings. People think the Allies just went over and attacked

08:30 and eventually won D Day but they had to prepare for it, and there was 1,000 Americans lost in one night. They took over the coast, part of the coast of Cornwall in England which looked like the coast of France, and had a practice for the D Day landings and the got amongst the practise ships and destroyed them. And there's a man in England who

09:00 retrieved one of the Sherman tanks and got every name of every man that was lost and he's built a memorial to them at Slapton Sands. There are just so many things that have come out and you're learning about those years. Of course there's nothing good to be said about war, nothing, as we're realising at the moment.

You met your husband

09:30 **as a consequence of the war?**

That's right. It's funny, there was a song and no one can ever tell me the name of it or anything about it. It's, "I spoke last night to the ocean and from the ocean a voice came back, 'twas my blue jacket answering me." I won't try to sing it but it was one of the war time songs that hasn't survived. And I often used to think of this song

10:00 and my husband would've been up around the Timor Sea or places like that, or down the coast of Western Australia on their way to Africa, and I didn't meet him until a long time afterwards.

When did you meet him?

Well, I met him at Harman. I'd been travelling overnight in a troop train from Melbourne and had to get off and transfer to a car at Goulburn and when I went in to breakfast he was at breakfast

10:30 sitting diagonally, no, that way, across from me.

Tell us your story.

Well we just worked together. I didn't see much of him because I was at the Y hut and he was waiting to go to Adelaide River, and he was at Molonglo which was another radio station, wireless station half way between Canberra and Queanbeyan

11:00 which took high speed automatic Morse, very, very noisy. It comes on automatic machines and prints holes like you get in, I don't know what, but very, very noisy area. Of course, when the British Pacific Fleet came out here at the end of the European War there was so much more traffic and we had to get help from the British, and he came out with an executive officer.

11:30 He was the technical officer, and I don't know how many men, quite a lot of sailors, telegraphists and coders, mainly telegraphers, and they lived in the old nurses quarters of Canberra Hospital, and they used to have to transfer each day, each watch from Canberra Hospital. So I didn't see all that much of him, but

12:00 the first time I really became conscious of him I suppose was the CO told me that I was to go into the War Memorial for the Anzac Day War Memorial ceremony and he said, "One of the male officers will be going too," and that's who the male officer was. It was Stan

12:30 Dow from Molonglo, and I think he might've asked me to go into dinner in Queanbeyan that night or something. And we just gradually got to know one another. He had such an interesting war record in lots of ships which interested me, and he'd come to Canberra from

13:00 [HMS] Bulolo. The Bulolo was a Burns Philp ship and at the beginning of the war. It had been completed in England for the Bulolo company out in Australia and it had extremely modern engines and a very fast ship. And when war broke out Burns Philp gave it back to England for the war effort and they

13:30 used it as a fast ship taking all the heads of government around the Mediterranean from battle scene to battle scene or wherever it was needed. And towards the end of the war there'd been so much sophisticated gear developed during the war, she was due for a refit and my husband was the radio man who did the refitting,

14:00 or organised the refitting of the Bulolo. I don't know what happened to it after that, whether it came back to Australia or what happened. I have got its history somewhere, but there's a picture of it just inside the front door. But Burns Philp company went to the wall and they don't seem to know very much about their ships or their world records or any

14:30 of that sort of thing today. Anyhow, we decided to marry on February the 9th, 1946 in Canberra, but there are pictures out there of our engagement party with the commanding officer. But the 9th of February. We chose Canberra because apart from the people that were already in Canberra

15:00 and my relatives in Sydney, it was easier for them to come up to Canberra than for us to come to Sydney if we could've got leave, and bring the friends from down there that we knew. So we were to get married on the 9th of February in Canberra, St Christopher's at Manuka. It was all arranged and the week before the invitations were to go out, we were

15:30 at that American ligation party and the commanding officer had come from the station where a signal had come through requesting my husband go to Sir Bruce Fraser's farewell cruise of China and Japan. So these things always have to be confirmed. So that was what happened, and we transferred the wedding. Everyone helped us. We transferred

16:00 from the 9th of February to the 26th of January at St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, and his ship sailed for New Zealand at 2 o'clock and we were married at half past 2.00. And two weeks later after it came back from New Zealand they flew him to Townsville to pick it up. So that caused more disruption than the whole of the war effort. So that's, and then

16:30 he went off on his farewell and then eventually when the flags left the ship he took passage in [HMS] Swiftsure back to England. But at Cocos Island when they were saying goodbye to the natives there who'd been very helpful during the war, ammunition blew

17:00 up for some reason and some of their people were killed or injured. And then they came down to Perth and said goodbye there. I got to England before he did. His father met me in Plymouth and then we travelled to London where they lived, and then about six weeks or so later I went down to Chatham to meet the

17:30 Swiftsure and then we left London, went down to Portsmouth and got a flat in Southsea which was a lovely suburb. But all the houses there had been badly damaged in the war because they were bombing the marine barracks which was close to our address, and

18:00 they used to call them the Rip Van Winkle squad. They'd go from house to house repairing severe damage like weak chimneys or bad cracking or that sort of thing. But the flat, it was an upstairs flat of a very big home and it was near the Canoe Lake and the lovely Southsea shopping area. But Portsmouth

18:30 itself was very badly bombed, the Guild Hall and all the lovely buildings And food rationing was worse then than during the war because the American aid had given up. And then we came back to Australia on loan to the Royal Australian Navy, and we were half way here and they changed Stan's appointment from Sydney to Melbourne, and all our luggage was in the

19:00 hold for Sydney. So he went to Melbourne and I came to Sydney and took the luggage back later on. Then he was at navy office looking after the reserve fleet electrics for two years, or two years and a bit.

How did you handle that shifting around?

Well, I don't know.

19:30 Our accommodation, in spite of the lack of it in London and we had good accommodation in Melbourne. I don't know. I think to a certain extent I enjoyed the travel. It's not easy though. The two years passes very quickly and in those years, I mean the world really wasn't settled. The Middle East, we were held up in the

20:00 lake half way between the two ends of the [Suez] Canal and the firing all around the Middle East, that area, was still going on and the war was over. All the Middle East troubles were still on. The Berlin airlift was a problem. The world was very unsettled, very unsettled.

20:30 I suppose people in Australia can settle down, although with all the migrants that came here after the war there was still a lot of movement here and people having to sort of find new homes and that sort of thing. But no, I just went along with it. It was navy life and I'd been warned the navy, you had to be a good woman to be married

21:00 to a naval man because of the moving around and all that sort of thing. When he was away, I mean there were so many things to do, immediately he finished his course in Collingwood he went to the Home Fleet, the HMS Duke of York. Well I went up to Oxford to a volunteer agricultural camp. See they were

21:30 very short of people. They still had a few German prisoners of war. But I went up to Cambridgeshire, not Oxford, to Cambridgeshire fruit picking, beautiful Cox's Pippin apples off the tree in the early morning dew. You can't taste anything lovelier. But I went up there and spent my time there when he was away. When we were coming back to

22:00 Australia while we were waiting for passage, we went to the Y agricultural college in the south of England, and I packed spinach for the London markets that sold at about £5 a leaf, and he got blisters on his hands digging potatoes for the London markets, but everyone didn't have a lot of time to

22:30 think. They had a lot of, you know, working to do. And then for a time I worked in one of the state primary schools in Portsmouth, and then when I wasn't working at the school I used to take the children of big families to the school dentist and doctor because they'd been neglected a bit during the war. But the babies in England hadn't

23:00 been neglected. I've never seen such healthy babies. Beautiful young, like up to about two years of age because they made sure that they got their orange juice, their cod liver oil, all the good rations, all the good food went to the very young. Older than very young had been a bit neglected, unless they'd been in Australia or Canada or wherever they sent them. Of course, it was very sad

23:30 seeing them reunite. A lot of them had even come to Australia as children and were teenagers by the time they got back to their families and they hardly knew them, but the very young were the ones that benefited because they were looked after with the things that were necessary for good health.

Back to Australia before

24:00 **the war finished, what was the security like around the buildings when you worked in Canberra? Who guarded them?**

Well we had army guards. They were men that were no longer A1 condition I presume. They were good soldiers, but all the guards around the naval establishments there, and of course there was Belconnen Towers,

24:30 there was Molonglo, there was Harman. There was another one. They were all army guard. Now I don't know out at Fairbairn, the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], I think they had their air force… But Duntroon of course was well guarded, but I don't know anything about the security in the Parliament House and those sorts of buildings, but they all did have security

25:00 people when you visited them. You know, there was security but what branch of security they came from I don't know. But certainly the service establishments were all well guarded. But as I say, ours were all army and they lived at Harman. There might've been some that were resident of Canberra, I don't know. But we never had anything to do with

25:30 them. They were probably family men and we just saw them when we went up on watch or when we came down and they wanted the password.

Do you remember what some of the passwords were?

Oh no. Funny things, funny words usually, very unusual, they were usually things, but no, I don't remember any of them.

How often would they change, those passwords?

Every day they'd change,

26:00 yes, and then sometimes they would change twice a day. If they were going to change more than once a day, the guard house was on our way up to the station and you'd have people there warning you of the change of password, because from the guard house to the top of our street, or twice that distance and up

26:30 a hill was where we had to go, and then the people at the station, the general station had to go further. So, the guards at night, 2 o'clock at night as well as being around the fences, they would be on the pathway up to the station - and of course in those early hours of the morning you'd crack the frost in Canberra going up the hill - because they'd hear you coming.

27:00 But for general security I don't know. I know at Parliament House they had a good security there, but the other buildings I really don't know.

You said there were American men there from Pearl Harbour?

Yes.

Did they show any signs of post-traumatic shock or stress?

Well, not that I

27:30 remember. The Americans that we met and particularly the ones that had been at Pearl Harbour, they had such determination, you know, terrific determination to win the war and get things done. That's all I remember about them. They were very, very hard working. Hard working at play and

28:00 hard working on the job. They hadn't been there hardly any time when they cleared a whole paddock and built a baseball and a basketball area for recreation. But that's the thing I remember about them most. They were very efficient, they had terrific equipment which they gladly shared with us.

28:30 And we only had one station car and they had a lot of transport and they didn't mind lifting and shifting people to church, any church, on a Sunday if they had leave to go, or trips into town if they were on leave. They shared everything, and yet on watch, there again they could drink coffee and we couldn't

29:00 on watch. They couldn't smoke, you couldn't smoke and well that, I mean, signals could be ruined if there was an accident with anyone smoking.

Speaking of signals again, what would happen if you missed a sequence of part of a sequence when you were listening in? What would that mean?

Well

29:30 you couldn't do anything about it. If you genuinely missed it, it was missed. You couldn't ask for a repeat. The girls at the station would be able to ask for a repeat but we couldn't do that. So sadly it was missed, and if the frequency wasn't doubled up with someone else well then it was lost and they just hoped that Monterey,

30:00 Moorabbin, someone else got what you missed. It was a big network.

Can you tell me more about that network? How many other people were doing the same work as you?

Well it depended on how important the frequency was. Oh, you mean how many people altogether? Well, that I don't know. New Zealand had a section. Singapore, until it fell,

30:30 had a section. They had a whole lot of WRENS coming out for reinforcements there and sadly the ship went down off Gibraltar. We had Monterey, Moorabbin and Harman, but and the air force and the army would've had other places but mainly up north, but the Americans could've

31:00 had off-shore places. They could've even had places outside of Australia, I don't know. I only know the ones that were here, but it was a network where you could compare signals of people working on the same frequency.

Who determined the degree of importance of each

31:30 **frequency?**

Well they know what's happening in areas. The cryptographers know, and also if you're sending a signal, like an Australian ship to shore, you have a call sign and you know from that call sign what the ship is. Well, if they gave their call sign which they had to do of course, you would

32:00 know from that, or the cryptographers would know from that where the ship was and how important the information was, and how important the information was to us. But that's like getting information in the intelligence branch for anything. You can only do your best, but generally

32:30 it has proved very successful.

What indications did you have of the beginning of the end of the war from what you were doing?

You mean immediate indication? Well the trouble is when war was declared over we were busier than ever because some of the Japanese ships didn't

33:00 understand the surrender. They didn't believe it and they didn't surrender. So that our work, although people in Sydney and everywhere were celebrating, we were very busy, and the watch, it just happened when a long 48 was coming back from Sydney. The girls that lived in Sydney were allowed travel to Sydney on a long 48

33:30 and they got a monthly pass, and they could get permission with their family's, permission to take a girl from another state if she hadn't had leave home for a long time. And the watch was coming back, would've been due back at midday in Canberra, and the CO came into the wardroom and he said to me, "Get your hat there O'Byrne." And,

34:00 so I got my hat, and all your hats are put on a tray like that at the door, and I followed him. And apparently he got a report, 'cause this diesel was filled with parliamentarians. He got a report that the WRANS were misbehaving on the train, or the navy were misbehaving on the train, coming back from Sydney. So he organised a coach to pick them up at Queanbeyan instead of going to Canberra.

34:30 Well, when we got there, where they got it I don't know because that train stops today, but in those days it didn't stop anywhere except Goulburn I think. They'd turned their jackets inside out and they'd decorated them with wattle as a celebration. That's all they'd done. So we got back to Harman, but of course he was worried because the watch that was on duty for the long weekend had to be retired, or the long 48.

35:00 So we got them back to Harman and got them on to watch and that was it. But at the, I remember that night about 6 o'clock ringing my parents. But apart from that life was very busy at that time, and then of course once we made sure that everyone had surrendered that should have surrendered, we then had the very

35:30 busy traffic of thousands of names from all over the world of the prisoner of war people. So from being busy we became busier until a lot of people that were gradually being freed, their lists of names and whatever the people sent to us, we were sending to wherever it had to go. A lot of it was England,

36:00 some was Holland, could've been anywhere in the world. But that went on for weeks and weeks of course. And a lot of our prisoners were so badly, well, mutilated that they were sent to Western Australia to recuperate a little bit before they came back to their families and vice versa, and of course all that meant signals. So

36:30 really, the end of the war, well the end of the war really never ended for me until I came out here in 1959, because at the end of the war we still had to keep our ships in the reserve fleet fit and that was why my husband came back to Australia, to keep all the ships in reserve, all their radio gear. He didn't do it personally but he

37:00 had staff, wherever the reserve fleet was, mainly over in Fremantle or some other place, Rockingham. And then we went back and it was the Berlin, it was one crisis after another. The Berlin airlift, and then we went to Northern Ireland. You can imagine what life was like in Northern Ireland in those days. The police were always

37:30 borrowing the navy's gear. And you didn't even have television when we were in Northern Ireland. Or the people that were alive in Australia didn't have television, so you didn't know what was going on over there. We make a big fuss of it now but it was far worse then and there was no communication because there was no television. So really, until we came back to Australia in 1959 there was one crisis after another. That's how we

38:00 lived, and then when we came out here you got a letter from the admiralty saying in the event of trouble you report to the RAN, so it really never ceased.

What year did you go overseas?

1946, July the 3rd. We sailed in HMS

38:30 Victorious, the aircraft carrier which was badly damaged by a kamikaze plane up near Japan. And while they had her in Perth to repair the damage to make her able to go to England they refitted her for trooping, all the hangar space and any space. And we left here with all the fleet air arm planes, the

39:00 fleet air arm crew, about 1,000 war brides. Lord Gifford, we picked up the governor of Ceylon and his lady in Sri Lanka and we met a gale in the Bight because the monsoons come around the Western Australian coast about every three or four days, and having done all that repair to her they sailed her in the worst possible

39:30 month, July, so met two monsoons in the Bight, and that's when we lost a lot of babies, and then we got into Perth. We were due to get into Perth about half past 1.00 in the morning and they didn't want to leave her out because they didn't know how many of the plates had fallen off that they'd repaired earlier. So they got people with car headlights to light up the entrance to Fremantle Harbour,

40:00 and there weren't many cars in those days. Anyhow we got in and then they couldn't get her out. So we were days because of all this monsoon season. Anyway, she hadn't lost any plates but we'd lost all our crockery and a whole lot of other things, but that was our, that was my first trip overseas. And after that we called in Trincomalee, and at Trincomalee

40:30 we left all the aircraft, all the fleet air. I don't know what they did with it at Trincomalee. There were no wharves, beautiful harbour, lovely, but they took them off in lighters. And my cousin, who by this time was in the navy proper, not a new entry, he was at Trincomalee when we arrived there.

Tape 7

00:35 **After you graduated from officer training where were you posted immediately then?**

Well, immediately I was posted to navy office and to HMAS Lonsdale. All I did at Lonsdale really was live there. That's all I was supposed to do, but I found out that I also had to

01:00 do officer duties like checking that the boilers were not over-heating, and ring the duty officer across the way if they were, and other duties in the 'WRANery'. But every day a car came and picked me up and took me to navy office. But I was only supposed to be there to get a bit of background on the work I'd been doing for the last three years or whatever, and then

01:30 I was to take a group of WRANS, I'd actually named them, Commander Newman who was the director of communications let me name them, older people and good operators, and I was to go to Adelaide River. But after that at Lonsdale I was to go to Harman to let another officer

02:00 go down and do what I had done, get some background knowledge, and then I was to go to Adelaide River and the appointment was actually made. But while I was still at Harman we learned that the Americans had to pull out of Adelaide River and go to Manus Island because the reception wasn't as good and they navy

02:30 wouldn't let the WRANS go to Manus Island. They'd let us go to Adelaide River, but not Manus Island.

Why wouldn't they let you go to Manus Island?

Well, it would've been overseas and that would've required a lot of discussion in those days I presume, and I mean, the Americans might've had to rough it. I don't know what sort of conditions were in Manus Island.

03:00 It might've required money to build quarters, anything. I really don't know, except that when the Americans went to Manus Island, of course they took most of their gear and that sort of thing from Adelaide River, but it was probably a combination of many things. Probably living quarters as well as the fact that the women's services hadn't been gazetted

03:30 to go overseas. We did have one WRAN who went up to Lord Louis Mountbatten's staff in Burma for a short time, and she got some weird disease and died immediately after the war, so they had their reasons.

What were your feelings about being denied that trip further north?

Well, I always wished I'd had the experience and

04:00 also, you know, if it was going to mean more traffic and more information getting through, and it would've. They probably listened to different frequencies to us at Harman. They would've done the Timor, Indian Ocean, Burma end that we, shipping that we wouldn't have been able

04:30 to hear. I don't know, but probably it would've widened by horizons.

So where did you end up then?

Well, I remained at Harman until the end of the war, and then

Sorry, how did the nature of what you were doing change now that you were an officer?

Well, very little really, very little because instead of

05:00 being at a listening post I was continually leading hand of the watch, and also I became day duties, but on call for night duties because there were other things around the establishment that you had to do. You had to be the duty officer about one in four which

05:30 required supervision at meals and that sort of thing. But I also spent the day going through the traffic and checking the various signals and things, but apart from a supervisory job things didn't alter all that much.

Were you in charge of women who you'd previously been equal to?

Yes.

Was that difficult?

06:00 Not really, no. They gave me a little smile when they'd salute me perhaps. No, by that time too there were a number of people, there'd been a lot of transferring go around. I think they felt there were a lot of experienced people at Harman and they didn't need quite as many as they had in the past so they let them have

06:30 a little stint at Moorabbin or Monterey, which meant that we got girls up that we didn't know. So that made it easier. Although I did get to know some of them down there. One I got to know was Eve Chauvel who was the granddaughter of our famous army general. But no, things didn't, because I had been in charge, see,

07:00 I'd been, I can't think of the ranks now. I'd been a leading telegraphist and I passed the exam for a petty officer telegraphist so I'd really been in charge on a different sort of scale, so it didn't really make that much difference. As long as you're fair to every one and no favours and that sort of thing, I think

07:30 it's what you have to be if you're in charge.

What occasions did you have to discipline anybody?

Oh, we got a group of girls. They weren't telegraphists, they were coders I think, or writers maybe. I don't know. They were from Townsville and by that time we were getting, I really don't know for sure and I should, we were getting a lot of

08:00 18 year old men, and I think they were conscripts or I don't think we had conscription. Anyhow, they were new entries and they'd passed the exams to be telegraphists and they were coming up to Harman for experience and they had to learn to touch type and they had to do a little bit of English and a bit of coding procedure, but we were gradually getting some RAN boys. Anyhow

08:30 this cottage of girls from Townsville, they invited men into their cottage. Well, that was taboo. It was only 6.00, 7.00 at night and they were just chatting and whatever, and anyhow the CO, you never knew where he was going to turn up. He'd be on rounds around the street, on rounds up at the station and

09:00 he, I happened to be the, no, I wasn't, it was Marion, it was another duty WRAN officer and he went around to the cottage and the men were immediately sent elsewhere, but because of that and because of the state that the war was in, in our favour, he immediately made me the

09:30 executive officer WRANS and I had to deal with the problem. But they're denied leave or the cottages are split. I don't think they ever lost any pay. They didn't receive enough to lose. No, that was, and apart from VJ [Victory over Japan] Day when they're supposed to, mean people reporting them.

10:00 They were really quite senior people. They turned their jackets inside out and decorated themselves with wattle. A bit mean to be reported for that at the end of the war when everyone else is celebrating, but apart from that there were no troubles really. People were generally very well disciplined and behaved, behaved well.

10:30 Apart from some of the army men, I think, they got up to some pranks. We followed them into Gibraltar. They were on their way to, must've been the victory march, and they wrecked the place. When they heard there were more coming in, the Victorious, they battened up all their windows and that sort of thing. That was a shame. They were chosen people and they really wrecked

11:00 Gibraltar.

What did it mean that you made executive officer of the WRANS?

Well it meant that I had all these women to look after for 10 and 6 a day. Well the executive officer, because by then we were training people, training people to look after other enemies probably, but

11:30 it meant that I was full-time in the guardhouse looking after the running, you know, organising travel for people on draft and accommodation for people coming in. Any discipline matters, just the running of the establishment from the women's point of view. And also at that time we had

12:00 the air force base at Fairbairn closed and we housed the remaining WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], and the remaining WAAAF, their main duty was to go out to Government House and help. One was Rear Admiral Bracegirdle's secretary and the others, all the men who gained DFCs [Distinguished Flying Cross] and honours during the war, they looked after and did all the paperwork

12:30 for the people being honoured for whatever they deserved an honour for during the war. And also we had WRANS going out to Mount Stromlo, the weather station there, and you had to arrange transport and bringing them back and all sorts of executive duties like that. So that's how I ended

13:00 up. But that was because I was asked to stay on. I mean I wasn't in a hurry to get out like some people were because my husband was away from home anyhow. So that was one reason. There weren't many people who stayed on after I left. Gradually, there was a group who stayed till the September, but gradually people were anxious to get out. They

13:30 had boyfriends, husbands, people who were coming home from, a lot of them coming home from

Singapore and prisoners of war. That was dreadful that 8th Division. People say, “Why didn’t they fight until the end? That’s what I did.” But it was the Japanese contaminated or had control of the water and no one would’ve survived, the civilians or the soldiers.

14:00 **Once you got your rank and you were an officer now in charge of a section, what secrets were you privy to that you weren’t privy to beforehand?**

None really, no. Except for the pregnant women’s file with nothing in it. I didn’t know they kept such a thing, along with all the

14:30 other files, their conduct and their movements and that sort of thing, but that one looked funny to me because they were all very, very honourable women really. That was something that didn’t happen in those days. But no, I don’t think there was anything that occurred in the navy.

15:00 I think when I was on the other side of the fence, I still knew both sides, but people never asked. They just accepted that at the Y hut they were all peculiar people and left it at that.

Why peculiar?

Well because they were doing something they wouldn’t talk about. Well neither would the station girls either really.

15:30 If you’re doing things for your own side you don’t advertise shipping movements or people moving from one ship to another, or certain ammunition being loaded that might look as if they’re going a long way. You don’t talk about that either. In the services you don’t talk about anything really that has to do with work,

16:00 secret service.

It must be difficult not to talk about work when you actually live there as well?

Yes. It was like that paragraph, it was strange really, all working at something you never talked about. No, it was odd. We never asked if someone was busy, or if you saw they were busy and you weren’t, but of course your eyes were on those

16:30 little numbers because if you moved too far away, particularly if it was a crowded frequency, you would miss. So you were occupied, you didn’t really see what was going on around you and you certainly didn’t ask anyone what frequency they were on, or were they busy, or what was the operator like. Most of the operators were terrible, particularly as the war went on. I think all their good operators must’ve been like

17:00 ours in 1942, had a watery grave. It’s hard to think about but towards the end they seemed quite erratic in their sending, but there may have been a reason, there may not have been.

What about how the volume of traffic changed towards the end of the war?

17:30 Well, all along some frequencies would be busy and others would not be very busy. I think that remained the same. I don’t know what they did after they, I can’t remember, they had to do something after they lost Truk broadcast because that would broadcast nonsense I understand, a lot of nonsense. But in the nonsense were messages

18:00 for the, it was like their bread and butter frequency for getting information through to the ships and when supplies would be coming and the nature of that. They had to go somewhere else, but I really don’t recollect. I would’ve known at the time but I don’t now.

At the time what did you think of the Japanese, what opinion did you have of them?

18:30 They were just another enemy I think. And in Australia before the war, we had a saying if something didn’t work, it must be made in Japan, and I think I thought probably wrongly that they couldn’t win the war because

19:00 they were Japanese because of what we’d been brought up with, you know. It was just a saying I think but people took it seriously. If it were made in Japan it wasn’t any good.

It was a bit of a rude shock coming then?

Yes, but I think the fall of Singapore gave everyone a shock. It filtered through in our press that the prisoners were badly treated and some of our

19:30 spies, some of our coast watches and those people that were put on islands, not many of them survived. But they got terrific information back at the risk of their own lives and I think it filtered through how our prisoners were treated and I don’t think a lot of people thought very much of the Japanese because of that, and that whole division, you know, the 8th

20:00 Division, all to be, not fire a shot most of them, and they hadn’t been properly trained, so my father said. You know, they were properly trained but not for long enough. So that was, but see the Japanese went straight for the water and what could they do but surrender?

It must've been a strange

20:30 **war for you in respect that the enemy for you was dots and dashes?**

Yes, yes, very, very strange, very strange. I was in touch with the enemy the whole war and yet the women, particularly some of those, some of them have got odd complaints.

21:00 Yes, some of them, the older ones, they could've done with a little bit of help along the way from the government but they never got it. Of course, in Melbourne we did have a farmer that gave

21:30 milk which hadn't been pasteurised to the Americans and the girls at Moorabbin, and they got that awful disease you get from unpasteurised milk. We didn't lose any girls but the Americans lost some men and the girls, their teeth were always yellow and they did have problems for a long time afterwards. But no, it was strange

22:00 that you were in touch with the enemy and yet you couldn't do anything about it. He was there, or she. I don't think there were many she's, he's.

Yeah, you must've had a lot more contact with the enemy than a lot of the men?

A lot of the men, yes. We were in contact the whole time and see, some of the girls were at it for longer than I was, so it really was a

22:30 long haul. I had a bit of relief. The watch keeping was, but then watch keeping in any department in the navy is hard. Doesn't matter who they are, coders or writers or whoever keeps watch. You can sleep, you can go to sleep, I can still go to sleep anytime of day and I never sleep right through the night. I usually wake at 3.00 in the morning and have a little stroll

23:00 and go back to bed and I do sleep, but a lot of them don't. Yes, it is a funny thought when you think about it.

What do you think the male ordinary sailors and officers thought of you as an officer?

Well, I had so little contact with them. My main contact was with women because the station really,

23:30 apart from the executive officer and the two paymasters and the Americans, we had the greatest respect from them, and even today they put us in front of the navy at the Anzac Day march. Not that I'm ever keen to march on Anzac Day and I'm sorry they let the women in, but having done it, well, you've got to support them. But

24:00 no, anywhere I've been we haven't had anything but the greatest respect. And part of my job when I was executive officer WRANS, we got a new intake of these farm boys, bank boys, whoever, 18 year olds, and I was teaching them touch typing and the CO came in

24:30 one day. One of them was smoking, "Who gave these men permission to smoke?" "I did sir," but they supported me, the boys anyhow. All the COs said then they're not to smoke anywhere on the station. This was an instructional hall right away from everything, but anyhow they didn't smoke any more. But it was funny, when we went to England my husband was doing

25:00 a long L course at Collingwood. We were at a dinner one night and there were three young, I don't know whether they were officers then or not, but they were certainly in training. They must've been officers because it was an officers' function, and they looked over at me and smiled and I thought, you know, who could they be? I don't know them. But they came over and spoke later. They were three of these boys I'd had in

25:30 the instruction hall. They'd decided to take the navy on, and at that time the only training they could do was in England although they were RAN, and the CO of course, he was such a marvellous man. I think he had nothing but respect for the WRANS, particularly the Harman WRANS, but I don't know, I can't speak for

26:00 them anywhere else.

What social functions were open to you as an officer? Sorry, what social entertainment and so forth was open to you as an officer?

Well, we were quite, anything that occurred at Government House we were always invited to. Not much else really. The odd weddings. There was not much time for social outings.

26:30 Occasionally we'd go in to dinner, some of us, in Queanbeyan because it was closer and easier to get home from. Occasionally the other establishments like the air force if they were having a special dinner or Duntroon, they would invite us and we would invite them, although we didn't have a lot of room in our wardroom to invite many people, but really there was not much

27:00 social activity. It was all work.

How did you personally celebrate the end of the war with Japan?

Well people often, and I've often thought myself when I see all these photographs of tickertape out, we didn't celebrate it. At that time it was so very busy because we weren't

27:30 sure that some of the ships had surrendered, because they didn't believe apparently that there had been a surrender. And I suppose if you're miles out in the Pacific or whatever, you know, people can have a joke with you. And also as I say, immediately after the war we were the only communicators in the country with the outside world and we had all this after the war

28:00 reorganisation. And what strikes me, I'd go over to Molonglo on night rounds and I'd see the girls and they'd be surrounded with piles and piles or automatic Morse tapes and they were all names of prisoners of war waiting for instructions for relief. So that really, you join up, you enlist for the duration and six months afterwards

28:30 and it takes all that for your war to finish. So I really don't remember celebrating at all the end of the war. I think there was a garden party at Government House shortly afterwards and I was detailed to go. You got invitations but the invitations went to the CO and he'd

29:00 detail who'd go and that was I think, to celebrate the end of the war. And then when I was due to leave Harman, Rear Admiral Bracegirdle who was a wonderful man, had a son in the navy, he was the aide-de-camp to the governor general and he gave me a farewell party in the cottage at Yarralumla and

29:30 there was quite a gathering of the officers and the WRANS, and by that time other people were beginning to come into Harman to take over from the WRANS. But I really don't remember a particular celebration.

What about much later on your part in the victory parade?

30:00 Yes, I remember going up, I didn't take part in it. I was there for it.

I thought you said to us you'd led the WRANS?

Oh that was at Canberra.

Yes.

Oh, well on the 10th of June, 1946 every big city in the Commonwealth celebrated the end of the war and there was

30:30 a victory parade like all the state capitals in Australia, Canada, England, wherever, and I had the honour of leading the victory parade in the women's section in Canberra, and that was as I say, the 10th of June throughout the Commonwealth. But apart from that, I got in each of the coaches

31:00 that had taken the girls into the parade and I said goodbye to them because I wouldn't get another chance probably. I'd be leaving in about two or three weeks from then, myself. They didn't know that at the time, but I just said farewell and thanked them for the day and that was that. But they were a lot of, at the end of the war there were a lot of girls who had turned 18 waiting

31:30 to join the navy and the navy accepted them, but they weren't really war time WRANS, they were peace time WRANS.

What did you feel marching at the head of all those women through the crowds?

Well I felt very honoured and I couldn't understand why, because there were nurses in Canberra with the army who had been overseas and I thought that they should've

32:00 led the march, but the navy for some reason was given that position and that was that. So I just did what I was told. And there was one other officer, the one that, the assistant, Betty Greenaway, never heard of Betty? She did send me, to England, pictures of the victory parade and a few others because during the war we couldn't take photographs.

32:30 The only photographs that I have there were taken by the navy. They were the only ones allowed. No one was allowed to take a photograph of anything in the establishment.

Was it hard to say goodbye to some of those girls?

Well it was, yes. Although most of the ones that I knew and had served with by that time had left. See, they started leaving and being replaced

33:00 by men. We did have men coming back when all the ships came in. We did have some men coming back and gradually as they came back, the girls that had compassionate reasons went first. So really from August the 15th, 1945 they started going, and there were some left. There was a particular chosen few

33:30 that stayed on until the September but most of them were new younger girls and I didn't know them. I've got one very good friend here, she's in Tasmania at the moment, who's now at Sans Souci and she said, "I only ever remember you as an officer," and she was one I thought would've done,

34:00 but she doesn't, so the personnel were changing. And the wardroom, nearly all the officers had left the wardroom except Betty Greenaway and myself and the nursing sister. We were the only three left when I left. All the others were men, and they were wonderful. I gave a little party myself before I left

34:30 and you're only allowed to put so much liquor a month on your liquor bill, so they all bought liquor for me, to give me their ration tickets for liquor or whatever they were called, and they offered all sorts of help which I thought was wonderful, at the end. Of course, I had to do many things, go in and get a tax clearance from the tax office

35:00 and no transport, and if they had a car they saw to it that I got there. No, I have found the navy and the personnel that I've dealt with wonderful. No problems whatsoever, and a fine body of women, the WRANS were. Well educated and they did a good job.

Was there any possibility or ambition on your part to stay in

35:30 **the navy?**

Well, the navy, we were just there for the war time. The navy at that stage hadn't thought of, no one ever thought they'd have women in the peace time navy and I mean, no, I left. I was on the reserve. I was on the reserve in case, in Melbourne, I joined the naval reserve in case we were needed again. But

36:00 no, no one ever thought that there would be peace time navy for women. See, that was 1946 they were disbanded and they reformed in 1952, but no, that was over and done with we all hoped.

Why did you decide to go back to Britain with your husband rather than him come to Australia

36:30 **here with you?**

Well, we considered that because he was offered a very good position with [Radio] 2CA in Canberra, but he had been a career naval person. His time was up when he was a chief petty officer in 1939 and he had a very good position. It was at an air force base but as a civilian

37:00 in radio and he accepted that and was due to leave the navy, and that was 1939 when all this problem was going on, early '39 and war broke out in the September of course, and the navy requested him not to go. So he stayed on and got caught up with the war of course, and

37:30 then he became an officer and it would've meant giving up superannuation and a number of things like that, but we did consider it.

What was it like being on a ship and what was your role with all these war brides that were on it?

Nothing really except in a

38:00 voluntary capacity. The navy took two from each of the nursing services, army, navy and air force and they took two officers from each of the services to help with the administration, and I was actually only a volunteer. Volunteers were needed with the naval people

38:30 to help with the war brides.

What was the nature of that help?

Well the nature of it was they had a lot of luggage. I don't know where it was stored. There was a big area where it was stored and it was wired off like all the As, Bs, Cs and Ds and people could go to their luggage certain hours during the day and they needed supervision

39:00 and help at that time. So that was one of my main jobs every day, helping with the, helping supervise the luggage because a lot of them were very slow at undoing things and they were only given a certain time. And the other one was if people were missing for meals, they each had a place with their name for the meal table,

39:30 and just helping check that the people that didn't come to meals were all right, etcetera, etcetera, but they were the main things. And then when we were in shore, when they were at Colombo they had the chance to go to Kandy for the day and there again just helping, make sure that everyone who wanted to go got there and got back, just things like that. But I wasn't

40:00 officially one of the people on the ship's books and they only took passage, they couldn't come back within two years. They had to stay over there for two years and then find their own way back, but it was just a little gesture that some of them took up.

You said that in the monsoonal storm you lost a lot of babies, what do you mean by that?

Well a lot of the women were pregnant and

40:30 these monsoons in the Indian Ocean, apparently they come down the Western Australian coast and come around the corner at Albany there and they've got a three to four day cycle. Well when we left Sydney and got to Wilson's Promontory we turned into the full strength of one of these.

And how did that affect the pregnant women then?

Well,

41:00 we didn't really know for sure how anyone, they survived that all right and we should've been to the other end before another one came. But off Adelaide an American ship lost its rudder and we had to go around and around it all one night until help came from South Australia, Adelaide or Victor Harbour or somewhere there, and then that

41:30 made us right in the middle of the [Great Australian] Bight, we struck another monsoon. But no, a lot of the pregnant women had to be taken off in Fremantle or attended to.

They had miscarriages?

Yes, yes, apparently. Yes, that was unfortunate because the Indian Ocean was rough but after that it was as calm as could be.

Tape 8

00:31 **Pat, how long did you spend living overseas?**

All told be about, I was there from 1946 to 1948 roughly and then I was back there in '51 to '59. So about eight or nine years.

What kind of work were you doing there?

Well, I was teaching. Not

01:00 the first period. When I went over there first they were so short of teachers that anyone who'd been an officer in the services was given an 18 months course which was very, very good really. But I didn't use it because soon after that we came back to Australia to Melbourne, and while I was in Melbourne I did do some work at Felton Grimwade and Bickford. They were pharmaceutical

01:30 suppliers, because my uncle was a chemist and they were short staffed, so I did some work there. But when I went back to England I had a position to go to teaching and then we got a move to Northern Ireland and the British weren't allowed work in Northern Ireland because you took jobs from the Irish, so I did some voluntary work in the school in Londonderry. And then when I came back to England

02:00 I got an appointment at St John's College Southsea and I taught there for four and a half, five years. And then when I came back out here I did my, well I don't know what they call it, you're trained a two year teacher and by that time they'd brought in three years training which sent all the men out of teaching which was a tragedy.

02:30 So I then, through Armidale and the Macquarie University, I graduated as a four year trained teacher and then I taught right up until 19, oh dear, 19 when? '85, 1985.

What do you think your role

03:00 **was in the Australian war effort?**

Replacing a man so that men were available to, I think that was generally accepted that's what the women did. They replaced a man from the shore establishments so that they could go to sea.

03:30 And really we were so short of everything during the war. You know, all those men in the 8th Division, young men lost to Australia at that time, and then we had all the people that went over to the Middle East, the campaigns in North Africa, and then we had all the people that joined the air force and were sent over to help the RAF [Royal Air Force], R A F.

04:00 It didn't seem to matter into which area of life in Australia, there were shortages. Everyone was doing something and that was what we were led to believe, our main role, and that's how I looked on it. If Australia couldn't communicate with the ships at sea or the rest of the world,

04:30 it's the biggest radio station in the southern hemisphere and still is, plays a very vital role today in our communications. That was the role. I mean it meant that men coming due for shore leave perhaps didn't get as much shore leave as they would've done, but then because of the shortages there would've been one sea appointment after another anyhow.

05:00 But we lost so many trained people who'd trained, and it does take years really to train good communicators. We were just so short of them in 1942, that was what they did. They took in sufficient WRANS who weren't lost to the service. I mean most of them served until the end of the war. There was no loss

05:30 through ships going down and that sort of thing. But that's the role that I think we played, and it wasn't

easy. I mean I left school at 18, I just turned 18 soon after I left school and six years later, it's a long time out of your life from when you're 18 till you're 26 when everything was war, either as a civilian

06:00 doing voluntary work or as part of the navy. So you know, all your peers have got their trousseaus together and perhaps started life, those that were lucky enough, but it just makes your life, what you plan for your life, it's so much different. I married in January 1946

06:32 and I turned 26 on the 31st of December, so you know, it's not just the years you're in the navy, it's the years that led up, either the training for WESCs or life at war. We've got it now, we've had it for 12 months and we're all fed up. It hasn't affected us

07:00 very much as yet, but who knows? We hope not.

Do you have any regrets about your service?

None at all, no, no. I got wonderful experiences, I got wonderful training. I met friends that I've had for life. No, I have no regrets at all.

07:30 Life in Canberra in the war years, I've seen Canberra change from a no lake city to a city with a lovely lake. I've also seen it grow, badly in some areas but generally it's grown into a lovely city. The experience of living there and seeing what goes on in diplomatic circles, all the rest of it. There are a few privileges there that other

08:00 people don't get and the same with us in the navy. We got invitations we wouldn't have got otherwise.

What skills do you think you learned during those war years in what you were doing that have served you well in your subsequent life?

I didn't get what?

What skills did you learn?

Oh skills. Well,

08:30 mixing with different people, different people from different states, learning about different states. We have reunions regularly in other states which we subsidise and raise money for which is the naval people in civilian life to have the opportunity of coming to, say, New South Wales which they wouldn't have done otherwise.

09:00 It's broadened my outlook in many ways because I married and went overseas. That was a wonderful experience and a wonderful opportunity achieved in many odd ways, but nevertheless, achieved. I can't think of anything else in the way of skills.

09:30 **Your father served in the First World War, did you feel you were part of a service tradition by serving yourself?**

Well, a little bit I think because the First World War families, the men came back from the First World War, married, and within 20 years there's another war. That ended in 1919 and in 1939

10:00 the Second World War broke out, so many of the children born to the First World War men were then of an age when they'd be ready for the Second World War at some stage, but we didn't do 'warry' things between the wars. My father was certainly in the militia between the wars but that didn't affect us except one night a week or one night

10:30 a month or something, he'd go off to some drill hall in uniform. But I didn't think of that until the war actually broke out. So many of the men had fathers who also fought in the First World War which was rather sad, with a Depression in between which was not a happy era in Australia's

11:00 history I feel, particularly the Depression. But I didn't feel, my mother hated war because she didn't work, she was a musician, but she continually met the troop trains. They lived in Junee, her family, and the troop trains would stop there for comforts when they were going between the states

11:30 returning men apparently, from the First World War when they were wounded. And she also used to go and play in the hospitals and the doctors, when they were taking the bodies out dead they would say, "Keep playing, don't stop playing," and I think mother hated war. She hated the sight of uniform, but when war came she became an ambulance driver, a voluntary ambulance driver.

12:00 But I don't think it was a family tradition to want to be at war. It was just how history played its part.

When you were living in England particularly, what evidence did you see of the bombing and the damage?

Everywhere, everywhere. When we arrived in England, Plymouth Sound which is this beautiful sound leading up

12:30 to Plymouth, we were met by the mayor of Plymouth and as we got nearer the whole place was just one heap of rubble. All the wharves had gone, it was really brought home to you what the bombing had

done, and then of course when you got to London, my husband's people lived in Ermine Street, Lewisham, and the doodle bugs [V1 rocket-powered unguided missile],

13:00 houses on this side of the street were standing but pretty rickety, but there might be two or three houses missing there and then two or three. The doodle bugs seemed to hop around but everywhere you looked there was bomb damage. And in Portsmouth the Guild Hall had gone, many of the housing

13:30 streets and estates were all razed to the ground and people had temporary accommodation on the outskirts. The rationing was worse than during the war because American aid had stopped. They had to stop that because of the expense. No, everything was very much a devastated area.

14:00 But then my husband had a short appointment in Cologne in Germany and we had friends from Australia living at the Australian Embassy there which was not in Bonn, it was, the residences were in Cologne and they built a new area for them called, it meant the people's area, and that was even

14:30 worse. People were living down in basements of the area in Cologne, but it didn't matter where you travelled it was the same throughout Europe. London was the sad one, but they seemed to pull themselves together and everyone on their annual holidays went

15:00 voluntarily and worked in agricultural camps and dug vegetables and did all that sort of thing, and the schools were the first things that were put in order. The children were very well looked after which is right of course, particularly the little ones.

You mentioned earlier that

15:30 **Anzac Day has not played a huge role in your life. Can you tell us why?**

I think what I mean was I'm not really keen on the women's services taking part in Anzac Day. It's just that their role I think was a very short one,

16:00 apart from the nurses. They've been in every war since the Boer War. But apart from the nurses the women's role as auxiliary services, not like the present roles, I think it belongs to the men. And when we were invited to march we considered that and I think 13 marched the very first time.

16:30 But they sort of expect it of us and having invited us to do so and having placed us in a prominent position in the march, you feel that you have to respond, which we do but it was only a handful really that marched. And the WRANS were the only service that had peace time WRANS. They were

17:00 reformed in 1952 so we have post-war WRANS in our WRANS Association, but the army don't. Although they were reformed they became known as WRAAC [Women's Royal Australian Army Corps], not as Australian Women's Army Service, AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] as they were during the war. So the AWAS have no post-war AWAS. They've got a different service called the WRAAC, and the air force also have a different service.

17:30 And I don't believe in people who weren't in campaigns or in war service should be marching on Anzac Day. And we do have people who think that because they're in a WRANS Association or some other association, and I don't think the Land Army should be marching. They were unfortunately called army, but I mean they've got nothing to do with the sort of, I mean they did a wonderful

18:00 job, but they've got nothing to do with the campaigns that the men took part in, and I think the march is getting far too long because of all these extra people that are in it. But that's the only reason. Anzac Day itself I think is a wonderful tradition and we should remember because it was not an easy thing for the men who took off from this country in the earlier campaigns,

18:30 and there are some wonderful heroes amongst army, navy and air force. But I'm just not keen on the women. The nurses, yes. There is a medal board being produced by Christie's. It's being launched in State Parliament House on the 7th of June and the women have gained campaign medals in the Boer War, the First World War, the Second World War and the

19:00 wars, Korean, Vietnam, but they've all been nurses. The AWAS had a few nursing aids, I forget what they're called, VADs. But those that deserve the medal board are those that are actually enlisted ex-service women and particularly the nurses. But that's the only reason. Anzac Day,

19:30 I think it would be a shame if it weren't celebrated each year and people remembered, but I'm not so keen on seeing the women there. I probably will be there, but, if I can still walk by then.

What doors do you think serving in the Second World War

20:00 **opened for women?**

They became very independent, both during the war and afterwards, and I think they learned skills that they wouldn't have learned without having served in the war years. A naval stewardess and a naval cook, if you ever need a cook

20:30 or a stewardess and she's been trained in the navy, employ her because their training was wonderful. I can't think, most of the other categories, the VADs or the sick berth attendants they were called, they

received very good training too. The dental nurses and the sick berth attendants, they're virtually nurses, but that's

21:00 what they used to call them in the navy. I'm not sure what they call them now, but they did receive very good training first before they let them into the wards at Flinders Naval Depot and then when they left the wards and went elsewhere. I can't think of any others. Most of the transport drivers were already drivers and they had good experience meeting people and driving important people around

21:30 from place to place. The writers, writers were stenographers, clerks, anything that you couldn't give a name to you called them a writer. All sorts of people were writers. Even the people in fingerprinting were called writers, but that was a bit of camouflage. But no, I think that their training

22:00 and the discipline too, although it wasn't hard discipline, you know, you learn to think of other people, learn to live with other people. If you didn't, you didn't fit in, but most people seemed to fit in and accept it, and they had some experience of travel. Friends I had went up in Cairns, went up to Townsville, Brisbane,

22:30 Western Australia which they probably wouldn't have done in those years otherwise, because we didn't travel around much when we were growing up with the Depression on and another war looming. So my life from 1939 to 1959 was all 'warry', war experiences or rumours

23:00 of war or dreadful situations around the world.

How involved have you been in reunions?

How often?

How involved have you become in reunions?

Quite involved, yes. I was treasurer for a big Sydney reunion which took place in our bicentennial year and it was a big international reunion. We

23:30 fund raised for that for three years because in order to get a venue in Sydney, or venues in Sydney in our bicentenary year you had to make bookings very early. And in those days it was not easy to get a venue big enough for the number we had. The Entertainment Centre wasn't there. We ended up at the AJC [Australian Jockey Club] at Randwick which was wonderful,

24:00 very well organised and a lovely meal, that sort of thing. We had people come from America, some of the WRANS that had married Americans, come from New Zealand, from England, and that was a great success. We had a week of taking them down the south coast, breakfast at the zoo which was a new venue in those days, harbour cruises and of course

24:30 our dinner which was the main event, and the Anzac Day march. We had a lot of people, and the Anzac Day venue was a venue in King Street. I don't know whether that's still there, but I think any venue on Anzac Day is a bit chaotic, and that was chaotic that one. But nevertheless, they did their best. We have a reunion every year and a church service every year.

25:00 And what else do we have? That's about it, a reunion and a church service. And then I'm on the council of ex-servicewomen, that's all ex-service women and we do things, the government gave us the land and we built eight villas in the war veterans' home for ladies who couldn't get their own homes, and when they die

25:30 we find other people that need accommodation. We paid for the memorial to women in Canberra outside the War Memorial. We paid for the memorial in Jessie Street Gardens. You've probably never seen that. Gateway Park down at Circular Quay, there's a lovely memorial there to pioneer women and ex-service women

26:00 and other memorials too in that little park. We do things like that generally for, we're a bit of a lobby group too to try and get help for people that are sick, and that are over 85 and having a hard time. We're not having much success but we try. No, the

26:30 reunions keep us together.

I've just got one more question for you Pat. If you had a message for Australians watching this in the future, be it five or 50 years time, what would you say to them about serving your country?

You mean all Australians? I would say your country is the

27:00 most important place in which your home or for you your habitat is, and that if it's threatened well then you find the best way you can to serve it. If you've got someone at Sydney Heads and they're an enemy what do you do? Do you let them come or do you fight for your

27:30 freedom and your country, and I would say that in every case the motto of the RSL [Returned and Services League], eternal vigilance, is important throughout anyone's life, especially where defence is concerned and also for any facet of life. But if you're threatened and you're called up to serve, well then

do it to the best of your ability.

28:00 That would be my message, eternal vigilance.

INTERVIEW ENDS