Australians at War Film Archive

Helen Kenny (Frizz) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 28th March 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1702

Tape 1

00:36 **Helen, remember what I'm going to ask you to do now is to give me your summary of your life please? Off you go please.**

Well my name is Helen Kenny. I was Helen Frizell, F R I Z E L L, and I was born in Neutral Bay on March the 21st, 1921, and when I was a child we

01:00 moved to Burwood where I grew up, and my father was a doctor and he went to Cambridge when I was a baby to do one of the first diplomas in radiology, came back and we lived there and all my friends were around there. I went to Meriden Church of England Girls Grammar School. Hopeless at maths, good at English and history. Had to do Latin to matriculate,

01:30 Did the leaving. Not much good at sport, I used to win the sack race, but I filled the school magazine because you got a point for your house if you won something at sport or something. So I used to pour out rather turgid verse and stories and I got a lot of points by writing the school magazine. Went to Sydney University at the beginning of 1939 and did Arts, and there were

02:00 4,000 students in the whole of the university then and I believe there are 4,000 on the staff now, and I did English, history, anthropology, one year of Latin which was compulsory and one year of geography but it got too mathematical for me, and I was doing English honours and the war was on and the university was cutting up, so we finished at university at the end of

02:30 1941. I'd finished a BA [Bachelor of Arts] and they suddenly announced you'd have to do an extra year to get your honours and I'd had my name down to go into the army or something and they sent for me, wrote to me in '41 and I was called up in March '42 two days after my 21st birthday and I was put in a cipher unit

03:00 and then I eventually ended up at Central Bureau where I was until the end of 1945 and then in '46 I ran around the newspaper offices trying to get in. Eventually the Women's Weekly took me. I was there for a long while and then I went to Woman's Day and then I went to the Herald. I got a US Leader grant for journalism in '65 and went to the States with a group of Pacific

03:30 women journalists. I came back and I tried the Herald and Pringle, the editor was there. He'd been the editor on the Observer, and he tried me out on the news column and I stayed there until I retired. I was doing the column and then I was the film critic and then the literary editor had a stroke and I happened to be standing in for him, so I did that until, you had, you know, had to do

04:00 everything except economics and mathematics. They didn't let me near that. And then I retired and my husband and I travelled and went to the Public Records Office in Kew and he was a widow and he'd been a journalist in Queensland, and he'd been in charge of the Telegraph Bureau in Canberra but they didn't call them a bureau then. So here I am with files full of Central Bureau and history and books and people say, "Helen,

04:30 what is going to happen to it?" And I say, "Well, the Mitchell Library as far I'm concerned if no else on wants it, or archives."

That's wonderful. OK, we've got that summary, now we'll go back right from the very start and bring you all the way forward again.

All right.

What are your earliest memories?

My earliest memories are before my dear sister Shirley was born,

05:00 some years after I because my father had been to England, been away, and I can remember walking around the house, framework of the house in Burwood which was part of a subdivision of quite a grand

home, which was later a private hospital and now demolished, and I can remember the day reading came to me like that, like falling on the road to Damascus. My family were great readers and story tellers and

05:30 so I went out to the letter box and there was something in there. Fairies at the bottom of garden which sounds strange now, and I went into my mother and it all came out. So I was very brilliant at reading but I could hardly add up two and two but they advanced me. And I was a fairly sick child, I had some kidney trouble and at Meriden they were very good and I had coaching in maths but it didn't really help, but the people I went to school

06:00 with I still retained friendship.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Only one sister.

And do you remember your father being absent?

Well, he started up, I can remember he was away and he came back and my mother said he was one of the first to go to Cambridge and get a degree in radiology, diploma, but he came back and I can remember he started up in Macquarie

06:30 Street in the AMA building with great big machinery, but the Depression came and he couldn't keep going. So he had to become a GP and in the end he, I mean his certificate was signed by Rutherford and it was a shame, but he didn't complain about it, and so he went and then he became the school medical service spending all the term away going to country schools and then eventually when he retired, the

07:00 Commonwealth Medical Service. My sister's a physio, everyone in the family had been doctors or nursing sisters and I think I couldn't have. When they started carving up bullocks our in physiology I quit.

Apart from your father having to close down his radiology practice, did the Depression affect your family in any way?

It did. Everyone lived very…my

07:30 father had a car because he was a doctor, we had a maid, Lily or Maudie. My father kept the books, my mother answered the telephone. Lily would do the cooking and most of the house, but there was no secretary, as when you go to the group doctors now. So you kept your own books and so on, and he did that for some years

08:00 and the practice wasn't going very well because he (squatted? UNCLEAR). There were other friends of his in the district so he went to the country quite a lot.

Where was his practice, his GP practice?

In our home. Subdivided a bit of the front verandah and one of the bedrooms and patients used to go there, and we'd go on our rounds with Dad. His father

08:30 came from Northern Ireland and he was a doctor, Tom Frizell, and he came out in the 1880s to Cossack near Roebourne on the Western Australian coast. He was the only government doctor in the north west before Broome, went up to Singapore and married my grandmother who was an English nurse, brought her back to this godforsaken place and every time I hear of a cyclone hitting the Pilbara—and she died when I was nine—but she was terrified of storms and used to shut,

09:00 I don't wonder. So he died before I was born and he had six sons and the eldest was a doctor who was killed at Paschendale. My mother's brother was in the army, two of her brothers, and he died of pneumonic flu back in London a month after the war ended, and I'm called Leslie, L E S L I E, after him. And the house was full of books

09:30 and my grandmother said, "We hope Helen develops a taste for good literature," and they put me to Dickens when I was about seven. It was a bit hard for me. And my mother also scribbled and Shirley was always the vet looking after the dog and the cat. But people came to the door selling shoe laces and playing

10:00 trombones in the street and we were always told if anyone came to the door to tell Mum immediately and sit out and we'd talk, and fine returned men on their way to the west, walking to the west and we'd make huge cups of tea and give them plates of sandwiches to get them going. My friend Lillian who rang this morning, her father was a clergyman at Lidcombe and he would, his wife was always saying, "What's happened to

10:30 that jumper, Oswald?" And Oswald would have given it off his back. They came through.

So there were quite a lot of these itinerants moving through?

Well, they weren't really. I mean my uncle was out of a job, he was an Anzac at Lone Pine, but he'd been on the land managing a property but married an English bride and brought her here with a baby when she was 19 and Dalgety's, his firm, said, "Well, we don't take married men back." So he had to give up

the

11:00 land which he loved and eventually became, but he was out of work but never let on, and he and his Anzac mates used to meet in town. I think they formed the (McCawber? UNCLEAR) club, something would turn up. They had a hard time and they never grizzled. But we never went, we had pictures of my dead uncles, my parents, we didn't read war books;

11:30 we didn't go to Anzac Day except at school things, because the war had been to end war and there was never going to be another one.

What was it like going on rounds with your father as a GP?

Well, he had an old Essex car with running boards and he would drive around Concord and Burwood and then Shirley and I would sit in the car and he'd go into the house and see the patient and some of them

12:00 we got to know, or they'd come to the house. But he had trained in the, I won't get into this, otherwise it's his story, isn't it?

Well you can elaborate a bit if you want?

He left school, his father died and he wanted to be a doctor but he hadn't done Latin. So he got a job in Silver Star Starch for two and six a week and after a year he thought, "Well now night school". So he went to night school and then got

12:30 to Sydney University and his crowd wasn't allowed to enlist until the end of the war and then Australia sent a British ship called the Encounter to Samoa with a team of doctors and interpreters who were dropped off in the islands where the natives were just dying of pneumonic flu and Dad said all they had to give them was aspirin and so he had that. The first book I was ever

13:00 given when I was six was Ballantyne's The Coral Island, and I've always wanted to see Western Samoa but I haven't.

At what age did you start school?

Six, but I could read then.

And what are your memories of school?

Well Meriden School, they had what was called a bungalow. The headmistress, a Miss Avery, wore a black gown and we wore tunics

13:30 and little girls wore socks but then we were in black stockings, surge tunics, white blouse, and it was so damned hot and we were in this, they called it the bungalow, which was subdivided. That was our school hall, we didn't have one, and we sat at wooden desks and we began writing with ink at an early age. I was covered with it; I wasn't very…my people used to say, "We don't like having lunch with you Helen because

14:00 your hard boiled eggs turn blue," but ballpoint pens were the best things that ever came in and the girls in my class, they were an interesting intelligent crowd. One became Australia's first radio engineer and worked for the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] before we had television here. Others were mainly nursing sisters, banks, social workers and one became, some

14:30 went to the university and did science but there were only about 13 in our leaving class. Our teachers were, some were qualified, some weren't. They were in the Depression having a hard time of it too. Prayers every morning and until a new…the main block was an old house in Strathfield which my father had known the people who lived there and they tacked

15:00 bits on to it and now it's quite good, but we had two tennis courts. We had no stage and for the stage for school concerts they'd push tables together, put up rings and a few curtains. But we had very good English teachers and I wasn't very good at languages. I didn't end up in the linguistics part of the Central Bureau.

Given that you were obviously quite a gifted child at reading, how did school suit you in that respect?

15:30 Well I had to repeat a year or so because of maths and because I was sick and missed quite a bit. But they thought bright child, Helen. Everyone else would be cat sat on the mat, and I'd be, you know. But reading was no trouble and I loved listening to stories, I loved geography and French. When I went to France it didn't help very much that I knew all the verbs that went with H. I could read the

16:00 script but I couldn't talk it.

Was it a strict school?

Yes. Never any caning or anything like that, but you would be kept in to write many lines for talking in class, and my mother who'd been to a small school in the western suburbs had a trick and told me that if you tied two pens together, if you had 100 lines to write if you tied to pens together and wrote

16:30 that would cut the time. She was a very amusing pretty woman. There she is up there.

And what did you do for fun?

We flew kites. There was a paddock just up the road in Burwood. You had to make your own kites then out of brown paper and balsa. I wasn't an expert at that. We went swimming in the surf. My father was a keen surfer and he would drive, we'd go to

17:00 Cronulla or Maroubra, anywhere into the surf. Take your mark on the beach, stay between the flags, get out beyond the dumpers, don't stand there. I wasn't a particularly good swimmer but I loved the surf. Consequently years of, I didn't sunbake but I was in the surf three times a day, consequently now a lot of fair skin, Irish descent, zap zap.

17:30 **What about special friends you had at school?**

Well, one of them rang me this morning and I've still got three or four left who really stand by you if there's any, we ring up and help one another, and I've got some army friends. I didn't make so many at the university because it was, the fellows were disappearing going to the Middle East or New Guinea and the university was very politically

18:00 divided. Yes, what?

What sort of things did you do for a treat?

Well, because of polio my father was very protective of us and very wisely. So we were never allowed to drink unboiled milk until I left school. Horrible with skin on the top, and we took milk bottles to school, medicine bottles with corks in them and by lunch time the other girls could go and get, well ice chests, no

18:30 refrigerators. We went swimming, we went horse riding. Sydney was smaller, you could get out. We had relatives out at Camden and we learnt to ride there and we played. We played in our own back yard which was quite big. We climbed trees which was lovely and the other children were much more athletic and when I hadn't been well I would try to keep them by being up the tree with them, running off,

19:00 and I would try to tell serial stories to keep them there but they would escape in the end. We'd go up to the Blue Mountains and we'd be lent a cottage there and other children would run down these paths. "Helen, you stay with granny," and mountain mists. I hated the mountains. I've got to like them again, and we'd go out and pick mountain devils and pipe cleaners to make little objects out of them, not very good at it.

19:30 But Sydney was small and it was lovely and it was wrecked in the 1960s by all these lovely arcades being pulled down. We didn't go to picture shows until I was about 14. We played tennis on people's courts, Strathfield. We didn't have a court but many people did and we'd play all day at the weekend and then we'd go and have salads and showers

20:00 in the house. We had dances. When I left school we had dances in one another's houses. We'd take up the carpet and put borax on the floor and wind up the gramophone; or had something called a pick-up, go into town and there were a couple of places to go. But I really, when the time came, in the army dancing was the thing. I was a moderate dancer but you know.

20:30 **What do you mean by putting borax on the floor?**

Borax was like candle grease. It was to make the floor polishy and then you'd scatter this stuff on the floor and then you'd put a pair of slippers on or a soft mat and you'd skate around the floor to get a nice polish on. See, they're polished boards, they're jarrah, and we had this dining room and someone outside, my sister said she often had to look after the gramophone, but

21:00 we had no alcohol. There might be a claret cup when we left school. No alcohol at all. We had fruit cups and people, wine wasn't available. My parents would have a sherry before dinner and after I left school we would go out and we would have sauterne which was very sweet and I didn't like it. The word chardonnay had not been heard of,

21:30 nor had merlot, and my father would have a beer and sometimes we would have a shandy but if we went to friends, my mother's friends for afternoon tea, I've got a picture of myself in the '50s with Peter George on his mother's lap and we're all around there wearing hats and I was, you know, I was late 20s then all sitting up like Jackie having lovely

22:00 homemade sponge cakes. I've never been very good at them, I adore them, and beautiful sandwiches and lovely homemade things and the phrase, bought cakes, I'd heard it said dismissively, "Oh, they buy bought cake, they have bought cakes." We could tell the difference. I've got a bought bun for you two later.

What was the nature of the illness that you had as a child?

I had kidney trouble called pyelitis, which

22:30 you know, it sort of kept you in bed a lot and they gave you huge big blue pills to swallow which I

couldn't get down. My mother used to, kindly, she had two teaspoon fulls of golden syrup or jam with a pill hidden in one and I could always tell. I'd get it down there and never mind. I mean polio was terrible and the greatest thing was in the '50s when, 'cause I knew quite a few people affected by it.

23:00 My sister worked with polio patients and TB patients.

And you made a recovery from that illness?

Yes, fortunately. I was a weak small child and by the time I was in my teens I got large.

What sort of high school student were you?

Well, we didn't call it high school. The forms were given different names. They were kindergarten and went 2A, 2B,

23:30 etcetera up to 6A. The intermediate was 5A. >I liked studying, I liked it and I used to get very annoyed when some of the kids would muck up on the teacher who was quite interesting but let the class get away from her. She'd travelled and she'd been in Germany and she could be easily diverted by the girls who hadn't done their homework, "Tell us about the Black Forest, Miss

24:00 Anderson, when you were going through," and she'd forget about the test or else they'd be getting under the floor boards in little manholes at the back of the class hitting up with rulers and I had read in a terrible school story about a girl in the book stopped a row by picking up a tin of pencils, throwing it on the floor and that stopped the row. Well, I did that and who got sent out of the room? I did. I was just trying to help.

24:30 Naive child, very naïve. We were all girls in our family. Two girls more or less lived with us. My uncle's wife died and they came to live with us so we were a girl clan.

What about contact with boys?

Very little, very little at all until we, you know, played tennis when we were about 15 or 16. Hardly knew any boys because they were all girls around, and

25:00 our school had a dancing mistress, Miss Williams, who would come every couple of weeks. In your surge navy tunic and one would have to be the boy, "Rest your hand like a little butterfly." Oh God, and she would pirouette around in a taffeta gown and we thought she had a wig and the big treat at the end of the year, we would go to a practise class or the boys would come to us from Kings

25:30 or Scots or somewhere else and my first evening dress I had white satin shoes and a white taffeta dress sprig, and we went out to Scots and a nice footballing lad walked on my shoes. I probably got my feet in his way I'm sure. So we had to have these shoes died black. But on the way back, this was sophistication, the father of one of the girls drove a few of us out to Kings Cross. His car had a

26:00 radio in it and on the way back he said, "Would you girls like to have a hamburger?" Never tasted one in my life. It had onion, it's a wonder it didn't end up all over the white dress. So we had those, and then we went in one another's homes and we would have these dances and things. And then the war came and everyone, then there was sort of, my mother worked for the 2/4th Battalion and she was the

26:30 treasurer of it and she wasn't much good with money either because the maid we had was helping herself all the time and Mum would carefully be making cakes and raising money and she'd take this down and said, "Well this month we've made £10 two and sixpence but the suitcase only has £8 two and threepence in it," and Mrs McClusky was helping herself, not to very much. But everyone was knitting, doing camouflage, the mothers

27:00 were knitting, they had sons at the war. My mother had no sons, knitting. At the university it was divided.

At what point did university become an option for you, a female of that time?

Well, my friends' mothers had been to the university. Mine hadn't. But I asked my headmistress, I said I wanted to be a journalist. Now there was

27:30 no counselling of schoolgirls then and my vague and brilliant headmistress looked at me and said, "Well it would be a good idea to go to the university Helen, and you would learn how to write a thesis, and that would help you get into journalism." No way. Well I was interested in going and I thoroughly enjoyed anthropology and Pacific history

28:00 particularly.

What challenge did you face as a female trying to get into the university?

None, because they had exemptions then. I didn't get one. You had to have a very good pass, but if you matriculated, we had to pay to get in. I don't know how much it was, it wasn't very much in those days, and my parents used to give me, granny used to give me seven [shillings] and six [pence] a week and my father and mother gave me seven and six a week each for bus fares

28:30 and lunches. But the thing now, the whole university became female because all the fellows went to the war, most of them, and so there were women doing science and medicine. You know, some of my former classmates became doctors, two of them did.

Was there any stigma about females going to higher education?

No, not at all. It was more or less,

29:00 my mother said, well you know, they both said the thing is to try to get a good education because you never know what will happen, and I should've done this, I should've done shorthand and typing. I went to a shorthand class straight just before I went into the army and I learnt to touch type on a keyboard with a hood over it and they played the Skater's Waltz or something while you hacked around, but that's all I had. I didn't have any

29:30 business training in how to set out letters. That didn't matter in journalism. You typed it and X'ed it out, as long as they could read it.

Why did you choose to do arts at university?

Well I thought that would, English, history, anthropology, the things I was interested in.

Can you remember roughly what was the proportion of male to female students when you first started at university was, I mean prior to the outbreak

30:00 **of war?**

In arts there were more women than men. In medicine and engineering, no. The women were outnumbered in that, and in science probably too, but in arts the women did outnumber the men. I played sport there, netball, third team, tennis.

30:30 We had a couple of women lecturers, Marjory Jacobs for history, a woman anthropologist who'd been in the Kimberleys before the war. I didn't have Camilla Wedgwood who later became, but some of my mother's friends were doctors. She wasn't. She loved writing I think and she was good with children.

How did university satisfy

31:00 **your thirst?**

It didn't. I felt lonely, I felt unhappy. I made a couple of good friends there, because it was torn between, the war was on and until Hitler and Russia made their pact it was a wicked imperialist war and we had friends who'd gone to Greece and Crete, so the university was completely divided, but once Russia came in it was a holy war.

31:30 And it was an unhappy time because you'd go into Fisher Library and you'd see friends and they'd say, somewhere in the Sydney University Regiment, "We're going overseas," you know, they were just vanishing. Fisher Library was…I think it's the McLoren Hall now and it was unheated. It had warmers under the desks like

32:00 the old steam trains had, like water filled, and it was lovely going down the stacks being among the books, or it was brought up to you. And the professors were old because the young ones had, now, this is very interesting when I get onto Central Bureau, because unknown to all this, unknown to me and all of us, Central Bureau, people before Central Bureau, they were picking out the best

32:30 linguists and mathematicians from my year and they were beginning, small groups were beginning to intercept Japanese diplomatic messages because they knew what was going to come. So they were tapping into their messages and their signals.

And how did you, sorry, I'll go back a second. Why was the entry

33:00 **of Russia into the war so important for the students?**

Well, because all the ones who belonged to the left in the university were…many of them were full of idealism, others were committed communists. We were the era when it was a Depression, people had had a hard time, they thought, some

33:30 thought, that Russia was going to be the solution to ways of the world, the internationale and all of that.

And how did you keep up with the news of the war when you were a student?

None of us had portable radios you see. This is hard to understand. So we would go down to Manning House which was the women's, men and women at the university were segregated except you could go into a certain part, the refectory of the men's and have coffee,

34:00 but men didn't come into Manning House. So we would go at lunch time, get our sandwiches and we would crowd around a big radio which was a bit bigger than this and we would hear the news of the day, and in 1940 the news of the day was every day a different country falling, Belgium, Holland, Norway, France and we'd go home and friends of ours did have a short wave radio

34:30 and you could hear Lord Haw-Haw speaking from Germany and we listened to the radio and read the Sydney Morning Herald.

At what stage did you start to consider giving some service to the country?

Well this was after the Battle of Britain and so forth and many of the British girls were doing all sorts of things and in Sydney they had big meetings at the Town Hall of women, and at the university too,

35:00 and some became Voluntary Aids. They volunteered to go overseas as nursing aids. Physiotherapists and trained sisters joined the army and went, or the airforce, but I joined something called the Women's something, probably Auxiliary National Service and we learnt, it was quite useless really, they marched us around the back of Burwood. We met in the school,

35:30 Burwood High School, and we practised with Jap silk flags, Morse with a blue and white flag on the end, dit dit dit, dah dah dah, dit dit dit, SOS, or whatever, learnt the Morse code. We learnt first aid which, and we were wanting to do something and everyone was disappearing and then Japan came in and you know,

36:00 the day Pearl Harbour was just after I finished my exams and no one knew what was going to happen, and everyone was away. Most of the men were away in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. Australia had 6 million people. Singapore fell, and I went in as I said, two days, I was called up two days after my 21st birthday and this was when MacArthur had…

36:30 but until I went to Sydney University and saw the first German refugees carrying briefcases, we carried little suitcases, I had never heard a foreign language spoken, only on the records which played scenarios from opera. And I was in the Sydney Town Hall with my aunt who was a music teacher and I heard a language behind me and I said, "Aunty, what's that?" Was German. See,

37:00 it was completely, the word Anglo was never used. I detest this, Anglo and tribalism, I detest it, being called an Irish Australian or Scottish or French or whatever.

What were these German refugees doing at the university?

Well, they were brilliant. They were students. They were Jewish refugees who got out here perhaps just before the war.

37:30 Some of them were continuing their studies. Others were, you know, going on to be high academics.

So how often did you have to go to parade and training nights for the WANS [Women's Australian National Service]?

On only about once, WANS, I don't know why, only about once a week, and others at the university were making camouflage netting. Others were learning various things but it was,

38:00 you know, people, and people were knitting madly, knitting, and I tried to knit. I was knitting around turning the heels of socks, not my thing, but I did try. I made gigantic pairs of socks.

So what was the date when you got called up, can you remember?

In December '41 and then the women who

38:30 were, they were mainly Girl Guide leaders or so forth who had been picked by the army. So the first, well I'll get onto, I mean this be boiled down as I used to reduce stories down to this. When I was called up I went up to Killara to where the Lord's Retirement Village is now, and we had no uniforms

39:00 because they didn't have any ready for us and they issued us with AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] arm bands and a man's great coat which dragged on the ground and a hat I think, and we had a fortnight's concentrated army routine and everything and then at the end of the fortnight marching around and practising air raid drill

39:30 and learning more first aid and the history of the army and so forth, they allocated us and they said, "Well you're going into cipher at Victoria Barracks," and I said well, you know, "I've heard of ciphers," and so I went out to Victoria Barracks, still living at home, and for the first six months, my first day at the barracks,

40:00 we were under intelligence then, not signals, and there was a little office and signals was next door receiving the Morse, but we were working on code books with troop movements sort of going up the coast with troops being moved around Australia. I had no training in that. Now later people at Central Bureau were trained. I was taught by twin girls who, if anyone needs interviewing, the

40:30 identical twins, I haven't seen them for some years, they had had a little course with intelligence. They taught us. We had a First [World] War man in charge, and we worked around the clock, coming in and out on the tram and the train, 4.00 till 11.00, 11.00 till 8.00, 8.00 till 4.00, just circulating like that, and I think the men in that office were rather glad a lot of eager girls had come in and,

41:00 you know, some of them went off to the pub and didn't come back. I remember working, but the people who came, there was my former history lecturer's wife, Joan McDonald. They were mainly people who'd

done the leaving or intermediate, some were graduates, and we just worked our guts out and we were at Victoria Barracks when, then we were moved in to live at the barracks.

Tape 2

00:31 **OK Helen, tell us about the subjects you studied at university?**

I studied English. In English honours you were made to learn Anglo-Saxon. I studied Latin, was compulsory for one year. Geography which I loved at school, but we were doing graphs of the high Alps and things but the things I liked mostly were history and anthropology.

01:00 But there was no chance to do any field work because the war was on.

Which history did you like the most?

Well, we had Professor Roberts whose text book we'd done at school, who was blindingly dull, but there was McDonald whose wife ended up in the cipher unit with me. Ancient history, he was such a good lecturer, very very interesting, and there was an old man called Henderson. Who am I to talk about old now?

01:30 Henderson had been at Sydney University in the 1890s. They'd come back because of the war. He was a double first from somewhere. He had been in the Pacific and he talked about Pacific Island history and this was almost anthropology. He'd been in Fiji in the 1890s and he was talking about Tonga and the magic and the division between the customs of the Fijians in

02:00 Samoa and I found it absolutely gripping, and it wasn't so, the Pacific then, I mean ships came and went. There were no aircraft in the Pacific and as it was the age of air, which I should've said as children we went out and we waved to aeroplanes as they went over. We went out to see someone land in a paddock near Bankstown,

02:30 Butler. [Charles] Kingsford-Smith [pioneer aviator] would land and my father would take us out, can I go off the subject to the aeroplanes? He would drive us out on a Sunday to Mascot where small biplanes and things were landing on a grass strip in the early 1930s. I didn't see Kingsford-Smith land but there was a man called Goya Henry who had one leg which he lost in a previous flying accident and he had a plane pained red

03:00 like the red dragon, five shillings a ride, and we would pester my father, "Dad, could we have a ride in that red plane? It's only five shillings," which is a lot of money and my father would say, seeing these things fluttering around and bouncing on the grass and being caught by the wind, my father would always say, "Clean forgotten my wallet."

How did the Depression affect you as a family?

03:30 Well it affected my father's job as I was telling Matt [interviewer]. He had to give up the career which he would've excelled, and he was of that First War generation, pretty stoic and uncomplaining. We watched the money. We didn't, a dressmaker would come to the house, we'd chose our own material when we were children, our mother told us, but we didn't have,

04:00 children have masses and masses of toys, we didn't. We'd get toys for Christmas but at school we made our own sort of wrapping paper or dresses out of crepe paper and after Christmas my mother would go, Dad's father had been a founder of Western Suburbs Hospital which the Labor Government razed to the ground about 15 years ago. It's now a hole in the ground, and Dad used to work

04:30 there, and my mother would go down and any odd toys she could collect from children and we would go down there on Christmas Day when the doctors and nurses waited on the patients and dressed up as Santa and so forth, and my mother would collect toys and take them to go in the pale for the kids. But we had a dog and a cat and my sister had a bicycle but I didn't. I had a metal tricycle which the handyman

05:00 converted into a two-wheeler, and I would hurtle down the local hill and fall off but I was small and thin so I could sit on this thing, but we just liked playing outdoors. We didn't go to parks. We played in one another's homes.

When you were going through university you expressed an interest in literature in the past, what were your favourite books?

05:30 My favourite books, I loved poetry. Dickens I'd been put off because I'd been put to it so young. I don't know. We did Shakespeare at school. We did…Coleridge was and is still my favourite.

Mine too.

And I've been reading up on that poor child, I've got his biography there, how because of his tooth aches and being out in the cold they put him on laudanum and

06:00 said, “Breath, breath child.” It was the Ancient Mariner and the way he wrote, yes, yes, and Kipling. And there was a seminar on Kipling at the State. Kipling, the simplicity of his writing, you know, put down as an Imperialist, lost favour for many years. But Ba Ba Black Sheep, have you ever read that?

06:30 It was a story when his parents were in India and he was sent back to England with his little sister and they were boarded with an ex-marine and his wife, and Kipling had bad eyes and he wasn’t able to read and he was treated by these people very very badly and it was Ba Ba Black Sheep and the story of his treatment, and eventually his mother after a couple of years comes back from India. He was writing but

07:00 he couldn’t read so he was put down as a fool by these people, and when his parents came out and found what was happening they removed him instantly. But they thought he was in good care and the treatment that child and his sister had. Lovely writer, and there’s something at the State Library next week. I don’t go out much at night since someone got my credit card; held me up on Wynyard Station and said she was a policewoman.

07:30 And I said, “Show me your identity and open your hand.” She showed me but it was fake. She was very clever.

Back to your university days, did you work during your holidays?

No. Only one girl I knew did. She worked at David Jones. Everyone else, they were purely students. So this was all, I mean I’ve got six grand children, everyone has worked in

08:00 McDonalds or things, but no one did. This girl was quite rare. They all lived with their parents too as far as I knew, and we got busses. No one, but no one, had a car so therefore we were very limited. And during the war, the cars because of rationing, my father had a car because doctors got a ration. My mother had a small car but it was on

08:30 blocks for years. But she had driven when she was 16 in a Dion Buton or something, but I didn’t learn to drive until I was in my late 20’s because I was practising on the paddocks at the back of Homebush and I broke the back axle. I kangaroo hopped. The axle was probably ready to go anyway.

When you joined the WANS and went to Killara, can you describe…?

Well that

09:00 was the AWAS at Killara, that was the Australian Women’s Army Service run by the army. The WANS was like joining the Red Cross or something. The AWAS was run by the army completely and we were part of the army service and we enlisted to go anywhere.

What was enlistment like?

Well I can barely remember it. I mean you signed up and I think you probably promised to, I don’t know, but I’ve got

09:30 my certificates and things there. Once you were in the army that was it. You really had no control of where you went. You could be posted anywhere. You had to keep to very punctual shifts, such as the shifts we were on, and if you were on leave you had a leave pass and you wore uniform all the time.

What did you like the most about it?

10:00 Well I liked some of the people I met very much. I mean I got very frustrated because I wanted to be doing more than I was and we were sent, McDonald, his historian lecturer’s wife and I were sent up to a camp at, just out of Liverpool. What’s the name of it? Holsworthy, and we were housed in the middle of the camp and we were the only women there, two

10:30 others, three others, and we had a house and we’d walk a mile to the staff office and here was very little traffic. A man came in to light the fuel stove and to cook a meal and you weren’t allowed to stay in the house on your own. There always had to be two women there, but we were in the middle of the men’s camp. The men treated us very well and foul language was never used in front of us by the men. They’d

11:00 be singing some army ditty from the Middle East and then go, “Da da da da da da,” and I didn’t hear the F word spoken in front of me until a printer on the Herald in a lift, and then he said, “Sorry Helen, I didn’t know you were there.” That was up to the ‘70s.

What do you remember about the night that the midget subs got into Sydney Harbour?

Well, I was at home that night and we had…

11:30 everyone had built little air raid shelters in the backyard. I was at home but I was at the barracks working the night the planes flew over Sydney. But I know the very next day my mother very stupidly now as I think of it, we all rushed down and got the Manly ferry. I had a day off. We took the ferry to Manly to see what we could see. And ships came and went, huge big troop

12:00 ships came and went, and the Queen Mary and so forth, but when the Japanese came in, there were trenches dug in Victoria Barracks and there’d been very heavy rain and they were filled to the brim with rain, so we were just told to go down to a basement or something in the barracks. When I first started

there in the cipher office no one was allowed in the cipher, my very first job when I turned up in my civilian dress, they weren't quite ready for us. They said

12:30 would I go and serve drinks in the officers' mess, which I did, and then two or three of us were in the cipher office and a drunken man with red on him, I didn't know what the ranks were then, he was rather boozy, after a good lunch I think, and he came to the door and I was there on my own. There should've always been two, and there was a little gun kept in the desk with the cipher books and he said

13:00 in a jolly way to the 21 year old, well, you know, this is the cipher office, well, "Can I come in?" And I said, "Certainly not, no one's allowed in," and he said, "Well what if I do come in?" And he began opening the door and I pulled out this little gun from the drawer and I said, "This," and he turned pale white, jumped forward, took the gun out of my hand, said, "Never point a gun at anyone again," and he went away and the gun vanished after that. We'd had no instruction with firearms, but after that,

13:30 very closely watched.

Tell us about cipher?

Well cipher, it had started off in the days of the Greeks and Egyptians when they would put a message on someone's bald head, write it, and let the hair grow and then they would send them across country. Ciphers were used in Elizabethan times. They were used in civilian life, business people would code, there was a book with, it might have Matt, there

14:00 might be a four letter number for Matt, one two three four and one, Kirsty [interviewer], isn't it? K I R S T Y or I E?

Y.

Y, good. So you would have a number, so all our messages would be going military base Sydney to Brisbane. The ships, everything would be spelt out in cipher and you would be receiving these messages in all figures and you would get your code book out. They changed everyday or sometimes twice a day,

14:30 so there would be no repetition because that's the way they picked it up. But they had no machine cipher in Sydney and that's what I used when I went to Brisbane.

What training were you given to do cipher?

Well as I'm saying, none, because I was taught by the officer in charge who was in intelligence and the twins who'd been given a little course. By the time I got up to Brisbane they were training girls at Ingleburn, they were training them in Melbourne and Brisbane.

15:00 But we were in very early so we more or less learnt, as I did journalism, on the spot. And from the barracks, I was in the barracks for some time and then they shifted us to Boronia Park which is now a Jewish home, and was then until the army took it over, beautiful buildings and hot showers and all very nice and you got the ferry to town and again we worked.

15:30 Morris West was the cipher officer, the novelist, he was on the shift. Hal Messing of the art gallery whom I didn't meet, he was the director of the art gallery, was in camouflage. You didn't know and you didn't ask people what they were doing. So we would work night and day and troops coming back from the Middle East going on their way to New Guinea, getting messages back from New Guinea and the islands, and then this would be taken

16:00 by Don R which meant dispatch rider, it was old Morse, and that would be taken to headquarters in town somewhere, and eventually in 1943 they chose about seven of us and said we were going to New Guinea. We were put on a troop train, we were very excited about this, and when we got to Brisbane no one was there to meet

16:30 us. So we ended up in tents in the camp on the heights of Indooroopilly which is now a smart suburb and we worked in the basement of the unfinished Queensland University. Have you seen it? Beautiful stone building, but it only had two sides of the quadrangle finished and we worked down in the basement where there were these cipher machines which looked like typewriters but weren't quite the same

17:00 and they had spindles and drums and they had to be set everyday and we communicated there with the islands. So this went on and on and they said, well, would a couple of people, were interested, there was a place called Cental Bureau over at Ascot and I was being, you know, I just felt, we thought we were going to New Guinea. So I thought maybe if I move I may get somewhere else, so I got to go to Ascot

17:30 and another camp at Chermside which was fibro huts and I always took my little Japanese picture with me but there was no wall to hang it on. But I like Japanese prints. They issued us with a kit bag in Brisbane. They eventually let us have suitcases, but they were, you know the men's kit bags, which sort of practically dragged on the ground? But again we shared huts and I made friends with some of those, quote, girls, as we'll still be to one another

18:00 and still see them. Not many.

Tell us about your friendship with Mack, Mrs McDonald?

Well, when we were at Holsworthy she had been, I didn't realise then, Mackelrafts were very wealthy and she married a McDonald but she had been a Mackelraft and they owned great big stores all over Sydney, beautiful food delicatessen stores.

18:30 But this was never known to me, so when I was in the barracks and told I was going to Holsworthy they said well a truck will, utility truck, I sat in the back. We'd go up and pick up Mack. I was made a sergeant instantly. We were all made non commissioned officers without any training because we were in cipher. It was security. So it looked quite important. It was ridiculous because people resented it. People who…

19:00 So went in this truck, we pulled up outside a building in Macquarie Street called the Astor. Do you know the Astor? Where Mack lived? So Mack came down in her felt army coat and so forth and we went out. I had about a month out there. There was very little, but Mack was showing me how to index because we had so little work to do that she was showing me how to index. She was working on a book of her husband's,

19:30 and I've only met her once since the war when she was wearing a beautiful fur coat and she had become fascinated by the history of the Northern Territory, but she was an interesting woman. She smoked very heavily. Everyone smoked, but I didn't smoke then until the end of the war I got an army ration of cigarettes and I thought, people said, "You might as well take it," and I smoked very heavily as a journalist. Gave it up in '78, just as well.

20:00 Do you? Have you ever? Matt? I was up to about 38 a day and I would smoke as soon as the aeroplane got, the smoking sign came on, filling in time at airports, right? Even after twenty years I wouldn't mind one.

What were conditions like at Boronia Park?

Very good, because there were these beautiful

20:30 rooms had been built. It was now a most wonderful home. It had been built by the Jewish community and it had, I was in a dormitory. We had fold up iron beds, grey blankets with a stripe down the middle. We had sheets, we had lovely hot showers, running lavatories unlike other places which were, you know. But it was shift and it was hard to work

21:00 shifts and then go to bed at 9.00 in the morning and the other ones would be just clattering in back from breakfast and it was hard to sleep, and then the pigeon unit was outside the window and you'd hear pigeons going, flying off, being trained to fly off as they were used in New Guinea with messages on their legs, and it was very good conditions and Morris West, the future

21:30 novelist was on my shift and he was writing a novel. He'd been up in Darwin I think. A most charming man, but the other people I'd met at the barracks, a lot had been, they seemed to pick on people who wanted to write and some of them had stories in the Bulletin. They weren't, some of the girls had been very good secretaries and so forth and they were very good in camp.

22:00 They took up making felt toys and things. Well that is where I fell down in sewing things on, still do.

How long were you at Boronia Park for?

I was at Boronia Park for about a year. Went up to Brisbane in September, but at Boronia Park we were joined in the cipher section by girls who belonged to 2nd Australian Army and they had been in, they

22:30 took over the Burnside Homes. Now these girls had come, some were English who'd been evacuated from Singapore who'd joined the army. They had come all the way from Western Australia by train. Some were from Tasmania and so it was, but they lived there, we lived at Boronia but we mingled on the shifts.

Can you tell us what the cipher office room looked like?

Well at Boronia it was pretty good because it had

23:00 nice windows and big desks and so forth. In Brisbane it was underground and at Central Bureau, do you want me to get to Central Bureau or not?

I'd prefer to talk about Boronia Park first and what you remember there and then we'll go on?

Well at Boronia Park I'd get the ferry to town or go home and my parents had an old

23:30 wireless at home that they didn't need that Mr Mitchell, our carpenter handyman, had made a lovely frame for it like an Aztec temple. It was so heavy to carry but the family said I could have it, and I dragged it. I had to walk about a mile from the tram stop to Boronia Park and we plugged it in and got the news. No one had a, see, no one had…we had cameras, black and white, and the first colour

24:00 photograph, transparency I saw, someone back from the Middle East had brought a picture. But it was all, we just worked very hard but harder, very hard at the barracks, extremely hard at Central Bureau.

Did you say that you worked harder at Victoria Barracks?

Than at Boronia, yes, but then Boronia was more comfortable. It had lovely showers and things. The camp we had at Chermside,

24:30 which we'd be taken by truck to, the historic picture of the house where we worked at Ascot is over there. We didn't live on the site, we would live in, but Boronia, it was good. Some of the girls lived in tents there and we had a room for sergeants' mess and there was a piano on which people played and some played very well. We played netball and tennis around as

25:00 a recreation and we went swimming, but we just, you know, your social life was very, you'd go to a dance and you'd be Cinderella, "I've got to be on shift at 11.00 o'clock," or be in by 11.39 which is what, 11.59, 23.59 which it said on your leave pass. So you had to clock in. So I think our generation became fairly punctual, but you were immensely punctual this morning. I've never seen anything

25:30 like it. My God, I'm a late person. I always like working at night. Here you are getting here at half past 8.00 in the morning. Can you stand it? But on the other hand I found by being in the army that I met girls and fellows. I was Burwood, I was Sydney University, I was at Meriden Anglican School.

26:00 In the army…at the university I had never met Roman Catholics because I used to think (UNCLEAR) why does no one at my school wear the colours of Joey's [St Josephs], because there was no mixing at dances or tennis or anything. Schools didn't play sport against one another which was ridiculous.

What role did religion play in your youth?

A great role because if you went

26:30 to church every, well chapel or wherever, first of all in the bungalow and then they had a school chapel built. It was very much a role of going by using the old St James prayer book and the bible and that language of that before people sanitised it, beautiful beautiful words. I'd be grateful for that. A visiting clergyman or missionary every Friday but

27:00 the headmistress would, we had to take turns in reading the lessons when we were seniors and there were hymns and prayers every morning. First of all we started off with Bjelke-Petersen, not the Premier, who came to the class outside to the tennis court and gave us exercises, "First corrective, dry land swim, jumping jacks." So we did that and then we went to chapel and then we went to lessons.

27:30 And there was a sort of feeling that, there wasn't a feeling of bigotry at all ever given, because the girl who lives here, how I came to be here, she had gone to Meriden and Catholic and mixed parentage. So at Meriden she didn't have to go to the chapel or prayers. The headmistress would say, "Well, go and read in the library," or what there was, there wasn't a real library.

28:00 And so she went there and years ago after Jack died and I was thinking, I'd been here to meet her after many years by an historian, a journalist who was writing a book about the Middle East and heard people were tied up with that. Would you like to meet the Chatfields again? And that's how I heard of this place.

In Victoria Barracks how much time did you spend there?

28:30 Only about six months. We were living in the old stone part. Our cipher crowd, because we weren't on ships we were never very keen on saluting or marching around. We tried to, you know, so we'd see someone coming and we'd sort of do, but some of the people who were later trained and to march, they were very smart saluters, but I'm afraid we worked very hard at our job but we weren't very keen on marching

29:00 around.

What were your living conditions like at Victoria Barracks?

It was stone. They were old quarters. I think I was sharing a room with another woman whose husband was a POW [Prisoner of War]. In the army they took people whose husbands were, who were widows or whose husbands were POWs. They took those. If the girl married someone in the same unit

29:30 they were separated. Once the marriage took place they were moved, husband and wife. One remained but the other went. But Mack was married and I always suspect her husband might've been in this secret university group. I can't find it.

And you lived in the sandstone building there?

Yes.

What were the rooms like?

They were all right. I can't

30:00 remember so much about them. I can remember more about Boronia Park where every camp after that you filled a straw palliasse. You got a big sack and you filled it up with straw, making it as high as you could because it soon wore down, and people would inspect the rooms and you had to mitre the corners

of the blankets and have everything, you had very little possessions with you.

What was your daily routine like?

Well,

30:30 it was an all day routine. If you started at 11.00 o'clock at night you would sleep part of the morning and then you'd go and have a swim or do something, or go to a film, and then you'd start at 11.00 o'clock at night and then you'd come off and you would have to sleep through the day. You'd be sleeping in this dormitory with other people and you'd be sort of cursing them if they came clattering in just as you were getting off to sleep.

31:00 I rather liked night work because I did, and when I was on the Herald I'd start later and finish about 10.00 at night. So I rather like the night hours and I don't really think very well until 4.00 in the afternoon. Anyway, go on.

When did you get news that you were going to what you thought was New Guinea?

31:30 In '43, we were suddenly told. Our picture was told at Boronia Park. One of the men there who was in our unit who is Jewish, and he, I've been asked to give old pictures because it's all changed. I've got old pictures of Boronia Park when I was there. But we got on the troop train and it went up on a line that isn't used now. We had a box carriage with doors

32:00 each end and two luggage racks, and so we made ourself comfortable. I got up in the luggage rack quite easily then, and there were two on the side, and of course these luggage box carriages had a lavatory in them, you see. So the one who was sitting on the seat in front of that every time someone had to get in, and it had a water bottle and the water bottles, old photographs about 80 years ago.

32:30 So we got out at Woy Woy which had a railway refreshment room and everyone would rush to get a pie or a cup of tea and they had a spoon chained. So the spoon would be passed along if you took sugar in your tea, and then back on the train and it took a very long time, and we went all through Toowoomba and the Darling Downs, that way to Brisbane.

How many people were in the carriage?

33:00 I think there were seven or eight of us. You know, seats on each side and the luggage racks. When we got out near the border and we jumped out leaving a terrible mess. People were sleeping on the floor too, putting cushions on the floor, and we made ourselves as comfortable as we could but we were ticked off because some of the door came open and some officer, "That terrible mess in that carriage with cushions on the floor and people up in

33:30 the luggage rack."

As you thought you were heading very close to the enemy, what did you think of the Japanese?

I mean I admired Japanese prints and so forth, but when you saw people coming back and heard of the, and I've still got a friend whom I see, she wasn't in the army, but her father was. He joined up and he was beheaded by them.

34:00 They treated their prisoners of war dreadfully and they treated, you heard all about their, we knew about their culture and so forth, but this was a long term plan, and Mack, this historian, she and her husband were working on some book about Japan and Japanese history, but it was

34:30 quite different because we didn't realise then when our fellows, and I had a cousin who was a POW in Germany, badly treated there, and others I knew in prisoner of war camps, but the Japanese and Germans were well treated here and you expect it naively, but the Japanese regarded Japanese who became a prisoner of war as dead. They wiped him, he was non-existent. So that was

35:00 why hari-kari and you know, they believed they were absolutely shamed. They didn't exist any more to their country or their people, therefore they treated their own people badly and they treated our prisoners of war disgustingly.

In 1943 how much did you know about the treatment of the Japanese?

Not very much until a ship, I've forgotten the name of it. We knew there were submarines and this

35:30 was going on and people, I mean there were tropical diseases that the fellows were getting, the malaria, the scrub typhus. A friend of mine died of scrub typhus, but you didn't really know until this ship which was transporting prisoners of war from Singapore to Japan was torpedoed by an American ship that didn't know Australians were aboard. I think it was the Montevideo Maru, and so these people

36:00 told their stories but it was hushed up completely because if it were known, if they had talked about what was being done it would've, there were Australians in Korea, there were Australians in Japan and they didn't know what effect it would have if they spoke out, so it was complete, and the Darwin raids were complete. We knew about that in the cipher about the Darwin raids and about the sinking of the hospital ship, The Centaur, particularly.

36:30 Darwin was before my time in the army but it wasn't talked about because they didn't want the civilian population alarmed and Darwin was just hushed up. They were bombing, they were shelling Newcastle, as you know, or do you know? They shelled Newcastle and so some of Jean Mulholland, who lives here, who's a PhD

37:00 from the ANU [Australian National University] and so forth, she was in Newcastle, younger than I. Newcastle was all, everything was blacked out and some of these army girls were sent up to Newcastle. Some army girls worked on the anti aircraft positions with the men, but it was happening there. It happened at, Broome was shelled and bombed, other places, and by the time word

37:30 filtered through you just felt you'd do anything to stop it but you didn't know what.

Tell us about arriving in Brisbane?

I'd never, because of the cars and limitations I had never crossed the Hawkesbury before. My mother had travelled when she was young. Dad had worked his way to England as a ship's doctor, but I had never been north of the Hawkesbury and Brisbane was like a foreign country.

38:00 Tram drivers in foreign legion caps, lovely trams, tropical climate, downpours of rain, beautiful trees, poincianas and so forth. So the camp we were put in in Brisbane was Indooroopilly, first off all in these tents, then in huts which were beside a creek. Now,

38:30 I was very allergic to sandflies and the sandflies thrived on this fresh southern blood, so I ended up a couple of times in hospital with big blebs, you know, blisters.

Tell me about that?

Well I used to get it in Sydney too if I went to certain beaches. Sandflies were tremendously irritating and susceptible people, they get a sort of blister, a water-filled blister. So I was in several army hospitals covered with, you know, but once I moved from that camp to another one,

39:00 got away from the creek which I now realise. But at those camps in Brisbane we had lavatories with sheets of paper from the Women's Weekly or the Telegraph instead of lavatory paper. We had sitting down toilets in which you flung disinfectant or, no sewage, no refrigeration of course. We went to our meals as the men did and you took your eating irons with you,

39:30 your knife, fork and spoon and knife which you washed up, and you sat down and the cook cooked on a big fuel stove and it was so hot, and so we ate there, but on night shift we used to cook over, at Central Bureau we had have a little stove.

How many people were at Indooroopilly with you?

I've got no idea. They came from all sorts of

40:00 places. There were hundreds of girls, but we were up in our tents because they didn't know we were coming in and they found us huts, and there were officers and people and they were all people doing different things. They were in signals, they were in cipher. Some had come from Macau and Hong Kong to join a unit which I heard about called ATIS [Allied Translator and Interpreter Section] and they were translating Japanese and they were Far

40:30 East specialists. But you didn't know what other people did except for your own little group. You knew what they were doing, and it was almost like an etiquette. I tried to start a magazine and it was hopeless. I got contributions for it but the cost of it would've been too great. People start little things. I wish I had some of the contributions now, because all around me there were people who were

41:00 writers at Central Bureau and artists, but I didn't meet them.

Tape 3

00:31 **Helen, I just want to get you to explain a little bit further what your actual duties were as a cipherer?**

Well if I can bring us up to Central Bureau because you sat at a machine which looked like a typewriter, and into that machine they had, if you've read any books about the Enigma it looked very like that. It had a spindle and drums which had to be greased. Now every day

01:00 this thing had to be reset a couple of times a day. So we'd be receiving messages from America or Bletchley Park or from the islands and it would all come in, most of it in groups of five letters, XYZQP, ONMKJ, and you would type this, having set your machine up you would type this stuff and out on one side would come what you're

01:30 typing, out on the other side would come clear text. And the same would apply if you were sending it to England or America or wherever. You would type your message in English and it would go into these

groups. You particularly were warned that you mustn't start the message at the beginning. So instead of saying, Dear Matt, starting a letter, I would start in the middle of your letter that I'd written to you

02:00 because the constant repetition, if we tell people it would give them a clue. They would pick up the repetition of a place name or a person. So you started somewhere down in the middle of the message and wrote to the end and then you went back to the beginning and brought it down. And we were communicating with Ceylon, Sri Lanka, New Delhi, and all this stuff was flowing in. Now in,

02:30 I think '43 or '44 the Australian 9th Division in New Guinea discovered the Japanese had sort of fled from the place they were in and everyone was supposed to burn their code books. The Japanese had sunk them in a steel tin in the middle of a water-filled pit and a couple of fellows from the 9th Division found that, wondered what was in the tin, opened it up and a lot of it was in pulp

03:00 and bits. So they flew that, this is part of the Central Bureau story, they flew that down. They dried it out in Port Moresby and then they flew it down on a special plane with an officer on the plane to Central Bureau. Now this gave Japanese battle plans for what they were going to do, and at Central Bureau photographers and people pieced it altogether like a mosaic and the results of

03:30 that were then transmitted by us and by others to let people overseas know. And some spectacular things happened because Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea which is West Irian, now Jayapura, and the Japanese…they picked up this message that the Japanese were going, all their planes were on the ground and they were going to set off on some, so because of what Central Bureau was doing, we had

04:00 no idea of this, we had no idea what it would be translated. Those Japanese planes were destroyed on the ground so that that particular thing didn't take place. And another Central Bureau achievement was…Yamamoto was the Japanese sort of commander in the Pacific. He's the one who led the raid on Pearl Harbour and he was, one of the wireless units

04:30 picked up a message that he was going to be flying. They passed that down and his plane was shot down and he was killed. But we were on the message end, we didn't know what happened to the messages once we'd handed them over. And the Battle of the Coral Sea, Colthard-Clark would know, sometimes they had knowledge but they couldn't act on it. Central Bureau was made up of airforce, there

05:00 were many units. There were WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], AWAS, Canadians and right at the end they came over, Americans, British, Australians, army and airforce, but the big brain behind it was Professor Room from Sydney University. He was a civilian professor of mathematics and navy commander who was Australian, who'd been in the Royal and Australian Navies. He'd gone to Japan in the '20s, learnt the language,

05:30 learnt all about the signals and he had been, Singapore knew all about what was going to happen but they didn't have the force to defend it. They knew about that.

In your daily work there where did the settings for the machines come from?

Well, there were cipher mechanics who would, there were two men working, Les Mannering and I've forgotten the other one's name. They would sort of maintain the machines, they would

06:00 be told the setting for the day and we would be told how to set it. Having done the messages we would take them to a desk and with a paper cutter, because these things weren't glue backed, we would have to stick these down on cable forms, cutting it and rolling it over a glue thing. Then that would be taken to a couple of typists who would type it all up and messages would be passed on. We came directly under MacArthur

06:30 whose office was in Brisbane in the old MLC building. The chief signal officer had escaped with, well, had been told to get out, Aitken, and he had come down from the Philippines and some of them had come and he was in charge of all that signals, and they would be taken to MacArthur. Some of our girls worked in MacArthur's office, but they have now tried to set up a

07:00 MacArthur memorial and someone had kept a lot of archives who'd been in the airforce and he was in his 90s and died. MacArthur was a controversial figure and people, you know, it was even within the Americans some detested him, some admired him. And so that was another thing that hasn't got off the ground, but all these photographs and things are around.

So in the case of you

07:30 **needing to cipher a message to be transmitted, what would happen? You would stick those scrambled letters down onto a telegram form, is that what you mean?**

Yes.

And where would that go?

I don't know. I don't know, it went out. We worked in a garage at the back of a stately home. The stately home picture is there. There was a garage at the back of it that had a sliding baffle door

08:00 and I've got a picture of myself and a group ion front of it. You went in there and there were odd tables

and our 12 cipher machines were at the back and they later added on to it, and we would take our messages and I was in charge of the shift for a while. I wasn't an officer, but I was in charge of shifts for a while, and everyone worked their hearts out and then all the men were suddenly told, we suddenly heard that they were going to the Philippines.

08:30 **The original, if you were transmitting a message, the original message that you had to type up and encode, what would happen to that original copy then?**

I don't know. I don't know, this is the maddening thing. We would decipher the message, have it transcribed or we would type it. It would be sent off by another section of Central Bureau to London, America or the islands, but we weren't directly transmitting.

09:00 **So somebody would bring in a piece of paper with a plain English message to you?**

Yes.

You would type it up?

Yes, and it would go into five letter groups.

Right, and was that done by the machine?

Well, we'd type it but it would be done by the machine and we'd stick it down on a cable form. Then it would be typed out and be taken away to be transmitted. Now within Central Bureau there were people called traffic analysts, there were linguists who spoke Japanese and German, there were mathematicians

09:30 and we were only a tiny little segment. Some of the, now, the wireless people they had to learn Japanese Morse which was called Kana, K A N A. Now I, having worked in the garage, the Kana people in our association, the Japanese alphabet has many more letters than ours and they had to learn this weird Japanese Morse and listen into it and they were used to listening in and transmitting,

10:00 but I had never heard the word Kana because it wasn't discussed. They had no idea that we were in touch with Bletchley Park.

What sort of security measures were taken about bits of paper being left around and so forth?

Absolute, well, at the end of each shift you went out to an incinerator in the backyard outside the garage and you burnt off. Everything was burnt, which I've done myself, light it up,

10:30 strike a match, stir it around. There was a guard on the gate at Henry Street and everyone had under the Official Secrets Act, couldn't talk about what they did or to anyone else. See, this is the trouble now, and Colthard-Clark had just been over to Bletchley Park and there are archives everywhere. Now DSD, the Defence Signals Directorate in Canberra suddenly took an interest in us a few years ago and asked us

11:00 up to their headquarters and we got in through the pass and it's beyond our care what is happening there.

Can you remember the sort of material that you were, what were the messages about?

Well, some of the messages were called ultra, U L T R A, and that was the most secret of the lot and I remember seeing a message about which, that someone in Australia,

11:30 they were sending messages. It was China actually. They were sending messages through the Russian embassy and Russia hadn't come into the war. They were being transmitted by the Russian embassy and being picked up by the Japanese. So everything that we were keeping so secret, because of the slackness of the Chinese embassy here passing it on to the Russians, it was all being picked up so that they knew very much what was going to happen.

12:00 But some of these Kana people were so expert and there were women among them. But anyway, when the time came for them to move to the Philippines MacArthur wanted to take all these women and as did the Americans, as did the Australian Army and air force, but the government said no. So right at the end of the war they brought out a whole lot of American WACs [Women's Army Corps] and they sent them up to, so we were furious of course, they went up to

12:30 Hollandia and the Philippines. But it was a government decision and not the army.

Again the material that you were working with, was it battle field reports or can you recall what you were, as it went through your head?

Yes, some of it was weather reports, some of it was troop movements, some of it was information about Japanese troop movements. The ultra messages were, there was something about an attack on

13:00 Singapore by the Krait. That came through in clear. We would also have padding. We called it padding at the end of some messages and you'd just write a whole lot of drivel, but one of the girls in our unit and a fellow who'd fallen in love, he was in air force or army up in the islands, he managed in the padding to put a little will you marry me or something. They've now been married fifty odd or more years but how it happened, how

13:30 it made certain that she got that message I don't know.

Why was padding required?

Padding was required to blank out, to make it more difficult for people who were listening in on us. Then there would be dummy messages we had to send and this was excruciatingly boring. When the Australians or Americans were going somewhere the Japanese people would always listen in, as would the Germans. If there were a lot of traffic about a certain area

14:00 they would think that some landing would be made there. So we would be typing and typing away to make it, so that it would not be Hollandia, that it would b somewhere else, and so there'd be so much traffic concerning this place and that was more or less to put them off the scent.

And were you aware of that at the time?

Oh yes. We'd be hacking away at this, you know, just like typing rubbish on a typewriter, just filling up messages.

14:30 But all these books there, it started in the Middle East some of it, the people who were in Greece and Crete in the army, they were listening in to the Germans. They came back, some of those became involved again. There were Japanese linguists. One of the most brilliant ones was a man called Nobby Clark whose widow I know, and he had gone to Neutral Bay school where they taught Japanese

15:00 and he'd known Japanese wool buyers and he didn't get a degree or anything until he was in his 60s, but he was an expert. He was at the Japanese war trials, everything. But a lot of mine was just pure, I said it was monotonous but some of the other girls said they found it of great interest, but I was curious. I wanted to know what was happening outside that garage and what was, and I couldn't until now.

How fast you could you type on these machines?

They were heavy.

15:30 I could type very fast and of course you had to be, I'm an inaccurate typist now, but if things went wrong you would check it and they called them corruptions. I mean if you're typing figures or letters and it was wrong it could be quite vital, and I know one man, when I worked with him at Victoria Barracks he'd been in the Middle East and he'd been a cipher operator and someone there had typed

16:00 a map grid reference and the wrong figure had gone in and that caused quite a disaster. He told me about that.

So how would you check against these groups of scrambled letters if there was a mistake?

Well when you get the scrambled letters coming in and say you're trying to, if I was typing the scrambled letters and the clear was coming out it would make no sense so then we would try and

16:30 rearrange the drum a little bit or just guess until we got it right.

And what about the other way around if you were encrypting something? How would you check that the output of your machine was correct?

Again memory, memory. Someone must've, I don't know.

So did the machine just output the scrambled letters or was there another output?

There were two tapes, one in clear and one in

17:00 the scrambling.

OK, so you could check the clear to see if there was a typing mistake in that and then you'd know?

Yes, that's right, yes.

OK, and was that automatically broken into five letter groups by the machine or did you do that in your typing?

No, we would be typing the groups, but when I typed the English it would put it into five letter groups. Sometimes they were three letter groups which I think had something to do with weather, but you would hear of submarine

17:30 reports coming down the Australian coast. You'd hear about that. You would hear about island movements.

Yes. Do you ever recall reading anything that really intrigued you?

Well, this attack on Singapore by the Australian small party that got in there, and it was the Russian signals being intercepted by the Japanese that

18:00 really pulled me back. But it was airflights and it was troop movements. A lot of it was terribly monotonous. One of the girls remembers how the Japanese messages ended, hail, the son of heaven. Well, I don't remember seeing that, and only after all this time, because we all did such different things, and now I've

18:30 got, a lot of archives came down to me which I've passed onto Chris Colthard-Clark from DSD and again seeing stuff that I'd never seen before. But it was three and a half years of, and then we'd have our leave and you couldn't go far out of Brisbane. You'd go to the pictures or you'd sometimes go swimming or horse riding; I wasn't a great rider but I

19:00 liked doing that, getting out in the bush.

How did the technology and the procedures change over the years you were there?

It didn't, it didn't. Sydney only had…the crowd I was with in Sydney only had the book ciphers, so I can remember Mill Base Sydney 1074 something or other and the numbers would repeat and you would spell out the names of ships. A couple of Japanese words that I remember

19:30 would be coming through, rentai, the regiment, R E N T A I, then how to pronounce it, and you would notice Japanese words coming through which you'd get to learn, but this would all go off to the translators.

How did that book system work then?

Well the book system worked, but we didn't use that in Central Bureau at all.

Just tell me in Sydney.

Well I was trying to before. I've got Matt,

20:00 and Matt might have a number against him, one two three four. So if a message came in I would, beginning with one two three four I would think Matt and I would go, you would go through it book by book, you know, page by page looking up the numbered groups and companies and businesses in Australia, they used those.

So every piece of vocabulary had a code number?

Yes. Matt would have, Kirsty would have

20:30 a number, a ship, every word. So these were like big dictionaries with numbers against the name. But there were other one time pad ciphers which they used in the field, so that that would be destroyed and there was very little likelihood of that. There were old time codes like Playfair ciphers, all of that, but with the technology DSD [Defence Signals Directorate] has now with these echelon things, you know, whoosh.

21:00 But all of the stuff from England came, a man from Bletchley Park and came and talked to us and it was all sent by the cable because cables were then secure and cables sort of skirted, it could get to Australia and they couldn't tap it, and it came in at a steady pace of six and a half words a minute or something, and the cable was safe, but the wireless was intercepted and of course telephones, and

21:30 paper. But now I gather they can do all sorts of things, tap into cables, they can do anything.

Why do you think you were chosen for this work?

I have no idea, because if they'd taken if from mathematical skills. I think up at the rookies' course, it was just a fortnight and they had some keen young girls who had a moderate education from school or a couple of

22:00 us from university and they probably thought well, they're bright enough to go into cipher. I do not know. It could've been anything. I could've ended up as a cook, might've done better.

What contact did you have with your family while you were up in Brisbane?

Well, only rang up once because there was a phone box in the whole camp. We all wrote letters, letters backwards and forwards.

How heavy was the censorship from Central Bureau in that sort of thing?

Well, uptohere

22:30 any letters you wrote, this was in your own camp, you knew your letters were going to be censored so naturally, I told my parents I was in cipher. They had no idea what I was doing or what the ramifications of Central Bureau were, but everyone in the army, which must've been very hard if you were passionately in love or so forth, you know, strangers reading your letters and going straight down, but spotting our troops or ship movements

23:00 or insecurity. But you accepted that someone, officer, not Central Bureau, in your camp would be reading that. Some officer would be, but the telephone, it was, you had to queue to get it. I remember hanging around for hours and hours so now you just, people send e-mails but all these people were

writing. All my friends who were engaged, they wrote a letter day,

23:30 letter number 100. We depended on letters.

But you were permitted to tell your parents you were in cipher?

Yes, yes, they knew that. I just said cipher and codes. That was when I was in Sydney, and I said signals and that's about all. Our address was 21 Henry Street, Ascot, which was this home which I'd like you to have a look at over there.

How did

24:00 **you socialise with each other given the secrecy that was going on between everybody?**

Well you became very close to the members of your own little group. So one of the girls I worked with, I'm godmother to her child. We've kept in touch. Another one is out at Mull Village. Her husband died and she's not particularly well, but we've kept in touch. We'd go riding together or on our leave and we

24:30 didn't know many people in Brisbane but my mother knew someone who had a weekender down on, the Gold Coast; then had one hotel on it and a railway line going down. We'd go down to Currumbin and surf, have a couple of days off, or there was a farm house up in the mountains near Bald Knob up near Maleny and the woman who owned it ran it for the YWCA. Her husband

25:00 was at the war and she would take in a group of girls and we'd meet airforce people, go surfing with them, play the piano, have sing-songs, even had wooden sleds sliding down the grassy slopes of the Glasshouse Mountains, not far, but just in the farm, and just made what fun you could. But you couldn't go down the bay in Brisbane because that was all closed, not until the end of the war. Rather beautiful when you go down to Moreton Island.

25:30 **Did you ever get asked by anybody to tell them more about what you did?**

No, no.

Everybody understood?

Mmm. And so after the war, Suzanne Morrow, who is a Mitchell librarian here whom I got to know well, and there was a very interesting woman called Nancy Rykeld, Nancy Johnson, and they were both in the literary groups in Brisbane. Nancy was a German linguist. She'd

26:00 been in Germany when war broke out, was interned by the Nazis among the civilians, and eventually was spoken to because of her linguistic ability, got into Central, didn't meet her till after the war. She lived in Mosman, and Suzanne, the Mitchell librarian, she wasn't in CB [Central Bureau] but she knew this group in Brisbane, and I was thinking if only I could meet a few writers or something, but I didn't. I was trying to do a

26:30 diploma of journalism through Queensland University. It wasn't a university then, it was an institute or something. But it was nothing to do with writing. It was the history of journalism going back, and some did correspondence journalism with someone in Melbourne whose name has gone, but I didn't. At university I tried to get onto (on ees wire? UNCLEAR)

27:00 but I didn't.

While we're there, tell us, you nearly didn't go into the army, did you? You had a job interview with the Bulletin?

Yes, that's right, yes. You heard that story, yes?

I think for the benefit of the tape you should tell it to us.

All right, I'll tell it again. I was so ambitious to get onto the Bulletin. I'd never met a journalist and I put on my hat and gloves and I took some poems down, my mother's recipe for rock cakes because I thought if the Bulletin didn't take

27:30 the poetry, you couldn't imagine anyone being so naïve and stupid, could you? Yes, you wouldn't have done that Kirsty, you wouldn't have. And he had a coughing fit and said, "If you're going to become a journalist, well, you'll become one." So I went away and the AWAS called up.

Just tell me why you took the rock cake recipe?

Because the Woman's Mirror, which was a good little magazine, and it

28:00 printed poetry, it printed short stories and it also printed recipes, and maybe they didn't like rock cakes. I don't know.

Up in Central Bureau can you describe the mixture of nationalities and types of people that were around?

Well again, ours was purely Australian Army. Ascot Park was just

28:30 down the road and that turned into a sort of Bletchley Park with a fire station in which the first IBM machines in Australia were used in the garage. They were big monsters and apparently I've heard since from Americans that the neighbours in this quiet road in Ascot complained about this clank clank thump thump, so they moved down into a fire station in Ascot Park where they had all these huts. Now I never went into that Park.

29:00 Only went into the garage. The only rooms I saw in the old mansion were the kitchen where we'd try and grill something on an open stove at night with cockroaches running around, make a cup of tea, the lavatory and the garage, and we'd walk down and get into trucks and go back to our camp. And they would exercise race horses from Ascot Park early in the morning and we'd climb into our three ton trucks, go back to Chermside

29:30 where there is now a great big hospital called Prince of Wales or Prince Charles or something, and there were dirt roads and we'd go to the pictures, we'd go to dances. Now, the Americans there, a few came in. People would come in and then they'd vanish and you didnt' know where they went. They might go to Darwin, they might, so you would teach them, give them a little lesson on the typex machine and they would go away and they'd go to the islands or the Philippines.

30:00 **That must've been hard?**

Well, you didn't know. They'd come and have a lesson and one fellow said, "You taught me on the typex, Helen, in Australia," and I said, "Well people would come and go". There were two men in the office, Ian Allen was the cipher officer. He had been at Boronia Park. He was a Tobruk man who'd come and it must've been sort of getting in among all the sort of

30:30 desk bound people. It must've been pretty hard for some of them, and he was made an officer and he was in charge of the cipher unit there, but the girls who came up, many from Melbourne had had great drilling. They'd been in camps and they'd been trained to the T, but we were in early so we were hap hazard.

But what level of frustration did you have about not knowing where you fitted and where it all fitted in the picture?

Well, I was intensely curious and I would sit there

31:00 thinking I wish I could do something about Japan going on here and this and that and I knew the linguists were there and the Japanese, and these young Englishmen would come in and they'd have a little lesson. But the Canadians, a couple of the Canadians, they came out late and they got here and they were sent up to Darwin and the war ended. They came right down through the centre of Australia by truck and train and a couple of them came out to our home and had

31:30 a meal and looked me up when they got here and then they were gone. So people just came and went.

What about the staff that worked with you directly, did they turnover?

No. You seemed to be in your one shift and you were in the one camp. Now there were people in that camp who I thought must've been on other cipher shifts, but they weren't. They were translators and linguists, but you all queued up and you had your food

32:00 in the huts and you all worked different hours, and the people I shared the huts with or tents with, they were a Victorian school teacher. One, Betty Chessel married an Olympic oarsman and sculler and went off to the games in Finland and she lived on the Gold Coast. We sort of keep in touch a bit.

While we talk about the shifts, what were the hours and how did you rotate through those shifts?

Sydney was

32:30 terrible because we didn't get a holiday really for about, Sydney was as I said, 4.00 till 11.00, 11.00 till 8.00 and 8.00 till 4.00 and we just kept on doing that. But in Brisbane you'd do about four or five days and then you'd have a day or so off, and a couple of times you got leave to go to wherever you could for a couple of days. But I went up there in '43 and people

33:00 didn't know what, you know. I had leave before I went but I don't remember coming back. The transport was so difficult, whereas if you were in the WAAAF or the air force, aeroplane around, people could hitch rides, but no.

Were you subjected to any extra security measures in searches of you?

No. There was a guard on the gate and

33:30 it was, our camp, you just crossed, it was still so rough out in Chermside you crossed, if a creek was running, the truck was just getting through, then you got to a gate but there was a camp full of girls run by a very efficient woman officer. No men around to guard that there at all. There was a men's camp next door and people would be saying goodnight at the gate at 23.59

34:00 or whatever it was and you know.

So it was really left up to your personal honesty that you didn't remove material?

Well I mean under the official Security Act you would've ended up in gaol.

What I'm trying to establish was that if you had wanted to it wouldn't have been hard to remove material from the

I suppose not, but no one did to my knowledge.

What contact did you have with the men

34:30 **in the same facilities?**

Very little because it was a garage full of girls with Ian Allen, the cipher officer, the two cipher mechanics and the transient brains from Bletchley or something or America who might come in. Brisbane was a strange funny city. We would go to dances but the Americans, I only went to one American dance, but we would go to dances in local halls

35:00 or down by the river. Now the Americans, the American Negroes, a word not to be used now, blacks, or what's the latest, Afro, I don't know. But the Americans kept them out of the heart of Brisbane. They were kept on the other side of the river. They worked from the docks and so forth. There were no black faces among these. There was a Japanese face, a brilliant Japanese, half Japanese, a Nisai, Yamagato,

35:30 who was a colonel. Didn't meet him, but he was one of the brains at Central Bureau. The others were mathematicians and quite, I don't know, but as I said, I only got deeply involved in this about four years ago when the news editor died and I'm landed with all this material which I'm trying to pass to Chris Colthard-Clark.

What was the food

36:00 **like in your barracks?**

Well, a lot of it was charming. It was a lot of stews, something called blue peas which was dried peas pulverised, powdered egg. We used to go out at lunch time and we'd buy pineapples and lovely tropical fruit because in those days mangoes didn't carry down to Sydney; you hardly

36:30 tasted a mango because they were horrible green ones, not like now. But the cooking was done at Chermside on a fuel stove and you'd line up and you'd get your meal and you'd sit down in a hut, have your mutton stew or whatever it was, and also they were very keen on what, the army was very keen and men would remember what we called gold fish which were tinned herrings, and some years ago, I hadn't

37:00 seen the Harvey twins for a long while and I asked them over for lunch and I presented them with a tin of herrings and blue peas for lunch but they wouldn't eat it. But the cooks worked very hard, and then you would take up your dishes when you'd finished, scrape them into a thing and then you could wash up your own knife and fork and spoon and take them back to your hut, and we would, Brisbane water was awful so we used to have a fizzy drink

37:30 called Salvital. It was a bit like Epsom salts but didn't have that effect and we were to have that with slices of Christmas cake, but we didn't drink at all until the end of the war and some of the air force introduced something called advocaat and cherry brandy. But I hadn't drunk; it was very sweet and rather nasty. Then when I went into journalism in the 60s and they began going down

38:00 to Beppi's for a cheap lunch and talking about Grange. But the army food, we would sometimes have a formal mess, a sergeants' mess and we were taught how to pass the port around. I don't know which way, that was port, and we would have this table, it would be decorated with gum tips on special occasions and once a frog leapt out of the gum tips and landed in someone's soup. Green frogs were very prevalent

38:30 in Brisbane then. You'd find them in the showers.

How did what food you got served work with what shift you were on?

Well, if you were on the night shift you got some sandwiches or something. You made a tea or tried to heat something up on the stove, but otherwise if you were around camp you'd just eat what was there.

So you could miss meals depending on what shift you were on?

You'd sleep through lunchtime or so forth,

39:00 but the powdered eggs were pretty, but I mean it was a good camp. The washing was a problem. There was a wood copper which had to be lit. Now a man from another camp would cut the wood but everyone had, we had two dresses each and they had pride and the smartness, everyone would starch their dresses so immaculately, but

39:30 you had to get the damn copper going and boil and wait your turn with the copper and then wait your turn for the ironing board and there were no steam irons and there was no drip dry fabric. So they used

to saturate their dresses with cold water starch or boiled starch and they looked very trim on it, and for a while in winter we had, you know, men's collars that used to have studs there and there? I thought I was choking but

40:00 I was putting on weight, but I would get the collars done by a woman who lived in a little house near the camp. She would do these collars which had a stud there and there, like a grandfather would wear to a wedding.

Was a little bit more effort expected from you because you were a sergeant?

Well, just to be in charge of shift. I was a warrant officer actually at the end, much to my family's hysteria when they said I was a sergeant major. But, well I

40:30 wasn't. I wasn't an officer. I wasn't put up for it because I think all the Melbourne people had this official training, but you worked very hard and you sort of just saw what was going on and you got it through. We would have coffee and talk till about 2.00 in the morning, and you either felt, at 2.00 in the morning you either felt high as a kite with the long hours or else, ugh, you know.

Tape 4

00:32 **All right, Helen, while you were in Brisbane how aware were you of the progress of the war?**

Very much aware, very much aware because Australia at first was just completely isolated after Singapore fell and then you heard about New Zealand and so forth, but you didn't hear about submarines bringing out captured code books or

01:00 people going down and rescuing it from crashed aeroplanes. Only this I find out as books are now being written, which could be, but you watched every second of it. You listened into it and because we were in such contact with Bletchley Park in England we were sort of conscious, we knew D Day was happening, messages backwards and forwards and you sort of wished you'd been over there. Bletchley Park was called GCCS [Government Code and Cipher School]. I know it's been called Station

01:30 X and various other things. But everyone in Brisbane, there was mild celebrations but VP [Victory in the Pacific] in Brisbane or VJ [Victory over Japan], whatever, when the Americans, 'cause there were false alarms about the end of the war, and we knew some air force people with a jeep and we went into Brisbane riding in on the jeep to have a look. People were milling around and nothing much was happening, then we went back to the shift

02:00 and went in again and you know, it wasn't, I gather Sydney was tremendous, but Brisbane was, with their dancing there up and down Martin Place, but I wasn't here, and Brisbane was odd. I remember seeing the first POWs came back from Singapore and they came into Hamilton docks on the Brisbane River near Ascot and some of us were told it would be nice if we went down and met them, but you felt embarrassed because they'd

02:30 been fed up, fed before they got back, but we didn't know them. We had a milk shake or something with a couple. We were told in Australia not to ask people about their time as a POW and they were told not to tell us, and I had this cousin who was a POW in Germany for a few years and John came back. He'd had a very hard time. They'd been marched for hundreds of miles through the snow and badly treated,

03:00 and he came back but he bottled it up. Only in the last, he died recently and he was my age by two days, and I sometimes think it was just a fluke. Here I am, a woman, I had the easy time and John and his contemporaries had hell, but they didn't complain and they bottled it up and now it's the effect that it's had on them, that bottling up. I don't know whether stiff upper lip is bad or hugging trees is equally as

03:30 bad.

What contact did you have with your parents from Brisbane?

Only letters, only letters, and they wrote regular letters and you know, my mother would draw little sketches or tell us what she'd been doing or Shirley would write about, you know, but she couldn't, they couldn't write about the troop ships being in the harbour. People didn't.

Did they tell you anything about rations affecting their lives?

04:00 Well, petrol was rationed, but compared to Britain it was all right. I know people, in the army we got chocolate and so you'd save it if you liked chocolate. I liked it moderately, and tea was very hard to get and my parents had a couple of English people, New Zealanders who'd passed through on their way to the Middle East. One of them was killed

04:30 but the other one came back. He brought back tea from Ceylon. Well that was a good treat, proper Ceylon tea. Clothes, well I didn't, because I had the uniform I didn't have any. When I got out of the army then you were getting, you had a dressmaker but you were buying curtain material to have a skirt made because that wasn't rationed.

Tell us about your uniform in the army?

I shall give you the list

05:00 of what we got. It's over there on the table.

We'll go through that later then.

All right.

What do you remember of your uniform?

Well, I remember I had a hat, all khaki of course. There were two summer uniforms which had short sleeves. They were khaki with a belt, buttons to there, and one giggle dress as it was called which was for doing chores around the camp or the washing or something, and that buttoned down the front. Now, we envied

05:30 the WAAAF because they had jeans. They had, you know, but it would've been lovely to have a pair of slacks or something but we didn't. We weren't, I didn't have any civilian clothes up there. I think I might've taken one dress for when I went up, but we were in uniform all the time. So I had two cotton dresses, one giggle suit and two skirts for winter which you had a cardigan, which

06:00 I'm featuring in the pictures there working on the night shift, and these were buttoned up and you didn't have handbags, you carried a little wallet. You had a kit bag. If you wanted a new pair of stockings or a new hat or you lost something or a new pair of pants you had to go to the Q store and show that it had been well and truly mended before you could get another one. Lyall stockings, the American

06:30 girls came out and they were wearing seersucker cool things, but Brisbane was a hot place, and the WAAAF had lovely big shady hats. We were issued with gloves. I think at one stage in Sydney they had us running around wearing gas masks. But you didn't have shoulder bags or anything like that, but after a while I got rid of the kit bag and I got a suitcase

07:00 and you had army numbers. Now my army number when I joined was N390997, but later there was confusion because N was, the AIF had NX for New South Wales. X meant overseas service. N was sort of within Australia, but it got very confusing if they were putting people into camps. So then they suddenly had to add NF to show you were a female so you wouldn't be put into the men's camp.

07:30 **How much social interaction was there between the men's and women's camps?**

Well our camps were quite separate. Occasionally there would be a formal meal and they would be invited and some would come over for this formal dinner. But apart from that it was very informal meeting. People would meet at a dance or at the films and there would be the pick-ups of course and you know, you would meet someone and you'd go

08:00 out with them sometimes. Meet them at the pictures. It was usually dances they met at and as my dancing wasn't really up, I was there, I got around all right. I didn't really, you know, great big army boots and dancing around and occasionally my friends would come up from Sydney who were passing through on the way to the islands and they'd come out and see me and we'd go out for a meal and there weren't many places to eat in Brisbane.

08:30 And the stores were very good in Brisbane. If you were in uniform, a couple of the main stores you could have a free meal but you felt a bit embarrassed going in and sitting down doing that. Ice creams, the Americans had something called a PX [Post Exchange – American canteen unit] which was where only Americans could go in, and my husband was on the Courier Mail. There was this big riot in Brisbane which was hushed up

09:00 because some Australians, one drunken Australian tried to get into the, the Australians had their own sort of centres and Brisbane was packed with Americans, troops back from the Middle East, Americans who hadn't been to any war, they'd just arrived, and they had beautiful uniforms, they had more money, very glamorous, better food, and the Australians had roughed it for several

09:30 years away and there was this big brawl and one drunken Australian tried to get in. Another fellow tried to restrain MP [Military Police] and an American MP pulled out his gun and shot an Australian soldier dead. Now there's been a book written on this, not a very good one. So there was a big brawl up and down in the middle of Brisbane with the Australians going for the Americans who had killed an Australian, and so that was on.

10:00 But that was before I went there, but Jack was there on the Courier Mail then, and I met a couple of, the man who kept the archives in Brisbane, he was there and he was in the middle of it. He was air force and he said he got bashed on the head a bit. But you know, it was on for young and old.

What about, you mentioned briefly that black people worked on the other side of the river. How aware were you of what

We weren't really, we weren't because they worked down on the docks and see,

10:30 we didn't go near the docks and I don't think we were really aware of how segregated the Americans were.

What about Aboriginals?

There was an Aboriginal girl in our camp. Her name was Nellie Allen, and well I don't know if she, we used to say full-blood or half-cast but it's not used now, but she was a very nice girl and she, I didn't know where she worked in Central Bureau, and about a year ago the Queensland Government

11:00 wanted a bit of publicity and they got in touch with us. They thought International Women's Year, they wanted to hand out certificates to 10 women they knew of who'd worked in Brisbane. Well I nearly went mad because these women got these certificates in Brisbane but then other women who'd been in Central Bureau in wireless units, in the end I had to provide 125 names and then last year they rang up and said,

11:30 one said, "I've been in touch with Nellie Allen. She lives up in Cairns and her Member of Parliament said Nellie didn't get a certificate." So they gave me her number and I rang her. We remembered one another. She was a very nice girl, and she had ended up as a librarian and I said, "Well, I'll get in touch with the Queensland," she hadn't, one of her friends had said Nellie didn't get one. See, all these years afterwards. So she lived

12:00 out of Cairns and she hadn't married. She'd been a librarian stenographer, but Kath Walker was also in the army and I used to interview her. She said there was no discrimination in the army whatsoever, and with Nellie, I didn't know what she did. She worked in the park, not in the building, and she was in very very early. She's the only one I met.

12:30 And there were a couple of semi Chinese girls who lived in Macau who came down, obviously with the… again I didn't work with them but they were in the same camp.

Were any of the Japanese speakers; Japanese people?

Well as I was saying, Colonel Yamagato whose picture's over there, he was, they had a separate camp but he was there and he was apparently

13:00 quite brilliant because he was a Nisai, you know, half Japanese, but he was very high up in it and they gave an award at the end of the war, but apparently one of the people who later became a politician in Brisbane or head of the stock exchange whose picture is over there standing by an ant hill in a pair of shorts, he said Yamagato, he had studied Japanese in Adelaide and so he had a lot to do with Yamagato and he said they were worried about Yamagato

13:30 in Brisbane because of hostility. So they were more or less sharing the same, they lived out and more or less Yamagato they'd keep an eye on him in case anyone gets nasty towards him.

More on the social side of things between men and women in Brisbane, did you ever hear of somebody getting pregnant?

Yes, only one. She was in the same, our huts were divided but I wasn't there when this happened.

14:00 I think I was in hospital with sandfly bites. It's probably very suspicious. But it was all very strict and girls who became pregnant, and the word, "She's been sent to Dalby," now, Dalby is somewhere in Queensland. I've never been to it. "She's gone to Dalby," and apparently that was where girls who became pregnant were taken. They went out to the general army hospital first where I was in there

14:30 with various complaints, getting a bit nervous because I thought people might think I was going to Dalby too. But it was like a big hospital with nurses with starched veils and a lot of VAs and I only heard of this one girl. My friend who lives at Mull Village could tell you more about that. But many of the girls were engaged and had been for some years and mostly

15:00 the marriages, a couple didn't last, but most of the ones have lasted for fifty or more years. The word condom had never been heard of. I think it was referred to as French letter, but some knowing girl once said to me, "Do you know what a corvette is?" And I said, "It's a small naval craft." And she said, "It's a little baby destroyer."

15:30 And I read some article recently and there was a picture of a destroyer in it and I thought, corvette, that's what I was told, a little baby destroyer. So all this condom talk, not a word. I mean people probably used other methods. I've got no idea, but we were a fairly sheltered lot and very much watched over and there wasn't the drinking that goes on now.

16:00 And people didn't have transport, so the men were…they were pretty good to us. In fact, the next news letter which reaches me by express mail this afternoon, I have to phone the corrections back tonight, one of the dear men, Bruce Bentwich who'd been in the Philippines and so forth, he wrote his piece of copy for me, the Treasurer's Report, and instead of writing

16:30 damn he put D dot dot dot. So that was the last of the Victorians someone said.

During the war how much did you see servicemen who had been abroad coming into Brisbane?

You saw it and they looked terrible. They were all yellow from Atebrin, which is the anti-malaria drug and you'd be on the tram and you'd fall into conversation. I remember one poor

17:00 fellow sort of pouring out his heart. He looked very sick and he'd been talking about terrible, fighting Japanese with bayonets and how they screamed and people would sort of come up to you and talk to you and they'd pour it out a bit, not the POWs, but you would see them coming back. They wore jungle greens of course. The Middle East men wore khaki because of the desert colour and at first when they went to

17:30 the islands they were in khaki and then they got into this green colouring. And the girls, the Harvey twins, the crowd I left who'd been at Boronia Park, I'd went to Central Bureau because I was fed up, I said I'd get somewhere, they went to New Guinea just at the end of the war, this group of AWAS, about 200 or 300 of them and they were at Lae and these girls were cipher and they had the funniest stories.

18:00 We had a few lectures in Boronia Park on sex education, diagrams. So the Harvey's, they were all told to, I couldn't have attended this lecture, and so all these girls went up by troop ship, the ones I worked with. Only about three went to Central Bureau, but the Harvey's, they suddenly found they'd had no sex education lecture so they weren't allowed to go on the troop ship. So they had their education lectures and then they were flown up and they were landed on an

18:30 airstrip in the middle of the jungle and a Salvation Army captain walked out of the bush and led them to their camp or to another plane. But they were screamingly funny. They were worth talking too those girls. They're the ones who taught me about cipher. They were identical twins, and you always had to sign the cipher message when you were doing the book cipher. You initial it, one would check and one would decode, but one of these girls had a gold filling in the front teeth

19:00 and I could never be sure if it were Betty or Joan until she smiled, Betty, and I could write B.

What part of cipher work did you like the most?

I was more interested in Central Bureau and the machine cipher. A sort of feeling that you were in touch with the world in a way. You knew messages coming through from the islands and Britain particularly, but as I said, I didn't know about the Kana. I knew

19:30 that people intercepted and language and messages. They didn't know what we were doing, we didn't know what they were doing. The mathematics, the hard hard work, the mathematical working out of codes, no idea. But there I was wanting to be a journalist and sitting in the middle of it all. What's going on? Peter Hastings who became the foreign correspondent

20:00 of the Herald, he was there but not in my time. He was a different section.

What books did you take up with you if you like to read so much?

Well you couldn't take, I had a butter box under the bed and I brought Donald Friend's Gunner's Diary which was beautiful, but it would be very very valuable now. I used to go in and pick up second hand books. I like poetry, I'd bring poetry with me, bits of Coleridge and

20:30 anthologies and things. You couldn't take very much.

Living in the camps how did you deal with hygiene and menstruation?

Well, it was all pads but you had to go and burn, at Boronia Park a revolting job. You couldn't put them down the lavatory and you would take them out and people would take turns to burn it off, like you burnt off the secret papers.

21:00 And you would apply to get that, but my menstruation stopped in the army for years. Apparently it happened to people who, it just, after several visits to hospital covered with bites. I don't know, apparently this happened to people who, but it happened to me. So, but the others were certainly worried by it.

How long did your period stop for?

20 Years,

21:30 until I was in,

Goodness.

from my 20's to my 40's. So you know, very strange. People, doctors in Brisbane had a look and it was all very, they thought I needed iron tablets but no, I'd been the reverse and then it stopped, and my sister who wasn't in the army had the same sort of trouble after she had her children. So it might've been a thing in the family. Very strange.

22:00 **How many times were you in hospital with sandfly bites?**

A couple of times and then I got a lump in the neck, but army hospitals, I got a bit fed up. But the army hospitals, one was like something out of the Crimean War because the matron would come and inspect,

but I had books there and I would keep intense diaries writing down my thoughts. As long as I had a pen or something I scribbled. Because most of the other girls in the hospital were reading

22:30 True Romance magazines and you know. They used to sing at night a lot of hillbilly songs, Coming In on a Wing or a Prayer, and then someone who knew someone in the air force would burst out crying and you know, because they'd been affected personally.

Tell us about the incidents of that, when women's boyfriends or husbands were affected?

Well, I worked with two, May Backus,

23:00 she was married. She was at Boronia, she became an officer and moved on. A girl called Kath O'Donnell whose husband was a POW, so I worked with her. She became an officer and she was in Brisbane for a while, but he did get back and I saw her a couple of years after the war in Brisbane and they did have a child. I don't know if they had any more, and he died some years ago and she married someone whose brother I knew, and she was lovely.

23:30 But you know, I don't know if you've ever seen the letters from a POW. They were allowed to write, barring the address, they were allowed to write, I think it was twenty words. So people who were writing and writing and sending, I know I've got a letter from John in this POW camp, only a couple from Germany and that was all, you know, keeping well, love to the family, remember,

24:00 and sometimes he'd say something. You'd hear of other stories, this place is wonderfully comfortable, it reminds me of Rookwood, you know, pointing out it was rather like a lunatic asylum or a gaol, but these poor devils, they might be writing, sometimes their marriages had broken up when they got back. I don't know what happened to May, but Kath,

24:30 she waited. But it was harrowing for those, and how they went, and Jean Walker who has since died. She was a doctor's daughter from Rose Bay. She was in cipher with me and she was engaged to someone who was in the navy and he was away for six years. He was in England and the Atlantic and he came back. He was away about five years, came back. She didn't go up to Brisbane because he came back. They married and

25:00 she got out of the army.

Were here many married women in the army?

Well this is what I'm saying, the married women, they couldn't be, if they married and some did in Central Bureau. Quite a few of the Americans married Australian girls. The two who still, the last one, Joe Richard, the code breaker, they married Australian girls, took them over with them.

25:30 There were quite a lot of marriages in Central Bureau, and Lester Truex, an American who married an Australian, a lovely, she was a ballerina with Borovansky, they married and he died last year. They're going, but I've only known them in the past few years since I got landed with this archives and paper.

When you were in the AWAS what contact did you have with the WACs?

26:00 Well, only a little bit because they came in when we refused to move. Some of them came in to be shown how to use the machines and they came into our little garage, had a few, then they went off to the islands. And so when that happened Central Bureau more or less folded. They didn't know what to do with us, so they sent me to an NCOs' [Non Commissioned Officers] course about May 1945 to learn how to march around and

26:30 you know, look this way and this way and so I did that for about a five week course, which was very useful and then they shut down the building at Henry Street and they put us to work in the old fire station. They didn't know what to do with us, and moved us to another camp and then the war ended. Some of them didn't get out until '46 but I got out in, got home for Christmas in December '45. But

27:00 they used to have an army custom at Christmas was officers would always wait on the other ranks. It still prevails, and in this hot climate in Brisbane we had turkey for Christmas and we went in. They began waiting on us and a few, "That turkey's off," and it was too. That particular helping was removed. That happened at an American Bicentennial dinner in Sydney at one of

27:30 the big hotels when we went to it.

What was that Christmas like, being waited on by officers?

I mean the meal was so, it was a bit of a joke. It was all taken in, they were women officers anyway waiting on us. It was an all women's camp.

What was your relationship like with your officers?

Well, very good. Cipher was a bit more independent. The nice

28:00 woman cipher officer in Brisbane, she came down, the New Guinea crowd, and they invited me to their reunion in Canberra because I hadn't got to New Guinea with them, but very pleasant. I mean there were a couple of bossy ones I saw, Joyce Whitworth who'd been in the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service], and she, but good hearted. They liked spit and polish more so than I did, but

they were very much…the

28:30 officers then had been Girl Guides. Ellen Manning who had been, they'd been social workers, they were graduates. They were very intelligent, usually spinsters, they were, who had a little bit and then they suddenly found themselves with all these girls pouring in, and they did a pretty good job. But at first when I was wandering

29:00 around the barracks, we were told to call…the officers had to be called madam which sounded very, "Call me madam," you know. Madam or miss or missus or whatever, or captain.

I understand you were promoted and in charge of other people, 12 other people?

Yes.

29:30 I was running a shift because someone went off to do a course and I've got the pictures over there of these girls.

But what was it like in charge of other people for you?

Well, it was just like, that's what I liked in journalism. I had a small team, just like on a column called "Data" on the Herald. I liked working with a small group and we worked as a team

30:00 and I wasn't saying, "Do this, do that or that." They knew what they had to do. We'd all been working together for some years. We worked terribly hard, the equivalent of thousands of cipher groups a day to type and check and pass on. Until I got into some parts of journalism I don't think I've ever worked as hard as I did on Central Bureau.

What was your opinion of

30:30 **marriage in terms of following a career?**

Well the people I worked with, if I can get onto the Women's Weekly, which is where I ended up thanks to the offices of Jean Williamson who was the first woman editor of the Herald before Connie Robertson. When the Women's Weekly started Packer recruited the best women journalists in Sydney to run this. It was the Women's Weekly and then it was called

31:00 (do as? UNCLEAR) a newspaper, not as a magazine, and these women were very skilled and they were married. Some of them were supporting…then Alice Jackson was the editor. She was married to someone in the army, she lived in the TNG building in Park Street and she went around the world during the war when I was in the garage. She was travelling for the Women's Weekly as was Anne Matheson; she was married. She was going around for "Bundles for Britain". She was

31:30 flying to America in flying boats. Anne Matheson was a journalist, an Australian in London. She was going into Europe, she was going to the POW camps. Tilly Shelton-Smith, all these senior to me, and Dorothy Drain, they were going to Malaya at the time of the emergency. Dorothy was in the retreat from Korea, and they all went by ship remember. My friend Sheila Patrick went to the Cocos Islands, had to go by ship,

32:00 fly to Singapore, go by ship to Cocos. But these women, a couple of them were divorced, a couple of them were supporting families, but the main pattern was when I was working they worked, they got married, they gave up until the children were old enough and then some of them went back.

What about in the army, what did it mean to be married?

Well it meant

32:30 to be married. If you married someone, if someone in Central Bureau, there was a very nice woman called Marion Wing who married Stan who had been in the Middle East and he was a linguist. Once they married she…they were separated because they couldn't work in the same camp together so they were separated. Now Coral and Sandy married. There were quite a few but then they couldn't stay working in the same place any longer.

What did you think of

33:00 **that?**

Well I don't think, I think we just generally accepted it. What a shame, you know, catch up with you on leave. There would be big weddings and you would go to them in uniform and everyone would go there, then they would go.

How much leave did you have when you were in Brisbane?

Well I had leave about three weeks before I went up to Brisbane. I'm trying to remember. I don't think I got back

33:30 from Brisbane. I think I had about eighteen months straight there before I came back, and I remember the journey up vividly. I can't remember the journey back because I was so out of things. Everyone was

running around, my sister wearing light things called peplums and nylon stockings and high heels and, you know, I was still hanging to the flat shoes, which I've done. But it was very nice to get out

34:00 and Sydney was still very, all the British ships were still in the harbour and it was still, it was a beautiful city and a lovely city that's been torn to pieces and over-populated. But you know, one of the girls on the Women's Weekly I worked with, Anne Bradley, she married a young dentist. She wasn't in the army but this is a sample. Max was

34:30 studying dentistry so Anne worked as a journalist until he got through. In the meantime she went to classes. She learnt how to build desks, he did too. They each built themselves a desk. She went to tailoring, she made clothes. Then they were living in a little flat in Ashfield, then he set up in King Street as a dentist. She helped. Then she gave up journalism. She had her two children.

35:00 Max did very well as a dentist and then they had their first overseas trip and he dropped dead in Naples. So she brought up the children alone after that, but did a lot of freelance.

Just getting back to your time in Brisbane how much contact did you have with other nationalities working in the Central Bureau?

Very little. A couple of Americans would come into our, it was

35:30 mainly Australians, and a few of the British would just come in to have a little lesson on the typex machine, or Americans. I went to a couple of American dances but it was mainly Australians I mixed with because they had their own camps. They weren't near us.

What was your reaction when you learned of the bombing in Hiroshima?

Well, we didn't, we thought it was a huge bomb. We didn't really

36:00 know that it was an atom bomb, but some of these people, they received messages about that. They were all ready to go to Japan, all these people were up in the Philippines and Okinawa and they were hearing signals about bombs and things. They were going to Okinawa and their feeling was, well thanks, it's amazing. I thought

36:30 it was a horrifying thing when I've been to Japan and I've seen it. I thought it was horrifying. And then as other people say, what would've happened to all these troops if they'd got there? They would've been slaughtered. But I think it was dreadful, wish it had never been dropped.

Before it was dropped, what did you know of atom bombs?

Nothing. You would hear of heavy water in Germany or some British landings about heavy water. Absolutely nothing.

37:00 **And what do you remember about hearing of the end of the war?**

Well it was Hiroshima and Nagasaki, bingo. Then suddenly everyone was sort of up there. Some of the CB people were up there at the war trials and they went to Japan, but it was, once the emperor said that's it, everyone in Japan, it could have been an absolute holocaust

37:30 to use an over-used word, because some Japanese in the Philippines didn't know and they were found twenty years later still lurking in the jungles of the Philippines still thinking the war was on. But they just stopped, but if the emperor had said otherwise it would've, you know.

And what was the mood like in Brisbane when it was over?

Very relieved. Everyone, thank God we can

38:00 get home and get on with our, this is why I think the 50s is so derided now, but the 50s was the time for us when people were getting on with their families, having children. They'd had a lot of hardship and it was a time to get on with your career, to travel and get out of the garage, get out of the country.

How keen were you to travel?

Madly keen.

38:30 But my mother travelled before the First War and she was a good photographer. She travelled in some style with her mother and brothers and I've got her old album still. There's a picture in the hall down there, lovely picture. I've still got the camera down there, can't get film for it now. So we grew up on tales of travelling and England and France and Venice and just wanting to travel.

Just to

39:00 **go back slightly, were there ever any stories of white feather type thing in Britain with the men who didn't go to war?**

Well there was in my mother's own brother in the First War, the one who later was in the army and died of pneumonic flu. One went off earlier than the other and he was waiting to go and someone gave him a white feather, but that was much a First War thing, much more than the Second, and the

39:30 First War was great, but the First War people after the First War they didn't talk about it. They avoided, they didn't like the politicians, such as the Curtin's [John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia] and people who'd been conscientious objectors in the First War sort of giving orders and telling them what to do. They were very suspicious of politicians.

In Brisbane in the Second World War when you were there,

40:00 **were you aware of any men who were not contributing to the war effort?**

I didn't, I met conscientious objectors during the Vietnam era, but there were people in Central, well some were called up. The militia were called up but the AIF were all volunteers which I think was the only volunteer army existing. Every man in the First War, every Australian soldier

40:30 in the First War was a volunteer, as the AIF was in the Second, but then they had militia units which they called chockos, chocolate soldiers, but they were very brave because they happened to be, although Curtin and people said they wouldn't be sent out of Australia, they were and they were the first ones on the Kokoda Track to hold back the Japanese, so they were very brave when it came to it.

Tape 5

00:31 **Helen, I want to go back towards the beginning again just to get a bit more detail**

Yes Matt.

about your university times especially. What sort of program of what were you doing in those days at university as in how many lectures, how many hours a week?

I couldn't tell you how many hours a week, but lectures, particularly Latin, there was an old Professor Todd and the door would be shut firmly if you didn't get there

01:00 bang on time they'd shut the door on you. The history lectures were very regular. The English honours with another very ancient professor, Sonny Holme, after whom the Holme Building is called, H O L M E. He was 'bare wolf…' that's all I can remember, bare wolf did something, and I do not know,

01:30 we didn't, now this is the thing, all you people had tutors. We had no tutors. We had the professors and the lecturers and then we were on our own so you had no one to discuss your work with, which would be very nice. We did one big essay a term in each subject, say history or English or anthropology. Elkin was the professor of anthropology and he was pretty

02:00 dull. I met him years later because he'd done so much field work, about the Aboriginal kinship systems of whose mother's brother's aunty could marry, you know, got a bit, but when in later years he was talking about being right out in the remote Kimberley's it was very interesting, but notes were all taken down in pen of course. We sat in fairly old lecture rooms sloping down like that

02:30 with all wood. We had very little visual things. There would be some colour slides of ancient Rome and the Colosseum and the Forum, but there was very little in visual.

So it was basically just passive listening to the professor?

Yes, and then some questioning at the end, particularly in the

03:00 Pacific Islands which was the one I was very keen on. But it was taking lectures and being at the lectures and taking masses of notes, and when we did our exams which were held in the Great Hall it was all sort of written ink or fountain pen and writing. Now, years later I tried to study Russian and I did the equivalent of the leaving certificate in

03:30 Russian in the '60s at the University of New South Wales. Now, the whole system had changed because when we wrote we could tear it up and keep on going. You would know about this. They gave you a folder, and so all your attempts and scratching outs were seen in that folder which I found very disconcerting. Does that still apply?

I'm not sure, but I would think so. So you had one essay and one exam per subject per semester?

Yes,

04:00 but we didn't have tutorials. We didn't have tutors. We had professors and lecturers.

So would you spend a great deal of time in your own private reading and research then?

Yes, a lot at the Fisher Library or going down to the State Library which was then, the Mitchell Library was there, the old building which was only finished during the war, but there was a building on the corner

04:30 of Bent Street and Macquarie which was the New South Wales State Library and it was pretty crowded waiting for things, and it was a place where the derelicts came in on wet days, as they still do, to get out of the rain. But it was a beautiful old building, but it's gone. But see, I didn't have an encyclopaedia at home. A friend, my mother's, had an encyclopaedia Britannica so I'd go down there, otherwise it was the Fisher Library or the State

05:00 Library, or the Municipal which was in the Queen Victoria Building at the Market Street end it was over a wine bar and every book smelt of very stale old red wine. And so that's where we did it.

How academically rigorous were the subjects?

They were pretty stern on us. The geography, we went on excursions for that. We'd go out on the

05:30 escarpment at Mount Keira and sort of slide down through the trees and look at the geographical formations there. But the things I wish I had learnt were geology and botany too. I'd love to know more about that. But the English, you had your set text books and you got your lists at the beginning of the term and you read those and the same with the other subjects. And the history, old Henderson at Pacific Island, he

06:00 insisted that you go to documents, so he gave us documents of the time to read which I liked going to the documents and not reading other people's opinions. I like going to the source.

You talked about literature and Anglo Saxon literature and so on, was there any Australian studies available?

Yes, there was a little bit, not much. No, it was predominantly British and we

06:30 had very little Australian history, we didn't, but my parents were very keen on it. They were mad keen on Australian history because my people had come up, some on my mother's side had come out here in the 1790s, some free, some convict, and so, which my granny didn't know about, said, "No convict blood," but we had been growing up to hear the stories of Australia and I loved researching it and reading it and

07:00 my granny had the illustrated history put out at the time of the first centenary in 1888 and I kept that until I moved here and I didn't have a full set, but we collected things about Australia and I was deeply interested in it.

What about the subjects like Latin that were a little bit harder for you? How were they taught?

Well, they were taught by lecture and Professor Todd insisted, well who knows,

07:30 he might've known, in Latin you pronounce V as W so instead of saying veni vees, he said, "Weni, widi, wici," I came, I saw, I conquered, and I liked translating from Latin into English but I found it very hard to put English into Latin. So that's a bit of a disadvantage. So it was only compulsory for one year after which I think the poor professor thought better of it, so that didn't last very

08:00 long.

So there were a lot of people doing Latin that had no real interest in it?

No. But Latin was a subject in which you had to matriculate. You had to have Latin to get in, or French which was of an extremely high standard, and I know Peter Gibson who was interviewed by your crowd. His father was a doctor and his brothers were but he didn't have Latin, so although he got quite a good pass he couldn't get in.

What sort of facilities were there for students

08:30 **as far as equipment, places to go?**

There was only Manning House and we played sport. There were tennis courts, the grass tennis courts where they still are, and played a bit of netball and used to play matches at the weekends going out on the tram to play big strong girls from factories at Rally Park, and played tennis; I liked those but I was in the low teams,

09:00 not like my niece whose coming over who got blues and things like that.

Relatively how expensive was it for somebody to go to university?

I do not know because as I said, my parents and grandmother gave me the allowance each week and I didn't pay board at home, but the cost of things now, again I sound like my grandmother talking when my father said you can get three

09:30 course meals for two and sixpence. I don't know. At my private school it was about £3 a term, so I don't know what the university was.

And what about the cost of books and so forth?

I didn't have many, didn't buy many. You had to use the library mainly.

Was there a student union in that time?

There was indeed, yes. There was Honi Soit, there were student unions,

10:00 but the men's union was near the main steps and there was a refectory. Well you could go into the refectory but the men's union was on their own. But you paid a fee to belong to the union, which was in the '70s pretty well corralled by AUS in a big way, but we thought, "Well we've got to pay", but it wasn't very high. A tennis racquet cost £1, a surfer

10:30 plane cost £1 but I couldn't get, I yearned for a surfer plane. I saw one advertised in Gowings recently for $200. So things are very relative.

What's a surfer plane?

Well it's these rubber floats with handles and you go out in the surf and you could hire them when you went to the beach. You shoot in as if you were lying on a surfboard, lying on it.

That was an ambition of yours to have one of those, was it?

Oh yes. I tried to body surf, I could get smallish waves.

11:00 **To what extent were the males and females segregated at university?**

They weren't segregated in lectures. They were segregated with the two, Manning House and the other one, but there was a lot of talk and coffee and talk going on. Not coffee in the quad. That was the meeting place, sitting around with the good light in the winter on the northern side of the quad and meeting there, or meeting at

11:30 lectures. There was a university settlement to which I didn't belong which was very fashionable, but that was raising money for Darlington and the poor of Darlington. It was a big charity raising thing and they would have a settlement ball each year in which people got, I didn't go to that dressed up beautifully. No, I just sort of milled around. I felt university, it was a strange pretty unhappy

12:00 time. I think I was too immature and I reckon twenty years later I would've studied much better. But I loved reading and I loved research, and some of the lecturers were good and some of the others, you know, they had bad students too to put up with.

What about alcohol amongst the students?

Well, I don't know, I didn't drink. People would go to…

12:30 I went to Paul's formal and there was some drink there but that was after the war. You went to a dance, if you went to a dance at the Trocadero or the town hall where there were the dances, no liquor was served there but alcohol was allowed in. People carried in now what were called, well, they're airways bags now, and they put it under the tables and these would be

13:00 sort of ex-school functions or whatever, and only soft drink on top of the table. So the men could sort of bring it out and pour a little around but it could not be on the table. In my father's time there were the university pubs. He didn't drink much, but there was the Lallarook and so forth but they'd talk about going and drinking up and down around the university, but my lot didn't

13:30 and later in the '50's when I said I'd go and buy a bottle of wine at a bottle shop near Burwood and Enfield, they only sold it by the dozen. So it was very, I mean there was a 6.00 o'clock closing which ended, good thing, but there wasn't the availability. People couldn't drive in or go to the supermarket like the IGA [Independent Grocers of Australia] and stock up on wine and then drive off blearily with it.

14:00 And the army had wet canteens for the men, but as I said, I really didn't drink.

What sort of socio-economic strata did students come from in those days?

Well, it varied. There were people who were very very bright, they got exemptions, and they got in for nothing. The others, you would be

14:30 income tested or if you got a really brilliant pass you'd get an exemption, but they were means tested and the really bright ones got in for absolutely nothing. Many of them did a BA DipEd [Bachelor of Arts, Diploma of Education] in which they were bonded. They were paid to do their course, to do arts and go to the teachers' college, but they would be paid while they did their course, but then they had to be bonded. They could be sent to Picton, they could be sent Bourke. They promised when they got through

15:00 they had to go to the country. The ones I knew, let me see, one was a friend who started as a bank manager in the country. Some businessmen, clergymen's daughters and sons, it varied. Now on the contingent scale or whatever they call it now, I know people came from moderately poor families,

15:30 but we weren't talking about working class or so forth. The people I mixed with and went with had been from my area and they came from educated families, some of whose parents had been graduates themselves.

So, a large portion of it were from affluent professional families?

We're not affluent, not affluent.

OK, let's say professional

Professional, yes.

families, like yourself, the daughter of a

16:00 **medical doctor?**

Yes, but who wasn't affluent by any means. He once said to me, some doctors used to buy a car a year and my father said to me, "That doctor earns £1,000 a year," and he thought that was pretty remarkable, and he was a government servant for many years.

Your father was a graduate of Sydney Uni as well?

Sydney University and his brother too, the one who died at Paschendale.

16:30 But Dad got in late because he had to get out of the Silver Starch factory and do night study and get in because his father died and what money was there, wasn't…

When the war first started and while it was going on and you were still there, were you aware of the university contributing to the war effort in terms of men or academics?

That's what I said, because the lecture

17:00 rooms were empty. People were going away in 1940, '41, they were going off to the Middle East, to Syria, Tobruk and so forth. So this was the women who were left. Some of the women went. They joined up as physiotherapists. They went to the Middle East and they went as voluntary, VA's, voluntary aids. They volunteered, they weren't paid. They went.

And you said before that there was a feeling that

17:30 **star students were being stripped out by the army for different…**

There was a Sydney University Regiment but what I found out only a couple of years ago from these professors was that these academics, mathematicians and linguists, they were beginning to intercept Japanese messages before Japan came in, and they asked as soon as Japan came in, about four or five people in my year

18:00 were asked to go and work in Melbourne sort of in the rudiments of code breaking as linguists and mathematicians, and in Canberra there was John Laird who's an historian, the former archbishop, he was in, John Robinson. A couple of people, they were good at Latin, they were good at Greek. Gordon Gibson, our president, was a very good Greek scholar.

18:30 I knew them but I didn't go to the same lectures. So I've met these people since. One became a professor of French in Adelaide, but they were the linguists. They were picked up, the linguists and mathematicians were picked up and I only got there by accident in a round about way.

The students who went to serve with the army or other services and were ultimately lost in the Second World War, what do you think that loss meant to Australian society?

19:00 I think it meant a great loss. There was a brilliant, very nice fellow in my year called Graham Waddell, clever and nice. He didn't come back. There were certain ones in that year who went. Most of them ended up in the services and some of them got back after the war who'd been in the services and they cold do this CRTS [Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme] scheme about which you've heard, and that applied to women too, and that

19:30 was marvellous. They got back after the war and there was this great determination to study and get on with it and the housing situation was appalling then. We had a little flat on the back of our house which had been built for my grandmother where she died and we put an ad in the Herald and they said, "Bring a suitcase for the answers." It had been let for thirty shillings a week, not as big as, about this size, and that suitcase was filled with

20:00 pleas from ex-servicemen and their wives, and people were 'doing it yourself'. They were half building their houses on their own land. They were going there and digging the foundations and building their own houses and trying to study, and you know, hard go.

Why do you think that by your own admission you weren't the happiest you could've been at university?

Because as I said, it was,

20:30 the whole place, the war had torn it apart. There was a lot of political argument in which the Donald Horne's and people of these years would jump up and talk, talk their way out and commandeer every student discussion. But it was an unhappy, unsettling time. I mean if you're trying to study about German colonies in the Pacific or something, well, France is falling, the Pacific is just going haywire.

21:00 It’s very hard to concentrate, as it must be for people now with this going on.

What level of education or discussion at the university was there about Japan before it became a threat?

Nothing, nothing. There was more talk about Germany and the overrunning of Europe, and America

21:30 not in it, and as then, as my first passport said, we were British subjects and Australian citizenships dual. So we could come, eventually we could come and go but we can’t now, which many of us find it was Britain’s fault and find it insulting to be put in the foreigners’ gate. But there was a great feeling of admiration for Britain’s bravery and so many of the people who were air force

22:00 and so forth including my cousin, they joined the…they went to the Australian Air force but they were flying Sunderlands over the Atlantic. They were with mixed British crews and so on, and very often going back to the, in Northern Ireland, my cousins went back to the village in Northern Ireland where grandfather had come from and there were still oldies about who could, aunties and uncles, but here we just felt

22:30 very alone and I’ll never forget the day when I was in a picture show at Enfield on an odd night. I can’t remember the film, but there was a lot of rumbling passed in the street at night and shouting going on and everyone got up in the pictures and went out and it was the 6th Division had arrived back secretly from the Middle East. No one had known they were coming and they were driving out through the camp

23:00 and people were sort of running out into, “They’re back, they’re back.” The place was empty of men.

So prior to the Pearl Harbour attack Japan didn’t even really register as a discussion point?

Not at the university it didn’t. But you know, we would read about it but we had no idea just what you generally know about Japan and early

23:30 19th century missionaries and how Japan had modelled itself and had been an ally of Britain’s in the First War, and there were Japanese ships coming and going and wool buyers all around this area, which I didn’t live in, Japanese wool buyers coming. But you heard about Germans here and German, there were exhibitions in the shops of surreptitious material captured

24:00 from German citizens here. The Italian people, someone took it out on the poor old Italian green grocers, but they were pretty harmless. It was the Germans who were the clever ones.

What about the German students at university, how were they treated?

I didn’t know any, only the refugee ones, but they were fairly senior and studious. They would’ve been treated all right. A friend of mine, Otto Newman who is now in his 90s, he

24:30 came out in 1939 from Vienna and his parents, he was an architect. His parents were to follow and they knew what was coming with Hitler so he came out in advance bringing the family furniture, bringing some beautiful linen and he got to Sydney and he was helped by people he met on the boat. He eventually joined the Australian Army but his parents both, they were Roman Catholics

25:00 but they had Jewish blood generations back, they both went to Auschwitz and Otto married a friend of my mother’s and he became an architect with the housing commission and he did all those sketches up on the wall there of my 21st. He did a book plate for my 21st birthday which was nice.

What level of political activity was there at university?

Very much run by the Labor Club, very anti

25:30 the war until the Japanese came in, very very political. Someone tried to start an Anglo-Saxon society, one of the history lecturers, but that was a bit, we went along to that, the ones who felt admiration of Britain, but there was the, you know, but the Labor Party, university Labor Club ran Honi Soit, it ran the publications and

26:00 some of the people later became, Eric Willis, he was rather a heavy youth, he became Liberal Premier of New South Wales. Frank McGrath became a judge of the industrial court I think. Gordon Jockel who was a radical at the time to my amazement became head of the, after the war, Ambassador to Indonesia and head of the Defence Intelligence

26:30 Bureau, and I would’ve thought he was the most radical, you know. There was big arguments but not as much as there was in the ‘60s.

How involved were women in campus politics?

Well there wasn’t much campus politics. It was mainly the men who were in the Labor Club, some of the women were on Honi Soit, but it wasn’t, it was, there were also the religious

27:00 groups, the Evangelical Society which was very militant religiously and others, and sort of, but the political groups weren’t there, the political argument went on, but not about Japan, and by the time

Japan came in I was out of it.

So the Labor Club was only for men?

No, but I didn't know any women in it. My husband was a

27:30 democratic socialist and I said I was a democratic conservative.

And this Anglo-Saxon club that was formed, what was the point of that?

Well that was a point to sort of counteract the anti-British propaganda that was going on which was more or less taking, the Fascists and the Communists had allied. They made a pact and they were suddenly both at this stage, [Adolph] Hitler [German Chancellor] thought he got the

28:00 Russians in on his side, until the Russians were invaded and notified by Bletchley Park that the invasion was coming. But as I said at the university there was this secret group who were doing the intercepting and listening in, of which I knew nothing. So now huge bibliographies have been built up by Dr Peter Donovan, the mathematician, and John Mack, University of Queensland, and they were

28:30 trying to, they'd suddenly become very interested in interviewing us all but we've stuck with the War Memorial and I wish they'd get a move on.

I just want to also cover a couple of your earlier postings before you were at Central Bureau. Your first place was Victoria Barracks, is that right?

That's it, yeah.

What was the name of the organisation you were working

29:00 **for there?**

Well it was just Intelligence. It wasn't Signals then. "Intelligence at Victoria Barracks?" people say rather sarcastically, but Intelligence was running the cipher. Signals was separate. When I moved to Boronia Park they called us New South Wales Lines of Communication and gave us a green and blue colour patch. When I moved to Queensland, before Central Bureau, we joined

29:30 at the University of Queensland at St Lucia, it was called Advanced Land Headquarters and that was, MacArthur was in Brisbane and all sorts of things went on within that university that I didn't know about.

They're all very bland names, all these?

Well Central Bureau was chosen to be deliberately bland I've read since, and on our discharge papers some of the men who went to the Philippines, their record

30:00 might record a W on them. I have 'clerk', there's no mention of Central Bureau anywhere. So when these people came back and said they'd been in the Philippines there were no records. It had more or less been apart from what DSD might have, and only about five years ago the Philippines Government suddenly handed out medals to the Australians who'd been there. It was, you know, could they accept them? The government said yes, they could after all this time,

30:30 but the Americans wanted to give awards, and I've seen the archives, to some of the really brilliant Australians. They recommended them and they gave awards to their own men who worked in Central Bureau but the Australian Government wouldn't let them accept the American medals.

The place, is that 2nd Army HQ [Headquarters] cipher office where you had the pigeons next to you?

No, that was New South Wales Lines at Boronia Park.

31:00 **There was also a camouflage section there?**

Yes, with Hal Messingham who was later, but I didn't meet him. I was in my, but the pigeons were outside the window and they were a bit disrupted of sleep, but Hal Messingham whom I met later when he was director of the art gallery, he had been in the camouflage unit.

What did you see of their work?

I didn't see any; I just knew they were there.

It sounds like a very mixed bunch of people and activities

31:30 **there?**

Well it was. There was a band leader from Melbourne who came up to Brisbane, Clarrie Gange, who was our First War officer who was a bit military, you know, clarinet player. He was a very good one too, and he would occasionally, at Brisbane, he'd bring a clarinet and play. There were, I don't know, one of our most recent members who

32:00 joined Central Bureau was Polish and he was destined, anyway he is still going to ballet classes in his

late ‘70s. They were a strange lot some of them.

Some quite bohemian people there?

I think so, but we didn’t meet them in the garage full of women, I’ll tell you. Oh yes, very much so. The head boss of it all was Colonel Sandford, very wealthy from

32:30 South Australia who, absolutely brilliant in the Middle East but he was most artistic and he ended up living in a villa in Italy, you know, with marvellous style. Others who had been in insurance companies and banks, they plodded on and worked for many years. Jack Bleakley who wrote that book over there, the history of the air force side, they’ve sat down

33:00 and they’ve written it and they couldn’t print for thirty years, but they had been in banks and insurance, a lot of them.

When you were first moved up to Brisbane you were supposed to have gone to New Guinea, is that right?

Mmm.

How did it come to be aborted and you arrived in Brisbane?

We don’t know. We got out of the train after a thirty hour journey or something and no one had been notified and we sat and sat and a lot of ringing up went on by someone

33:30 and then they sent out a truck and they put up a few tents on the hillside in a camp which had a lot of little huts and then we found we weren’t going to New Guinea. We never heard why. We ended up working in the basement of the university which I did for a considerable time until I went to Central Bureau early in 1944.

So what level of preparation of accommodation and so on was there for you?

There was none.

34:00 That’s what I’m telling you. I’ll show you the picture of the tent there. They didn’t know, but afterwards we were in quite decent huts. Four girls to a hut.

So how long were you living like that for?

Well I lived in it, I was in the tent for about three months and then they got huts and I lived in huts for the rest of the war. The huts had four girls in each, two small wardrobes each and mosquito nets because the mosquitos

34:30 at Indooroopilly were frightful, and Chermside didn’t have the mosquitos but it had again I think three girls to a hut with push out windows, fibro huts with push out windows, and it let the air in and kept the heat out a bit, but no heating or cooling of course. The fellows, girls, who went up to Darwin there was no air-conditioning. They got tinned butter

35:00 and stuff like that, not that they complained about it much. And one man, I will, look, if you go over to the table, I can’t get

We’re nearly towards the end of this tape so we’ll just keep talking for now.

All right.

It must’ve been extremely disappointing for you that you didn’t go up to New Guinea?

Well, we thought so, yes. But anyway, we got used to that and then after a while I heard a couple of us were lent to go to Central Bureau and a friend of mine went and

35:30 she said, “Oh,” you know. I said, “Well look, I’ll ask if I can go.” So I applied to transfer to it. Didn’t really know what it did and once I got there I found out.

Were you satisfied with that transfer?

I was satisfied with it but then the ones I left did go to New Guinea, but far too late in the piece. But looking at it now, if I was so allergic to mosquitos in Brisbane I probably would’ve been smitten the moment I put in New Guinea. Who knows?

Did you ever meet General MacArthur?

Of course

36:00 not, don’t be silly. Just like saying did I meet Winston Churchill. No.

What did you think of him as a leader?

Well when he arrived here everyone thought how marvellous the Americans are coming. Reading everything now it was the greatest…he got out by a fast torpedo boat, he had to fly, couldn’t get into Darwin because they were bombing Darwin, landed at Batchelor and I’ve been reading this

36:30 recently, said, “Get me a car and drive me to Melbourne.” He had no idea. So then he got to Alice Springs and got on the old Ghan all the way around to Melbourne with a staff of about, his wife, a four year old son, a few officers who got out of the Philippines and more to follow by submarine, and says, “I shall return.” I think it’s the most optimistic remark ever made. No one else was here. Then they started coming, but

37:00 slowly. I didn’t meet the high-ups, I didn’t mingle with the officers apart from serving them a drink on my first day in the army. I was among the NCOs and the privates and the nice Ian Allen who was the captain, later became a cipher head, who’d been at Tobruk, a huge tall man about six feet seven and married a tiny girl

37:30 of about five feet as most tall people do. Went into parliament, the Country Party, started the Darling River Scheme which they’re still talking about. I used to meet people after the war occasionally when I’d…the rector of St Mark’s, Darling Point, English, not now of course. I had to do something, an interview with him and I said, “When did you come to Australia,” and he said,

38:00 “I came in the war to a strange place in Brisbane.” I said, “It wouldn’t have been 21 Henry Street, would it?” Yes.

Can you describe to us some of the dances you might’ve been to in Brisbane?

Certainly can, and down the south coast at, down on the Gold Coast anyway. We went to the dance hall near the camp at Chermside and as usual the boys sat on one side of the

38:30 hall and the girls sat on the other. We were all in uniform, civilian girls came too, and they would play the music and it was good music of the time, you know, In The Mood, and all of this which we thought was a good tune and I still do, and Begin the Beguine, and you know, very good jazz at the time, but they weren’t so crash hot. Then you would get up and you would dance around the floor clockwise if I remember, and then

39:00 they also had a lot of old time dancing, palais glides, Lambeth Walks and the Canadian three-step. Have you ever encountered that?

I can’t say that I have.

Well it was rather good fun. We hadn’t danced to that in Sydney. This was more country style, and barn dances in which you would go around the room and then the music would stop and you’d be opposite your new partner and you’d dance several steps, the music would stop again. So you met a lot of

39:30 people.

What was the etiquette for men asking women to dance?

May I have this dance with you. Not as my mother’s generation, they had little programs which I’ve got old copies of. Then at the intervals the smokers would dash from the hall and have a smoke and I think the men have had a bit of beer or something outside. We’d have soft drinks and then they’d usually have very nice suppers. Except the only American dance I

40:00 went to was at an American camp and they asked for a load of girls to go over to the dance. Well this was sophistication, they had little tables with red check and they were jiving and jitterbugging, oh yes. I don’t think there was any liquor. Liquor wasn’t around much. I mean I’m sure the fellows got on to it outside the dance hall but not in the hall. It was dry in there.

40:30 **What was the ratio of men to women like at these dances?**

Pretty even, ‘cause there was a place in Brisbane I didn’t call, go to, I wanted to, call Cloudland, was right up, sort of semi Luna Park and right up on a peak. They had other dance places in Brisbane, they had floating pontoons on the Brisbane River, but Americans weren’t allowed in there. That was only Australians. So the Americans were segregated off. You know, there was,

41:00 but I mean the people who worked in the park at Ascot among the Americans, there were great romances and many marriages. Only one now remains in America, poor fellow. He’s a dear man and he used to come out, Joe Richard, very clever code breaker, he came out to Anzac Day until about a couple of years ago with his Australian wife and he had a uniform tailored in Brisbane in 1944 and he

41:30 wore this uniform, and I don’t think any of us could get into our uniforms we had in 1944.

Tape 6

00:32 **Helen, when you first joined the AWAS what did you imagine you might be doing?**

I had no idea. I wanted to do something useful, not just sit there while everything went on and everyone you knew had gone away or was fighting, and we girls and women just thought we wanted to help and you ended up doing, as I said, people were knitting and they were doing first aid and learning nursing

and so on. After

01:00 the war some of these women I met in the army, one was at Indooroopilly, she did a CRTS course in nursing. She became matron of St Luke's Hospital. People caught up their careers after the war, but you were in a state of flux. You didn't know what was happening.

Did you feel like you were part of an Anzac tradition?

Well as I said, my family were so upset, each of them with a brother lost

01:30 in the war or after it, and my uncle who'd been at Lone Pine, we didn't read war books, they didn't encourage war books, we didn't go to war, we didn't go to many films because of polio, but there was a thing, pride, in the bravery of these people but there was a feeling that war was disgusting. And my Uncle Tom, the young doctor who died at 29, he'd been quite brilliant, until recently when I left

02:00 Mosman, they sent back from France or where they had died, they would send back the officer's tin trunk with his gum boots and his revolver. It all came back to my mother. We had it at home. I used the tin trunk for storage. I've still got the holster of his revolver, and it did have the real revolver and bullets in it until, well you know, people were opening it up when I was young and sort of putting the bullets in when we were having a party, "Oh look, Uncle Tom's",

02:30 and we had Uncle Tom's gum boots, and this was, and you saw in Sydney, you saw so many First War people who might have brown gloves on their hands and you knew they'd lost their hands. You saw so many maimed people walking around and it was just there and you heard about the failure of the soldier settlement farms and the pride of these people who would sort of, they were moved on as you know

03:00 from town to town and if they got to Bathurst or somewhere they could only stay a certain time and they were on the dole, and there was great pride and this uncle of mine who brought back the English war bride and they didn't give him his job back, and he wouldn't take his deferred pay. After the war we all got deferred pay. It was a lump sum of money, not much, and my uncle said, "I volunteered, I didn't ask for money from the government." He wouldn't take it.

03:30 Well now we'd think what a fool because he was out of work later, he needed it. But there was a great feeling of, and he marched on Anzac Day with his crowd, but my father hadn't been. He'd been in the Pacific as a doctor, but Uncle Tom, the pictures of these dead uncles were around and there was a great feeling of sorrow.

OK,

04:00 **tell us about coming back to Sydney at the end of the war. How did you get here?**

Well I came back on the train of course and when I got back, got out of the army in December at the end of '45 and Sydney, there was still big British warships in the harbour and aircraft carriers and things which had come, they got here, they went up to Hong Kong and they were coming and going, but my sister saw that.

04:30 I didn't really. But Sydney was lovely, and out of uniform into nice cool dresses and several months I found out about the university and I had two months of lovely surfing and seeing friends, surf, surf, surf, and trying to get a tan, I went a faint biscuit colour, and I belonged to a thing called the Victoria League

05:00 Young Contingent and we used to dance with British people down in Andronicus Place. The Rocks just had coffee shops and things. It wasn't developed then, and I just saw friends who were coming back. My cousin got back from a POW camp and they had a first New Year's Eve party over at Seaforth near Clontarf. And the security of travelling then, my sister

05:30 and I in our evening dresses, we went and got the tram from Burwood, train to town, tram to the Spit, we were met there, walked up through the bush and they had a party, all these ex-service cousins and their friends. They had brewed beer in the bathtub. They had the beer, I think we had a shandy, and then at the end my uncle or someone saw us, put us on the train. We came back about 1.00 in the morning

06:00 to Burwood and walked home, the two of us. And now, you know. There was no danger, and even when I was 21 going in and out to the barracks, the trains were on the midnight, you know, going in at midnight and coming home at midnight, you'd get the odd drunk on the train but there was no knife carrying. Only foreigners carried knives. There were no drugs. So a boozy person would be the only…

06:30 you know.

What sort of shape was your cousin in when he came back from being a prisoner of war?

He'd put on a lot of weight because they fed him up, but I saw a most amazing film made by Americans who went in to this area where the Russians met the Germans, and it's a picture of the first flight, and I saw this tall fellow with a slouch hat going

07:00 up on this plane to fly out to Britain and I said to John a few years ago, "Did you see that amazing film with that Australian?" He said, "That was me," and he said, "I wouldn't have survived that march." His

father, who'd been an Anzac, had sent him a pair of army boots which he'd got fortunately through the Red Cross and I'd sent him some cigarettes so he could pay a few, and they walked. They walked through the snow and they worked in snow

07:30 filled quarries and the Germans trained machine guns. I only heard this a few years ago because you didn't talk, you didn't worry them about it.

So tell us about looking for work in Sydney when you got back?

Well I had looked around and I went down to the, I went to the Sun and nothing, nothing doing here, and then it was through an aunt of mine,

08:00 honorary aunt because we were all honorary aunts then, I have no real aunts, who was an eye doctor. She was my eye doctor, and she said, "I know a woman who's the fiction editor at Women's Weekly. I could get you an appointment with her," and this was Jean Williamson who was, you know, been a journalist since the first war. So she said, "Write us something and we'll see what it's like. Write us a couple of things," and they took it.

What

08:30 **did you write?**

I wrote a satire on school, a St Trinian's sort of thing on the school books that we grew up, all British school stories of children getting trapped by the tide and old abbeys and all this sort of nonsense we read, and Sprod, who was an ex 8th Div [Division] POW illustrated it, and he later was a leading cartoonist on Punch, and the Women's Weekly had, they went in for Australian writers and Australian artists so they took it

09:00 and then they said, "All right, we'll give you a job in the fiction department reading manuscripts until we see. We've never had a cadet before." Because all these women were, they had been war correspondents and they were pretty good. So I stuck it out and I was reading, well this was all right, reading magazines, all the Saturday Evening Posts and things from which they'd buy stories. There was a group of us reading that, and then after

09:30 about a year they said, "Well, we'll give you a cadetship and it will be four years." Well I was feeling ancient at this time and I had to go to lectures once a week by Donald Horne who'd been in my year and left, and Zalie McLeod who'd been a war correspondent. But the Telegraph treated, they were better with women. They gave women a really good chance. In

10:00 journalism as you know, and I did a sort of run down thing on this when I got this grant to America on the status of women journalists in Australia and ran down historically who they were. But the AJA which is now the Media Alliance, women had equal pay from the very beginning but they didn't have equal opportunity, particularly on the Herald. But on the Telegraph and Women's Weekly, the Women's Weekly really women there

10:30 had much more of a chance than the men, because my husband who was a journalist for many years, until he was made supplements editor he'd never travelled until he was over 60. But we were going around Australia, we were flying here and there and what have you. Travelled with a photographer like you and Matt, when they let me out on the road at last, and some of them were very keen on the city life and they

11:00 gave me a few months on social pages and I had to dress up a bit and went to the races. I'd never been to the races, I didn't know much about it, and then occasional picnic races. Then on a magazine Packer owned called the Home Budget and the Home Budget sent me on a canoe trip down the Williams River, paddling down and writing a story about the canoe trip, one down the Williams River

11:30 down near Dungog. And the equipment for everything is so marvellous now. I was told to take two kerosene tins, one for clothes and one for food. I shared a tent and I loved it but the canoe tipped over at one stage so my notebook floated away and I had to write on lavatory paper or something that was lent to me. But I liked being in the bush, I wanted to see Australia. So the others who wanted to be around

12:00 Sydney, I wanted to get out and I didn't like the office atmosphere. You know, I liked some of the women extremely well and I still see them. We meet a couple of times a year, and Joyce Bowden who was there before the war, she was the daughter of the head of JC Williamson's and what she doesn't know about Sydney. And a few senior ones, I'm senior but not as senior as they, and

12:30 then I got out.

What sort of stories were you most interested in writing?

Getting out about the bush.

And how did you get yourself involved in covering the Korean War?

I didn't cover the Korean War. Dorothy Drain did. No, I had nothing to do with the Korean War, only seeing troop ships off. I think whoever interviewed me, I said, "The women of the Women's Weekly had

had extraordinary

13:00 experiences." Dorothy Drain was a columnist, very witty poet. She was the one who told me about reading the New Yorker and these literary magazines which I'd never heard about. The Women's Weekly had a former drama and literary editor of the Herald working for them. They had, no, but Dorothy Drain was sent by ship to Japan and then she was on the Korean peninsular when the Chinese invaded and she was caught up in the (Crete? UNCLEAR). No, I only

13:30 saw the troops off in Sydney. No.

OK, and you studied Russian at university. Why did you choose Russian?

Well, that wasn't at university in my youth. That was later.

When did you do that?

I did it from the late '50s because I was, Strathfield became a place where many of the Russians settled and they built a cathedral just behind my old school and I was

14:00 interested in Russia and I met Hungarians and Russians who told me the stories of how they got out of Hungary, and I was very interested how did the Communists take over, and I thought, it was so censored. I thought well I will learn Russian to the best, but I should've started when I was about three. And I studied and I wrote this script and I love the sound of the poetry in Russian, just beautiful,

14:30 and so I was really sort of, I became very interested in the manoeuvring of Communists and Russia in this country and I saw the Petrovs [Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov , members of the Soviet embassy who defected in 1954] off the night they flew out. Another journalist and I, the Women's Weekly sent us out there and I don't know, I just got very interested and I got to Russia in '62. You've probably got that down there.

Tell us about seeing the Petrovs off?

Well, I think half

15:00 the press of Sydney was there. The Women's Weekly sent me in a police car to wait out on Parramatta Road to see if the car was coming in and then Betty Best waited at Mascot which was a small terminal then. And every Russian in Sydney and every press person turned up, and Betty and I, we were told to wait in the ladies' lavatory in case Mrs Petrov went in. We didn't do that. But she was definitely drugged and she was

15:30 pulled through the crowd by a man called Koslitzen and she didn't know where her husband was and went with the politician, was out there taking affidavits and Russians were shouting. And it was gangway then, you didn't walk in on a, and Qantas was the air, they were putting her aboard Qantas and I've never, I was just impelled with the force of the crowd. I was at the foot of the gangplank

16:00 and half the photographers and people from the Telegraph were going aboard this plane. They'd booked onto the plane because they knew she'd be going on it to Darwin, and Marge McGrath of Qantas was shouting, "Put out your cigarettes," because everyone was smoking underneath, and she had one foot in the plane and one foot on the ladder and the Russians were pulling the gangplank that way and they were trying to pull her in and they got her in.

16:30 But the air hostess had been wised-up and she, you know, convinced that her husband hadn't been killed and they got her off at Darwin. Betty Best, my friend who has since died, we found a shoe lying in the terminal. We didn't know whose shoe, and what will we do? So Betty said, "We better hand it in to lost property." So we handed it in and it was only when we saw that famous picture that Betty said to me years later, "Do you realise the shoe we handed in was Mrs Petrov's?" What

17:00 a journalist. Yes, and years after that I was often interviewing Yves Tishenko, I used to interview a lot of the Russian poets and people when they came here and political activists and so on.

Where did you go after you worked on the Women's Weekly?

Well, with the Women's Weekly I did all sorts of things, around Australian on two Redex trials going right

17:30 around, Alice Springs, all over the place. Then I felt I was just stuck there on a low grading and the ones who were around town I felt, you know, work work work, going out in the bush and so, and I'm still on a low grading and I thought, blow it, and I transferred to Woman's Day and they were pretty good, but I didn't like, the magazine was a bit of a mess and Women's Weekly in my time had good artists and concentrated on fiction

18:00 and they let you more or less, they let me go anyway. And Woman's Day let me go off to the Kimberley's for about two months doing stories on Aboriginals and education, with Hasluck's permission from the government. I went to all sorts of missions and settlements in 1960 and got stuck in Halls Creek for about a week and made my way over to Broome through Derby and so on, hitching rides and getting down to very remote stations.

18:30 A photographer came with me to Alice. We had some pretext of a story there about a centenary of John McDouall Stuart and then I went on on my own and stayed with the pilot of one of these nice bush planes, we'd flown for a while and he said, "Would you like a cup of tea?" So he put down on an airstrip. The homestead was there, the door open. He went into the kitchen, no one was there, made a cup of tea for both of us, got back in the plane, flew to Halls Creek.

19:00 So I got down to a few remote stations and then eventually got to Broome and was put up by a kindly man I'd met on the Redex trial and his wife 'cause there were two hotels and they were both blood houses in the old sense. No motel, I mean there were no motels around in the time I was doing journalism. You stayed in country hotels which were, you know, and at Derby they

19:30 said to me, "Miss Frizell, we can't give you a bed for tonight but would you mind sleeping out on the verandah?" And some kind Presbyterian missionary from out of town said, "I think it'd be better if she stayed with us." So took me out there. I went to Catholic missions and I went to Vestey's properties and I saw a couple of Aboriginal ceremonies out in the…but they all lived on the properties then. There hadn't been this removal

20:00 to…and there wasn't the grog. There wasn't the sniffing because no one had a car, and the police station in Alice Springs was called Muldoon's Mansions because Muldoon was the head gaoler and the prisoners, only a couple of prisoners and they were kept occupied keeping the grounds looking very pretty. But I went up afterwards and did articles for the Herald on Aboriginal health in the early '70s and infant mortality and

20:30 all of that.

What was your first overseas trip as a journalist?

New Zealand I think, just doing a supplement. They wanted pictures and I was very interested, or was it they sent me on a plane to meet Danny Kaye to land in, go to Fiji and I waited a couple of days, get on the plane in the hopes of getting an interview and then

21:00 I would type it, supposed to hand if off because the Weekly was a weekly then, not a monthly as it is now. They decided when Ita and everyone took over, they decided they'd change it to a monthly, whereas before it had a letter press insert so that they could have a news story, one for each state. They could have a news section and they could get it in within two days. So that was it, flew there and

21:30 intercepted Kaye on this long slow flight and he gave me an interview and I went back to my desk, to my seat and typed and smoked and handed it in at the other end.

What made you decide to go to the Sydney Morning Herald?

Well that was, the Herald had bought Woman's Day and I got this Leader grant for journalism

22:00 in 1965 and I went to the States as an Australian journalist and there were Singapore, Korea, Japan, New Zealand and we all went over there. We went to the East West Centre in Hawaii, had to write a paper each on a set topic, Women Journalists in the Pacific was one and the Status of Women Journalists in Australia was the other, and they said,

22:30 Woman's Day said would I like to be put in for it, and others were and I got it, and then when I got, then the Herald management said, "You'll have to take leave without pay." So I took it without pay, and I could see anyone I wanted too, Time Life journalists, saw Mrs Martin Luther King and we went to the White House and met Ladybird and you know, you had to dress up. It got exhausting, and then I flew

23:00 out to England and then I came around via Kathmandu and so forth before the hippies and got back, and so, but '62 I got to Russia at the time of the Cuban Crisis and I'd had a free trip to Israel and I paid my way up by train through the Balkans and just hit Moscow at a wonderful time.

I can't imagine what it must've been like to be in Moscow then?

I didn't know what was happening.

23:30 They didn't either. My Russian wasn't good enough until I met a Reuters man and you had to stay in the hotels where they put you and I would walk around the streets and go on a few tours, but then the Reuters man said, it was made out to the Russians that the Americans had intercepted their ships on the high sea, the wicked American, and so they were doing nothing at all. There was no mention. So it was an American back down as it was put to the Russians.

24:00 Only when I got back everyone was saying, "Oh, the Cuban Crisis," you know. Very close apparently.

Tell us about the Leader Conference in Honolulu?

It was all these journalists and you had to give your papers and they had American journalists who'd met us there at the East West Centre and there was women from Life magazine and Ebony,

24:30 a Negro magazine which I…so when we went to New York we went and saw all these places. So we had a fortnight there and then we travelled across the States and Wyoming and so forth, and in New York

after we finished we more or less had a fortnight to go where we wanted to, so I put in for Mrs Martin Luther King and the astronauts' wives, John Glenn's wife and so forth down in,

25:00 you know, not Florida. I got to Texas anyway, and so I saw a lot of places but it was before, and in the south I went around with groups who were registering the Negroes to vote and sort of heard the intimidation of some of the radio people there who'd been surrounded by the Ku Klux Klan and so forth and you know, I did as much, and when I got back no one was very interested.

25:30 The news editor on Woman's Day, a man, said, "We're only interested if Martin Luther King gets assassinated," and you know, he didn't use much. I had all this information. So I went down to Kath Collins who was the only woman on the Herald. She was a university blue and she now was assistant to the chief of staff and I'd known her for years and she said, "Well, Pringle is going to start a column, a news column, why don't you apply for that?" But I couldn't tell Woman's Day, so I

26:00 furtively went to see Pringle and gave him samples of what I'd, and I sent an article from New York on the new American ambassador who was coming out here and done a few stories, and I gave them to the Herald if Woman's Day wasn't interested, which they weren't. And so Pringle took me on and Gavin Souter edited this "Data" column and he had me and another fellow and a sub and so forth, and Peter Bowers edited it and

26:30 he was political correspondent for years, and then I edited it. I had a couple of young Englishmen working for me, one of whom has recently been the Mayor of Woollahra and had a big, but no, we could chose what we did every day, work out every day. It was a news column on which "This Day Tonight" was modelled, and they would ring us up when they were starting. So we didn't know what we were going to put in

27:00 and just wrote what we wanted. Pringle gave us a lovely go and Pringle said he prided himself on getting women out of the women's section on the Herald. Well I was the only one apart from Kath in the whole floor. I think they thought, you know, what's she doing here? The men were all, they weren't bad. It was the women who were more difficult, the ones in the women's section who were particularly put out.

So what sort of things did you cover on that column?

27:30 Covered everything from anti-Vietnam War movements to opera. Well, Utzon had just…lots of Opera House. I was always running around the Opera House with a hard hat on. Political movements, Aboriginals, well after, they killed the column on me. After a few years Peter went to Canberra. I did it on my own for a couple of years and then they

28:00 killed it overnight without telling me, but Pringle had gone by then. He walked out, he'd had a big row with management and he was the most civilised Scotsman, and then there was Guy Harriot whom I liked very much. He'd been a war correspondent, Australian, and then he left and they brought in someone else from Adelaide who, you know, he sort of, Harriot was still

28:30 there but Harriot was reduced to the leader page and the book page. But they killed the "Data" column on me and then they said would I, Charmiane Clift died, they said would I write unpaid a column every week, so I did that for the women's pages and then I was arts editor for a while when Harry Kippax left. So I was going to all the theatres, and then I did film reviews for some years for the Herald and I was

29:00 standing in on the book page when the poor literary editor had a stroke in Brisbane. So I did that for about, I was literary editor for about three years and that got pretty hard because my parents were very ill and you know, I just felt "ugh". I was living at Mosman and they were still out at Homebush and I was running backwards and forwards and Jack hadn't been well, so at the end of 1980 which was my due time turning sixty in

29:30 1981 to retire. Both my parents died early in 1981. They both had the equivalent of Alzheimer's and they'd been brilliant, clever, nice, lovely people and I just felt I couldn't do it any longer, I couldn't keep up the pressure. And now I'm so slow on the typewriters. Oh, this'll drive…I lack the technology and it's driving me mad.

30:00 And you see, even, I got his book out. He died but I got his book published and I had to do all the captions and get it together and it had changed so much because proof reading, instead of doing the galleys, hot, cold metal was coming in just before I left, but until then it was hot metal down on the stone and reading things upside down which I'm very good at.

30:30 But for reading the proofs of this book you had to have those little sticky things from books to put in.

Tell us about the Vietnam War?

Well when I first went down to the "Data" column I suggested doing a rundown on all the anti-Vietnam War movements which I did. The longest you could write was 22 inches.

Which is about how many words?

31:00 About 400. The column would have, anyway, it would be, it was nine point Roman, but it would be about

three-quarters of a page of the Herald every day disbursed by ads. So you'd have about this and that say. So I did a lot of research. Some of the anti resistance people, they're all sorts. Some are still around, some have, resistance

31:30 is still around. Social Youth Alliance was still around. There were the Quakers of course who were absolutely terrific. There were the Save Our Sons movement, so there were many. I did a sort of potted run down. Now, some didn't want to talk about what they planned. But I did that, I did a lot of politics, political writing, went

32:00 up to Canberra quite a lot and I was there when Holt disappeared and I was sort of getting on with Canberra and writing about the arrangements there. But I had a go at everything.

What did you see of the Vietnam War?

I didn't see the Vietnam War. I saw ships going off that were blockaded

32:30 and prevented from getting there. I saw the troops coming back; I saw the huge moratorium gatherings in Melbourne and Sydney, but Melbourne particularly I was down there for one. I saw the marches through the streets. I later did feature articles on demonstrations, the historical pattern of them and on the pattern of language that was used. I was against the Vietnam War when I went to America,

33:00 but as I saw it going on I realised how, at first I thought this is, then I met a Vietnamese from the North whose parents had been killed who were absolutely stifled and repressed and I swung. I wish we hadn't got involved in it, but when I was in America I was arguing against their involvement and we shouldn't have got into it, but I did change.

33:30 Because it wasn't, you know, "Wide eyed for Kai, well why go for Ho". It was just, I got to Taiwan. I tried to get into Communist China in the late '60s but I couldn't. I kept on turning up in Hong Kong but they wouldn't let me in.

34:00 Kath Collins got in at the time of the Cultural Revolution, but then I got to Taiwan because they wouldn't let me in, so someone said, "Would you like to go to Taiwan?" So I did. So I did a few articles on the Herald on what I saw of Taiwan.

34:30 **When you were travelling across America where did you stop?**

We started, we went from Hawaii to San Francisco and then we went down to, anyway, where

35:00 Steinbeck wrote Grapes of Wrath, down there. And then we went back and were put on a lovely train and went across to Wyoming, a beautiful train, and some of the people I knew who were in the air force went to Canada during the war. Well I'd only seen Australian trains, and this was a glorious train with a viewing cabinet. Got to Wyoming and glorious country, and the Americans staged a corny

35:30 invasion of the train and carried some of the smaller Asian girls off. They were dressed up as mountain men, and so we had a bit of a time in Wyoming, these marvellous mountains with snow on them and Charolais cattle which were white like chalk cut-outs on the hills of England. And I went from there and we went to Minnesota, Minneapolis, to Chattanooga, "Battle above the Skies sic (Clouds)",

36:00 and made our way across to New York and from there I went down to Williamsburg and down to Atlanta to Mrs Martin Luther King, then to Florida seeing some of the recruiting, and I met all sorts of people, then over to Texas, and it was only a year after [John F] Kennedy's [American President] assassination so he was, they had no monument to him

36:30 in Deely Plaza. A few flowers had been left there. But I met the journalists who had been covering and they had gone ahead of Kennedy. They had gone on to Fort Worth ahead of it. So they weren't there, some had been there, but they hated him and they just had no monument to him there at all at that stage. I believe there's one since.

What was it like being in Texas

37:00 **in the '60s with the race problems that were encountered there?**

Well, the race problems were worse over in Atlanta and Alabama. Texas wasn't, it wasn't so black and white. It was where the Ku Klux Klan were and the people over, and I met people in Atlanta who had been Quakers and peace activitists and they'd taken part in these marches. But Texas was,

37:30 it was blazing heat like Australia was about a month or so ago, and I went to the King ranch there and I went to…I was staying with people. I was staying with Americans who were in the John Birch Society and they thought I was there to spy on them and I'd heard of the John Birch Society. It was called after someone, but they were so far to the right it wasn't true. But they were very guarded with me and only

38:00 when I was leaving, I stayed in their home and I was typing articles and things, and they said, "Helen, how could you do this to us?" Their State Department had said I was there to investigate the John Birch Society which I wasn't, and so it was all very, and I got onto the State Department and said, "Why?" It was very strange, it was a strange atmosphere. It was Republicans, Democrats, assassination of Kennedy

38:30 and very strange.

What kind of access did you have to Mrs Martin Luther King?

Well the interview was arranged by the State Department so I got straight in. She lived in a wealthy black district of Atlanta, an unguarded house. He wasn't there. I think her daughter was there and I had, I will keep on saying Negro because, we've gone black. I'll say what we

39:00 said at the time, and Coretta King, she was there, and the house was unguarded. It was a big bungalow type of house in a good prosperous suburb because some of them were very wealthy. And so she kept me waiting about an hour. She was very hostile to me, and I sent her the article afterwards, but I got a bit hostile to her having been, kept cool, came on the right time

39:30 and so forth. I didn't like her, maybe because of that. I interviewed her. I interviewed some of the old southern families who were sort of religious, 18th century mansions and so forth, but who wouldn't have a black into their church. I said, "Well, that's not a very Christian thing." But it was the absolute separation and

40:00 in the…I wasn't on the busses so I didn't see it, but it was, once you got into Atlanta and Alabama, that's where it was. And in America the blacks had to be, they were trying to persuade them to go and register to vote and I went around with this team who were going into black homes and getting them to sign up and vote and meet people as I said, the man who'd run a radio station

40:30 in Alabama and been pretty isolated, and he'd been broadcasting things in favour of the blacks and the Ku Klux Klan were sort of circling in their cars and he said it was very intimidating.

Tape 7

00:31 **At that point, Helen, towards the end of the war where some of your colleagues got to go off with MacArthur and you girls got left behind, can you describe to me the disappointment?**

Oh, we were furious. We didn't think it was far, but at the time we didn't know who stopped us going but by all accounts it was the Australian Government. Everything that I've read and I've seen, I've got General Aitken, I've got his memoirs there

01:00 we got out from America and he praised the work of the WAAAF and AWAS and said "Highly skilled people". Well, many of them were in very detailed jobs, and he said it wasn't, he regretted they couldn't persuade the Australian Government.

Was that purely based on gender?

Well that probably was. They let them go to New Guinea, but they wouldn't let them go any further.

Do you think that was justified?

01:30 No. And his account, there was a woman called Joy Lenane, who was in the WAAAF, and she's mentioned in a lot of things and she was a skilled Japanese Morse code operator, older than I and living on the central coast. She was chosen with a group of others to learn this very difficult Morse and they lived in a hut down in Melbourne with a guard on the door and they worked four hour navy shifts and so forth

02:00 and she was particularly praised, her group, and they suddenly, well, these American girls were probably very good but they just passed. Some went direct to the islands and some passed through Brisbane. I only met a couple of them.

How did you fill in the time until the end of the war after the Bureau was packed up and shifted?

Well there wasn't much. That's when they sent me, after the

02:30 European war finished, they sent me to the NCO's course. I'd been an NCO for years but they sent me to learn about marching and discipline and so forth and we were just hanging around. We were moved into quite a nice camp near Victoria Park but there was very little to do. We'd go to the fire station at Ascot. We were there and the Americans had all left and that's where a lot of

03:00 the code breaking went on, but we never, I never set, it was as if a park in a suburb had been completely wired in and huts had been put through it and the fire station had been occupied, and that was all railed off and you didn't step outside your room. You didn't, you'd met your local, go and have lunch in another park, buy some fruit and a sandwich, but

03:30 if you, Brisbane had a couple, one coffee shop is still there called the Shingle Inn and it is the only remaining and it still serves the most marvels waffles and things left over from American days. It is still

there and it's still the same menu, homemade cakes. But you know, the newspaper, the Courier Mail moved out of Brisbane. The whole Queen Street is a wasteland of a mall now, like Pitt

04:00 Street Mall, dreadful.

So you really had very little to occupy your time there during the last few months of the war?

No, they didn't know what to do with us.

Were you doing any work at all?

Very little, I was tidying up. They formed a committee, of which I was not one, of some of the men to write a history, a run down of the history on Central Bureau. I wasn't involved in it. I think they took pictures of a few people. The Americans, which I've got there, they

04:30 put out just after the war something called Assist Records, Special Intelligence Service. I didn't get a copy but the people who were in the Philippines got copies. I've got a photocopy of it, and people since then have written their own homemade accounts of what they saw and did. And they are very interesting personal accounts.

How did you celebrate the end of the war?

We went around Brisbane for a couple of

05:00 days. Went in a jeep and it wasn't on and we went back to the garage again and then they said, "It's on", and a jeep with some air force people—the next shift finished—one of the girls was friendly with an air force officer who had a jeep so we all jumped in the jeep again, went into Brisbane. There were papers falling around but it really, that was it, driving around looking to see what other people were doing. And everyone felt very happy about it, it was

05:30 over and this atom bomb thing was very puzzling because we didn't know what it entailed. The time I remember feeling most frightened was the next year, 1946, when I was working on the Weekly and some of the Telegraph men went over to cover the Bikini Atoll, Bikini explosion, and there was so much in the paper then that they didn't know what would happen. Would the whole world keep going? I was really frightened.

06:00 **What contribution do you think you and your team made to the war?**

I think in our small way we were in a minor cog in a machine, and cogs don't usually know how the machine works, and these cogs were going around and around and working very hard. Overall, the ones who ran it,

06:30 I didn't meet, I didn't know, but I suspect I knew that there was the interception of Japanese messages. I knew they were being listened into. I knew the troops were moving and where they'd be moving to, but I had no idea of the implications of the destruction of Japanese submarines and aircraft. That was out, we were locked in this, we were in the fibro garage and that was stultifying I found for

07:00 a few years. It was lovely when I got get on the move again.

Do you feel then that you had a lost youth?

Well that's an old lost generation sort of thing. No, I don't. I think it probably did me very good mixing with all sorts of people and then as a journalist I mixed from drovers and shearers to academics, but if it had just been Burwood,

07:30 school, university I wouldn't have struck the mixture and sort of seems now, I thought some of these academics were very pretentious and I still do and I sort of saw the decency of the ordinary Australian girl and man and what fine people they were, and I really believe it. And when I think of those, 8th Division particularly, how they stuck by one another, but I haven't

08:00 heard a gunshot fired. I don't want to, unless someone sends the Harbour Bridge up in smoke any minute. And you know, I was just doing an army job in a sort of clerk grade 3 capacity or whatever they put on my thing. Not a mention of Central Bureau or where I've been or what we did.

What opportunities do you think World War II gave women?

08:30 Well I think women had their opportunities before World War II. I don't subscribe to the thing because I knew so many women who were clever and doing all sorts of things. I think a lot of girls got out of the home and a lot of men did too because they wanted to travel and the war was, especially the ones that went away on these troop ships, went to Canada,

09:00 and you're young and you don't think. "I'll be all right", you have a feeling, and you're very young and you think you're unhurtable, if that's not a word. But it won't any more than you can believe you're going to be old and looking at yourself in the mirror with white hair. You can't believe it when you've always seen dark for years. Not that dreadful

09:30 sea change word that the ABC, that awful program, yuk.

To what extent has Anzac Day figured in your post-war life?

Well it didn't figure until I got involved with the association and then as people went someone said, "Well Helen, our secretary has gone," whatever, or "Dada isn't able to come, will you be the secretary?" And as I have no secretary,

10:00 that took a lot of work because when they have Anzac Day reunions in Brisbane or Melbourne I used to have to organise it, organise the bugler, organise who bought the wreath. I only marched once on Anzac Day and now I watch it on the television because, that's my excuse, I had rheumatoid arthritis and I'm going well, but I go into the lunch and it is pleasant and I used to watch

10:30 it. As I said, we weren't allowed to go as children because everyone thought it was too sad, too upsetting, but they counted it and there was this great pride of people, we must get around on Anzac Day, and you think don't do that, you might drop down. But they are going to march until their last feet, the ones who are really in it. They'll stagger around, and now their grandchildren, some of them are bringing their grandchildren.

11:00 Well the RSL got a bit snooty about that and some of the Central Bureau people said they didn't want widows of ex-servicemen or children, and I think it's quite a good idea to let them march with their grandfathers or grandmothers, let them in. They say, "Oh." But they slow the bands down for us and the bands are all out of time anyway.

How do you feel about the increasing crowd attendance at Anzac Days?

11:30 I think its extraordinary. I think it's an extraordinary thing of going back to the battle field too. I think my people would've…when we went to Europe, they didn't go. We went on a bus but they didn't go, they didn't want to go near the battle field. They didn't want to, whereas this sort of cult thing now, and they weren't flag wavers and rah rahs.

12:00 They didn't wave flags and they didn't, but now I'm with these people and they look forward to the, that's the only time they meet, and they struggle to get there some of them, and they send all sorts of messages which are read out and this is the only, this rather scrappy newsletter is the only communication some of them have to sort of find out what's happening, and the trouble is

12:30 now there's beginning to be a lot of 'vallets' at the end of it, death notices, and people aren't doing anything terribly interesting as they once did. It's sort of reports of who's on the sick list or some are still going off in their caravans and digging up opals in Queensland or some are still, you know, getting in the caravans or have been to Western Australia. But most can't, are not well enough or they can't afford it.

13:00 **Why did you get involved with the Association?**

Because someone got in touch with me and said, "Would you like to join?" I hadn't heard of it, and this was in the early '80s. And they said would I like to come along to one of, they had a barbecue and so Jack and I went and he hadn't been in the services. He'd been a journalist in the war and he didn't know anyone, and then I met a couple of people whom I'd known in it and I'd

13:30 been at school with, and so then I'd go to the Anzac Day lunch which is usually very pleasant. They have a nice lunch at a remote place down in Broadway called the Lawson. It's changed its name, it's got a French name, Mecure, or Mecuré or whatever, whether it should have an accent I don't know, and they have a lovely lunch, beautiful fish and so forth. Catering, we have a room on our own now, but one Anzac Day we were there we were all lining up

14:00 with the Japanese tourists who were there all eating sushi, which I like very much. It just didn't seem… seemed a strange mixture which wouldn't happen some years ago lining up, all smiling at one another.

You've been back to Japan; you've been to Japan, haven't you?

Only once. Only once with my husband. He'd been there eleven times as a journalist with the supplements editor, so I went up with him and he paid for me and we went, and when

14:30 I first landed in the Philippines my mind went back. We went to Japanese homes because he knew Japanese journalists and people, and it all seemed so civilised and he was very keen on having a Japanese garden at home and tatami matting and so on and I like, love Japanese art. I've got a book on it in there which is quite valuable which my mother gave me when I was…I had a strange

15:00 21st birthday in the army two days later, but I was I was given some lovely things, a book of Japanese prints and a book, a lovely book plate and we had no party because all the men were away. We had an afternoon tea party in King Street with scones and a birthday cake, and girls and mothers.

What pre-conceptions do you think you had about the Japanese people before you went to Japan?

15:30 Well I just knew by record what they had done to our troops and I knew that there was this tremendous culture and the art and the history and the gardens. But underneath this feudal, and the thing that interested me, Jack told me about the cast system in Japan which I didn't know about. Do you? These

Japanese look

16:00 exactly as other Japanese but they are leather workers and butchers and this Japanese friend of Jack's came down to stay with us, or we used to have Japanese girls staying in the house in Mosman. They're very good visitors, they'd unroll a little mat and lie on it. They didn't want to sleep in the bed. But Henry Hiatsu, because the Japanese regard butchers and leather makers as absolutely beyond the pale and unclean, and Jack said to Henry,

16:30 "What would you do if a butcher or a leather worker moved next to you?" "I'd have to move." Now this is a man who spoke perfect English, travelled a great deal, and Jack said, "What would you do if say your daughter married a butcher or a leather worker?" "It wouldn't happen, it wouldn't happen." So this extraordinary feudal…coming from the samurai down which we don't have. But there is not distinction in looks,

17:00 you know. I couldn't tell if you were a leather worker or a butcher, Matt.

I'm neither, but I do like to eat meat.

No, I mean journalists might, in some countries they would be regarded as outcasts, I know that, very low on the scale.

After your trip to Japan how did you feel about Japanese people?

Well Jack was besotted by them.

17:30 I would still be where I feel utterly wary of them. Charming, courteous to meet, their artistry, they presented us with a present with Henry. We stayed in a Japanese inn and I love Japanese food. I like the simplicity of the architecture, the beautiful flowers, but I don't know what is underneath all that. The hari-kari, the sort of

18:00 fascist movement there, and which way they will go I do not know. And the treatment of the Korean women, and not just the Australian POWs but their treatment of the Indians and the Chinese, extraordinary. So you can't, rather as my parents used to feel about the Germans—Beethoven, Bach, civilisation,

18:30 how could that come? How could a concentration camp, I don't know. In the next life I'm going to have a better brain and I will understand why people follow dictators and leaders, but I've never really wanted to follow anyone.

Why do you think it's important that the history of Central Bureau be recorded and publicised?

Because every other aspect of the war has been written except Central

19:00 Bureau's, because it was under the Official Secrets Act it could not be. So everything has been written and all of a sudden they say, "Oh yes, well," because people don't know a thing about what these people did and how dedicated they were and the conditions that these men particularly put up with, and the importance of it to what eventually happened in the Coral Sea,

19:30 in the Pacific and in England, in the Middle East, and why should they be left unwritten when every other thing has been written about? And I feel history, if you don't get it, and the winners always tell the story anyway as we know. They write the story, which is why if I would get on with my story of Major Ross which I got a Curry

20:00 fellowship for and I've never got it done because of my computer ignorance.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your time in the service?

No no no. I think you've had enough.

For somebody's who's watching this in the future, fifty years, a hundred years, five years, what message or comment would you make about serving one's country?

20:30 It can't be one's country right or wrong, but in our case I think it was justifiable, and as we grew up believing there was not going to be another war until Spain hit us, Abyssinia hit us, I think you've got to be terribly wary and be particularly cynical of politicians and the motives of people who try to get you into things. And to be

21:00 kind to one another, be kind.

INTERVIEW ENDS