

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Nellie Espie (Nell) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1780>

### Tape 1

00:39 **We're recording now. If you could kindly give us a brief introduction please.**

Yes, well I was born out at York Plains, about five miles from Oaklands here where my father had a small farm. I first went to the Oaklands State School,

01:00 no I went to the York Plains State School and then when I reached grade six we moved into the Oaklands State School where I stayed for two years and after that I went to Hobart to the Hobart State High School where I stayed, I attended there until matriculation year when I started

01:30 my training at the Royal Hobart Hospital. And I did my nursing training, midwifery, general midwifery and obstetrics and child health. I'm getting all confused now. And after completing that training I worked at the Wingfield Crippled

02:00 Children's Home at Newtown in Tasmania before I went to Sydney to complete my obstetrics training.

**And what year was this about?**

That was 1942 I began my general training and in 1945 I completed that and then after two years I went to, can I look at that to get my dates,

02:30 straight?

**Certainly, if you just want to pause for a moment please. Okay, so you were doing a course in midwifery and...?**

In 1947 and then I did my child health two years later down at the mothercraft home near town in Tasmania. And then I did some

03:00 training at the, some work in the child health area, working at one stage in St. Mary's Clinic and then I, after that I worked at the Aspley Memorial Home in Perth, in the north of Tasmania here and then I

03:30 at that stage after the twelve months there I joined the army in 1951. And I spent twenty-nine years in the army before serving overseas in three active service areas. And then I retired from the army in 1980 as the Director of Nursing Services, Army.

04:00 And I could've retired anywhere in Australia really but I decided on coming back to where my roots are here at Oaklands in Tasmania. And it's a very good place for a retirement really. Slower than the other larger cities and what have you. So it's very, I've been very happy in my retirement here. Working in

04:30 my garden and spending a lot of time with the, with old volunteer work with the College of Nursing Australia state committee and the Florence Nightingale committee, state committee and the Florence Nightingale Memorial Home. I've spent some time chairing a committee which established the Museum

05:00 of Nursing at the Royal Hobart Hospital. And I've worked with the veterans around and I have been, I have just recently retired from the president's position of the sub-branch which I've held for many years. I decided it was time I retired and let some younger people take on...

**Sounds like you're pretty busy.**

Well I've had a busy

05:30 retirement. Didn't have time for a day off, which happens of course when you retire I think. You get busy looking after other people and doing things for everybody else and so it's really what keeps one alive.

**That's a very nice introduction. May I ask if you could please give us a brief rundown of what you did in those service**

06:00 **spheres you served in.**

Well I served in camp and military hospitals throughout different areas in Tasmania, mainly on the eastern side, in Australia I mean. And then I, my first overseas posting was to Japan and Korea, I

06:30 was in that area for two years. When I returned back to Australia and served in the medical centres as well as the hospitals and my next overseas posting was to Malaya during the emergency, 1958, '60 that was. And then after

07:00 after Malaya I served up at one military hospital up at Yeronga in Queensland. Following that I moved down to Ingleburn in New South Wales and then down to Victoria where I worked at the medical centre and the army apprentices school down at Balk And

07:30 following that I attended the College of Nursing Australia and qualified in the nursing administration course, diploma course, and then I, oh dear. After doing that in

08:00 1969 I was posted to Vietnam as the matron of the Australian Field Hospital up there at Vung Tau. I was there for twelve months when I returned to Australia and my, I was posted to the barracks at St Kilda Road there in Victoria and

08:30 I spent time there as the Assistant Director of Army Nursing Services and Southern Command. And following that I had a posting to Assistant Director of Army Nursing Services in Sydney and that, and from that I,

09:00 and while I was there I attended the College of Nursing Australia and completed the community health nursing course there, the diploma course and following that I was the, I worked in the Community Services Research Team at army office.

09:30 And...

**And following that, you've had a very incredible career.**

And then I became the Director of Army Nursing Services following that appointment. In 1976 I think that was. Yes, I retired in 1980.

**Excellent, thank you. That's a very good introduction there. What I'll do now is move back towards the pre-war era,**

10:00 **what I mean, basically before you became enlisted as a nurse in the army. Can you tell us about your parents please, their background?**

Yes well, my mother left, she was from the, came from the Oaklands district but the family, the original family first migrated in

10:30 1834 to Tasmania and then, I suppose it was around then I suppose and my father's people came out in 1824 in Governor Arthur's time as migrants. And my father was, he

11:00 wasn't a highly educated man because, and I suppose that's why he insisted all we girls had a good education because he didn't have the opportunity. He had to leave school when he was eight years old to help keep his mother. And he was self-educated really and he ran his farm, his books very well, on the job as he went along. And he,

11:30 this property he had, the Hill House Estate at York Plains there, was opened up to closer settlement in 1906. He went there in 1911 and all he had was enough to pay a deposit on the property, buy himself a horse and he went there, built himself

12:00 a hut to live in and over the, and of course when World War 11 broke out, World War 1 broke out, his brother was working in New Zealand and he had gone to Gallipoli in France with the Tiger Regiment from New

12:30 Zealand. And he was awarded a Military Medal on Gallipoli and a bar to his Military Medal in France. And he was shot by a German sniper carrying out wounded. But at that stage Dad hadn't joined the 1st/40th Battalion and he was serving in

13:00 France. And he was, he went there in 1916 and in 1918 he returned to Australia after being wounded. But while he was serving in France while his brother was killed it was interesting to note that his CO [Commanding Officer] called him before, to his office and said to him, because of his brother's death and he was the sole male

13:30 survivor of the family, did he wish to go back to Australia? Of course Dad said, "No," he was going to finish the war, what he went there for. And he, so he and then he was wounded and so he returned to Australia in August 1918. He was wounded during the big battles round the Somme area in France,

14:00 but of course the war of course affected him greatly. because I remember he used to chase Germans around the trenches of a night. You know, we'd hear him chasing, you know when we were growing up,

as little kids we used to hear him chasing them, hooing and chasing them till Mum would wake him up, but and of course I think the, well there was no help for the

- 14:30 diggers in those days. And they got no counselling of course when they came back or anything like that. Because I think a lot depended on their wives. They were the people that supported them in those days. But anyway he worked on that farm there when he came back from the war and he married in
- 15:00 1920 I think it was, can't remember the exact date and he was a very hard working, patriotic man and of course when war broke out in 1938 in Europe there, he was, he wanted to do his bit of course when the boys were going
- 15:30 off to the war and what have you and if he'd been fit enough he would have been going himself I think, or try. But anyway, his war effort was the government, he had a letter from the Department of Defence. Apparently they had a record of all the rifles that the boys, when they returned from Australia
- 16:00 they were able to take their rifles with them and the government asked him if he would return it to them for the sum of fifteen pounds, so he handed over his rifle which he didn't like parting with but he had his .303 and so anyway he, and he was, he grew flax and
- 16:30 carrots. They went through a stage where they would grow, everybody had to grow carrots for the air force, for the pilots so they could see or something was the reason they gave. But Dad and his carrots was quite a topic in the family for many years afterwards and we still chuckle about Dad and his carrots because there was no manpower much about course
- 17:00 in those days and we girls were out in the paddock pulling the carrots while he was bagging them, chopping the tops off and bagging them. And just as a sideline, two years ago after I had retired here I had attended a funeral and at the cup of tea afterwards this gentleman came up to me and he said, "You probably don't remember me, but," he said, "I'm the fellow that carted the carrots."
- 17:30 So those carrots were famous. But anyway, at that, because I used to help a lot around the farm and, you know, I learnt to build haystacks and I could pitch a sheaf with the best of them in those days, in my early teenage days. When I came home from school on the weekend and that I was always out in the paddocks because I thoroughly
- 18:00 enjoyed it. Part of our property was very flat and then the plains across the field, plains and it, and of course it was ideal for spreading the flax and (UNCLEAR - retting?) as part of the process that we had a flax mill over in the point here at Oaklands. And the Land Army girls used to,
- 18:30 the flax would be brought in to our property and the Land Army girls would spread it because when it was growing in our place I used to stook it up after Dad cut it with his blinder and horse, didn't have a tractor or anything like that. And, the, I just found too that you didn't stack it
- 19:00 the same as you do oats and the stooks and oats and you put it in a long line and so, and because a lot of the women worked in the flax mill during the war as well as the young boys and that and of course during the Depression years when we were growing up I always remember then of course I, in the earlier part
- 19:30 of my life of course when I, a lot of young men used to come to the property asking Dad for work for three meals a day and, because there was no dole or anything in those days, and the, of course he didn't have much work for them on the small farm there but he used to give them something to do and they used to come and have their
- 20:00 breakfast and go off to work and have their lunch and their evening meal before they went home. And Dad always gave them a few shillings for pocket money as well.

#### **Were these swaggies [swagmen]?**

No these weren't the swaggies. The swaggies were another group who used to come knocking on the door and I always remember my mother used to make them a billy of tea and give them milk and sugar and perhaps

- 20:30 a pat of butter and a loaf of bread or something because we made our own bread. And of course living on the farm during those years you were better off than other people, a lot of people went hungry but we didn't go hungry and we had eggs and Dad had an orchard where he grew different fruits and that, and he grew vegetables and everything so, you know, we never lacked any food
- 21:00 really and Mother always used to share it with these swagmen and give them a lump of meat or something, cooked meat, and they'd go off happy. But we always had the regulars. On occasions there'd be a new appear on the horizon but... and then the, I can remember the, we used to have the travellers that used to come around
- 21:30 from the bigger stores in Hobart. They used to come in their car and bring all their materials and what-have-you, selling it and I can remember some of those travellers, Mr Soundy was one of those. The Soundy shop down in Hobart, that ran for years. He was the Lord Mayor once, John Soundy, in later years in Hobart. But the...

- So those chaps that come over to your place,**
- 22:00 **you said swaggies were one lot, the others were they Sussos [receiving Sustenance benefit]?**
- They were local people, local young fellows growing up who just didn't have any work and they weren't old enough for the services and that.
- All right, they weren't on Sustenance either.**
- No, no, there was nothing like that.
- What was the cut-off age, how old did you have to be to be on Sustenance?**
- Well I don't know if they even had it in those days. I'd never heard of it.
- In the '30s?**
- 22:30 **You didn't hear of Sustenance?**
- No.
- What did they call it here?**
- I don't know what they'd call it.
- Unemployment benefits...**
- Yes, and the dole and that too but of course that didn't exist in those days. And I always remember one fella, I met at the RSL [Returned and Services League], he used to live actually... and he was one of those boys that used to go over for his three meals a day to home.
- 23:00 And he said he arrived one morning, he used to love to tell this story at an RSL dinner, tell the fellas, and he arrived for his breakfast and Mother hadn't cooked his eggs or something and she was giving me my bottle. So she handed me over to him and I sat on his knee while he
- 23:30 fed me with a bottle. He used to love to tell that story. This is when I was the president of the sub-branch here.
- How old were you then?**
- Oh this was after I retired.
- But he's talking about a story that happened...**
- That happened way back there in the, must have been back in about 1926 or something.
- You would have been a baby.**
- Yes.
- 24:00 **So the Depression, can you tell us how it affected the area around here?**
- Well a lot of people were having a hard time and, with the, such little employment. But I can't recall that much about it except I do remember these incidents.
- 24:30 Of course we didn't have power going through to York Plains at that stage. No electricity. And it was, so you know there were no washing machines or anything like that. You just had the laundry where you had your copper and your wash tubs and the wash scrubbing board, the washing board.
- 25:00 It was harder washing and it was a very different life altogether really. And the, a lot of people from around the town have said to me how hard it was over those years because they just didn't, they had very little.
- 25:30 We didn't have any extras, toys or any of tho... We just made our own fun. And we had a very happy life really, out there on the property.
- How many sisters did you have? You had no brothers.**
- Had no brothers and I had four sisters.
- Sounds like 'McLeod's Daughters' [television program].**
- Yes.
- 26:00 Except none of my sisters seemed to be interested in going down to the, in working outside or anything like that. I used to enjoy it and but of course and then when war broke out of course everybody was, the young men who were of age, they went off to the war.
- 26:30 But consequently there was a lack of manpower around the place so everybody who could do something was most welcome.

**So if there were four girls in the family, I can understand why the lads would come there and have three meals a day.**

We were only tiny girls in those days. We weren't very old those days, yeah. But,

27:00 that was before they'd grown up really.

**You were telling us about your father before, his World War 1 experience. You said about his dreams, can you tell us more about that please? He had dreams about the war after it was over?**

Yes well they had a dreadful time in the trenches.

27:30 And you know the films, on film you see footage of World War 1 you can quite imagine what it was, how dreadful it must have been. With, you know, so much water about because it was the wettest year or something that particular year. Winter in Europe at that stage.

**Can you tell us how your father was affected by the war?**

28:00 Well I would say it was a, must have been a type of battle fatigue I suppose, you know. Because, not that they had many planes in those days and the air forces were only young, both the enemy and our own. But the, when he'd be out in the paddock and a bird would fly over, he'd duck for cover.

28:30 He'd think it was a plane I suppose and he, things like that used to affect him and he used to get these dreadful nightmares. And he'd be hooing and carrying on and wake everybody up in the household with his chasing these Germans round the trenches.

29:00 **What, he'd be running around the house?**

No, in his dream.

**He'd still be in bed?**

Yes, he'd still be in bed.

**What sort of things would he say while he was having this dream?**

Well I don't know the detail...all we'd know was that it was a loud noise and we knew what was happening, you know, that he was after the Germans again. It must have

29:30 been, played on their minds.

**Can you please tell us how often this happened?**

Frequently, in the earlier stages, I can remember. And you know when I was very young I can remember this happening and how often I wouldn't like to say at this stage. All I know is that it happened.

30:00 **What sort of injury did he have as a result of the war?**

Well he had, actually he was very lucky, really with the wound he did get. The bullet went, hit scabbard before it entered his body and it went into his back, went between his

30:30 kidneys, missed his spine and anyway he was taken to the Casualty Clearing Station and he can remember, he was telling me how he remembered how when he was wounded and he was taken to the theatre to remove the bullet

31:00 he found, he said they used chloroform in those days and apparently what chloroform they had was very little and he said he was hardly, he hadn't gone to sleep when they started in the surgery and he said he felt the knife going in and he must have passed out I suppose

31:30 at that stage. And anyway they removed the bullet, got it here somewhere, and it was bent right over like that, I suppose where it had hit the scabbard and he, and of course he was repatriated back to Australia after that and so he always

32:00 had a weakness in his back for the rest of his life but he never worried too much about it until later years when he was very stooped as a result of it. But he worked on his farm there, kept himself going. But he was a hard working man.

**Did your father ever talk about the war?**

32:30 Not very often, on rare occasions he'd open up. And we'd be outside looking at some sheet lightning across the hills of an evening and it was a thunderstorm there and he'd say this lightning was just like the shellfire around the hills in France.

33:00 Reminded him of it.

**How did he behave under those sort of circumstances, when there was lightning and thunderstorms, did his behaviour change?**

No he just got a bit tense but otherwise, he never let it worry him.

**What were the, can you tell us what the other things he did say about his war experiences?**

33:30 Oh I can't remember much now really. He was, when he was in England on leave following his term in hospital he was given a few days leave and he went up to Scotland. And I remember him telling me in Edinburgh they had the cheapest tram ride he's ever had. So far for a penny or something.

34:00 But he, but, I don't think they got many breaks over there really. It was a hard war, particularly in the mud. And he was always, he said, he always had the greatest of respect for the

34:30 army nurses that looked after him there in France and England.

**Did he ever say anything about the French people?**

On occasions he spoke about their, how pleased they were to see the Australian there helping them out. But he didn't, no, can't recall anything too much there on

35:00 that.

**Can you tell us about your mother please?**

My mother was a wonderful person. She was a great cook. And she grew up around the Oaklands district and she did housework as the

35:30 women did in those days to earn, five shillings a week or something, as many of them did to help out in the family. And she went to the local convent school here. In those days we had a convent school at Oaklands.

36:00 Prior to that I think they had some private schools around the area before the state schools were established.

**What was your family's religious background?**

Well my mother was Catholic as her mother came back from,

36:30 her mother came out from Ireland when she was three years old. She was the youngest in the group and, of course circumstances in Ireland I think was why they moved out of Ireland really, after the potato famine and all that apparently. But the, and they were wonderful people really, those (UNCLEAR - Niles) out there

37:00 and Oaklands and the, oh, I can't think of what I can say here, but life wasn't easy growing up in those days. But they all seemed to make their fun and enjoy and I suppose this free country out here,

37:30 it was something they could... So my mother's people had a Catholic background, my father was a Presbyterian. He used to be, I remember he used to be bell ringer up at the local church. And he was very much,

38:00 he mightn't have had much education but he knew his Bible. He could quote from the Bible.

**So he was a staunch follower of his...**

Of the Presbyterian faith.

**...faith. And your mother was staunchly Catholic?**

Yes.

**So what about the girls, did you feel some,**

38:30 **were you devout in your beliefs?**

Oh yes we grew up as Catholics. Dad always saw that we went to mass and we followed our faith. He respected the Catholic faith as we did the Presbyterian.

**Can you tell us about the**

39:00 **confrontation that existed between Catholics and Protestant?**

I don't think I can expand on that too much at this stage of my life. I've never had any problem with that at all.

**But there were some problems...**

Oh, yes, in the early days there was a great victory, went on around the,

39:30 around the stages. The first parish priest here was a gentleman who did much for ecumenism in this town and it still exists. We all work together, the three churches. We help each other at our fairs

40:00 and, you know, in the old days when they used to have their balls and things they used to help each other planning their balls and things. It was a happy relationship within the whole town and still exists. Built on that first priest.

40:34 **Can you tell us a bit about your school life and what that was like?**

Well the school at York Plains was just one large room with the seven grades in it. That was in the earlier days, there were quite number of children in the area but over the years of course it's really depleted now, they don't even have the school.

## Tape 2

00:34 **Can you tell us a bit about your school life and what that was like?**

Well the school at York Plains was just one large room with the seven grades in it. That was in the earlier days, there were quite number of children in the area but over the years of course it's really depleted now, they don't even have the school. But

01:00 it's from grade one to grade seven.

**Okay, so back on your school life and what that was like?**

Yes I started school when I was seven which was the done thing in those days, I think you went to school when you were seven, and we had the one teacher who managed the seven grades.

01:30 And some of the school children used to ride their ponies. We walked down from our home which was about three-quarters of a mile. We used to walk down the road, used to keep us fit. I remember in later year-, a few years later afterwards there was a family who used to ride their ponies but they couldn't get their saddles on or off the

02:00 horses so I used to do that for them. And because, as the pupils left the finished at the school, a lot went on to secondary education in Hobart or Launceston and the (UNCLEAR - boarder didn't?) in those areas but the,

02:30 by the time I'd got to grade six I think Dad decided we weren't really learning much there and he hired a car to go out to York Plains to pick us up and bring us into school and then take us home at the end of the day. And of course in those days they didn't have school buses and things which they have these days.

03:00 And it's, and we came in here to the Oaklands State School, it was then, and where I, and of course I left in the middle of the year which apparently didn't do me much good, and I sort of sat for the exam to go to Hobart High School but I didn't make the grade, I think it was the

03:30 top five per cent used to, were the only ones who got admission to Hobart High. And so I spent another year in the school and of course I made it the next year quite easily and the, I was in my fourth year and because the war had started in '38 [1939] and that's when I went to

04:00 Hobart High. And I can remember how I used to have these, we had those war certificates [War Bonds] where we'd subscribe some of our pocket money. We'd gradually buy these war certificates and we'd cash them out at the end of the war, it was something the government ran. And the

04:30 And they started school cadets at the Hobart High while we were there. At that stage the air force and army had school cadets there. A lot of those boys later went on to the war. And this was the senior boys anyway and of course the girls didn't have anything like that. We used to have to knits socks in the domestic

05:00 science class. We had some funny looking socks for a start till we learnt how to do it. We used to say they'd probably clean their gun out or something with it. And of course while I was there and of course there was the epidemic flu, polio, poliomyelitis, and we weren't allowed to go to the swimming schools and

05:30 so to learn to swim, those who hadn't learned to swim, we had to, we swam on newspaper in the gymnasium. We learnt all the strokes, you know, in the lifesaving drill and what have even if we didn't do anything else. And of course we were not supposed to take any other sport until we had learnt to swim and anyway I enjoyed my

06:00 years at the Hobart High there. I was never a brilliant student really but always seemed to manage to pass and, but I didn't stay to do my leaving class. I said to my mother, "I'm old enough to do my training, I might as well start." So eventually they let me go and do my training. And of course as I,

06:30 and that was '42 when the Japanese threat was on and when I went to do my training but I can remember the, over that period at home we had special blackout curtains, blinds and there was a

framework around the window and you just pulled this black blind down to keep the light out and there were coupons for

07:00 clothing and for sugar and tea and things, rationing, food rationing was in and butter I think it was. Didn't worry us too much you know, in the country there, that sort of thing. But I remember we had them when we did our training, we had to get a special set of clothing coupons to put together our uniforms.

**You said that**

07:30 **the rationing didn't bother you because you were in the country, can you expand on that at all?**

Yeah well we had our eggs and we had our, you know, some things of course we couldn't buy in the shops or anything and rice was one thing we couldn't buy but there was always plenty at the hospital and things like that. And the sugar was another thing that was rationed and petrol was another.

08:00 You had coupons for petrol.

**And how would this coupon system work? Would they send them to you and then you go and get the items or...?**

Yes, you'd have to hand over your coup... You'd have your book of coupons and the shopkeeper would take out your coupons as you bought it.

**Could you get coupons from other people that had more coupons, do a bit of trading that way?**

No, we didn't usually do that because I think people,

08:30 those that had coupons needed what they, their ration really. And of course the sugar of course in the country would be rationed, things like that you know, be limited on.

**How old were you when World War 11 started?**

I was fourteen then, I would've been, yes.

**And did you understand what was going on, what was happening?**

Well I

09:00 was because I used to get up and cook the, Dad always liked porridge for his breakfast and he'd get up and go out and milk the cows and if he had any rubber traps set or things like that and when I was old enough I used to get up and I'd cook the porridge and get set up breakfast and before the rest of the household moved out because Dad used to get out early and I was always

09:30 wake and the, now what was the question you asked me?

**Did you know what was happening when World War 11 started?**

Yes, because the, we had the wireless didn't have electric power of course but you had the batteries and there were the three dry ones and the wet one I think. They had to run these wirelasses as they called it and

10:00 I used to listen to the news because when Dad came in he'd say to me, "What was the news?" you see. And I'd have to relay this to him, you know, what was happening in Europe. He was very anxious to know what was happening. And I was very much aware that it was on the way. And then of course it broke out in '38.

**Did it feel like it was far away or...?**

It did really. Europe seemed a

10:30 long way away to me in those days. And of course you didn't have the, you know, the air traffic that you have these days of course and there used to be, and some planes used to, the Miss Hobart and the Miss Launceston were the two passenger planes which used to, small planes used to fly over to Melbourne

11:00 in the beginning of the airlines here. And they used to always, of course they always flew very low and of course they flew over our property out there at York Plains, we used to see them going over. And Dad was very interested when the, when the biplanes used to come and they used to be service planes I think during the war at stage when they'd be flying around and over our property. And

11:30 the Light Horse used to drive through our property. There was a camp at Mona Vale, a Light Horse, it was the young fellows from around here belonged to it and they used to go riding through our property on their horses during the war.

**What did you think about the Light Horse when you saw them?**

Well it was sort of reminded us of the stories we used to hear about the Light Horse

12:00 in World War 1.

**Did they look glamorous?**

They did when they had the hats with the plumage on it and their riding gear.

**At this stage when World War 11 starts and you're fourteen and your Dad's been through war, did you understand what war was about?**

Well I had an idea, you know, it

12:30 wasn't the best of things to happen. And there'd be lots of sadness with it all and the people in Europe themselves would be suffering.

**What was day-to-day life like during World War 11 in Tasmania?**

Well it was,

13:00 there was a shortage of things. I remember when we were in Hobart training, when there'd be a troop ship coming in, for instance in Hobart, particularly when the Americans came in, we could never buy any nylon stockings or anything, they were all gone. And even if you had the coupons you couldn't buy them. And the fruit shops and things seemed to, you know, it seemed disappear off the shelves.

13:30 And I can remember that quite well. But the, and there were two air raid shelters in Campbell Street outside the nurses, home there which was a huge concrete pipe I think buried in the middle of the street and they were used as air raid shelters. When we were training we were issued with a, with an ARP armband,

14:00 Air Raid Precaution armband which we were always supposed to carry with us plus a badge and if we were away from the hospital and then an alarm went we used to have to, we were supposed to put the armband on and the badge and go back to work at the hospital. It was our pass to get through. And of course the windows at the hospital were all

14:30 plastered over with, it looked like that old wax paper, you know that brown, black tarred paper on the windows? We had a dreadful time cleaning it up after the war.

**When did you first get an interest in nursing?**

Well I was I suppose, I didn't really know what I was going to do with my life at that stage when I was going to the school there and

15:00 there were only two avenues really for girls in those days, it was either nursing or teaching. And teaching really didn't appeal to me. And that was suggested that I do a teaching, junior teaching sort of scholarship thing. But didn't want, I wasn't really enthusiastic about that at all.

**Why not?**

Well I didn't

15:30 think I was cut out to be a teacher at that stage, I don't know why, but I didn't, it didn't appeal to me. And so, and eventually I thought well, it suddenly sort of hit me at one stage, "I know what I want to do. I want to be a nurse and care for people." So that's what I did.

**How old were you when you had this thought?**

I was about seventeen. I was eighteen when I

16:00 had to start my training. Of course you had to be eighteen then.

**And that's primarily why you became a nurse, to help people?**

Yes. And then of course the war broke out and I thought, "Oh well, perhaps I can join the services when I finish my training." But as I was finishing my training the war was obviously going to finish so I gave up that idea and decided to

16:30 develop, start developing a career of some sort with my other certificates.

**Was that disappointing that you couldn't become more involved in World War 11?**

No, not at that stage. However when I was the, I think it was when I was up at Esky, I read a little bit in the paper, newspaper, in the Mercury saying that the army wanted nurses to go to Korea, it

17:00 was only two or three lines, you know, stuck in the corner and I thought, "Oh well I might apply." Eventually I found myself on the way to Ingleburn.

**While you were training during World War 11, did you see casualties coming back from the war?**

At the Royal Hobart there was the old section of the hospital at the back which has

- 17:30 been pulled down now. The 111th AGH [Australian General Hospital] was there and the, they were there on a temporary basis pending the building of the hospital up at Campbelltown where the 111th eventually went. But
- 18:00 the army nurses were there. They lived on the fifth floor of our nurses home and the orderlies that worked in that hospital used to come over to our wards to get some nursing experience because apparently they didn't, they weren't getting that much experience, hospital experience within the 111th where they were because
- 18:30 there was probably just minor sick they were looking after anyway. And anybody that seemed to be having surgery seemed to come to us anyway. But by the time the 111th moved up to Campbelltown of course the casualties started coming through then. But, and prior to that during the, those that were in the Middle East, I don't recall anything much about seeing any
- 19:00 casualties coming through the hospital at that stage, they probably went to the repat [repatriation] hospital I would think and so we wouldn't see them. But because the repat hospital was there and also, and the army probably had wards there I'd say.

**But you saw casualties coming back, yourself?**

No.

**You didn't?**

- 19:30 No. Didn't really. I can't recall seeing any like that. You'd read about it in the papers and things but we didn't have any hands on experience at all.

**When you were training to become a nurse, what do you have to know to become a good one?**

Well I don't know whether you, I think the basic,

- 20:00 nursing basically is caring for and caring about people. And all types of people. And young and old. Of course when I began my training we didn't even have penicillin as a drug in those days so it was very different to what it is these days.
- 20:30 And we'd, sick pneumonias and that, we used to spend hours with, sponging and poulticing and trying to, and getting their temperatures down. And you spent a lot of time with a patient. And also you saw numerous members of the family, you know, from tiny tots up to grandparents.
- 21:00 And you sort of got to know the families because the patients were in hospital for so much longer. An appendix out, you were there for a couple of weeks sort of thing and things like that. So it was very different. And we had the time of course to have this contact which is very much part of our nursing and
- 21:30 it was, and just after I started, sulphur drugs started to come in. We had a few sulphur drugs and then you couldn't give your patients onions and you couldn't give them this and that. It was a very different, very different situation. And of course when penicillin eventually came in after, during the Second World War,
- 22:00 the doctors used to give it to them. And the trained nurses weren't allowed to give it but they could mix it up for the doctors. Because it was in powder form, you mixed it up with sterile water. And you had, and the injection was four, every four hours.
- 22:30 And I can still remember one of the staff nurses going to the fridge to get the penicillin out for the doctor and she said, "One of these days we'll be doing it ourselves. They'll get sick of this." And of course that's what happened. So it eventually, very quickly got over to nurses.

**What year did penicillin start to be used?**

- 23:00 It was in the '40s. They had it in the army before, they were using it in the army before we got it into civilian hospitals. But the hospital supplies during the war were restricted in their basic things like bandages and dressings and methylated spirits and things like that. We
- 23:30 couldn't get it, you know, liberally. We had to make sure we were economised in our use and we had to wash bandages and do all sorts of things like that to have enough. And I can always remember when the 111th started and all these supplies were going over to the hospital, and the army hospital, we used to think, "Oh!
- 24:00 They can get it, why can't we?"

**Were there a lot more incurable diseases at that time?**

Well of course during the training days there were infectious diseases of course, measles, mumps, diphtheria, scarlet fever and all those things and...

- 24:30 So there were spinal meningitis and a few things

## **TB [tuberculosis]?**

Yes, TB was very prevalent and the, of course we used to have our special wards for the TB patients and of course and we, the staff used to have to have an X-ray each year, chest X-Ray and

25:00 then we'd have the skin test when we arrived from that, as it was called, for TB and if it was positive we were given BCG [Bacillus Calmette-Guerin] which is a little skin vaccine thing and so we and not everybody had a positive after they had that. Well I never developed a positive at all, I don't know why but I

25:30 never did. And although I'd looked after lots of what we used to call open TBs, surgery, chest surgery and that, and I still never had a positive. And when I was in the army at Brighton when we were doing the mantissa for the National Service boys and the chest clinic came out to do that, so I thought,

26:00 "Oh well, I might as well get in the queue and see whether..." So I had the BCG again and the, and I was still very vaguely positive, I wouldn't have it a positive but, so I must've been really immune to TB. But of course we had typhoid injections too because I nursed a couple of typhoid cases in the old days when they didn't have the drugs

26:30 to give them like they do these days.

### **So you did get a mild dose of TB are you saying, or...?**

No.

### **You didn't get it?**

No I never. You know the skin tests just showed a mild reaction which meant that I was, hadn't had any infection really. But the, even after the BCG vaccine, but the,

27:00 yes, we had the infectious disease hospital up at Vacluse there in Hobart. It's a nursing home now, or a nursing village or something, for the elderly. And it was, we all had to do

27:30 a term of three months or something up there in the, we were looking after these infectious diseases. And of course you rarely see such things these days.

### **Can you describe what these TB wards and these infectious diseases wards look like? What were the patient suffering and so on?**

Well I

28:00 just recall these very sick people with these dreadful coughs and they had a special hospital out at, I think it was at St John's Park to start with and then up at Devondale up north there they had this TB hospital where people once they had their surgery and what have

28:30 you they went to these places to recover as much as they could and some perhaps recovered fully and others didn't do so well. But it was quite a thing and course they used to have the annual chest X-Ray for all the public at one stage during those years. And the chest clinic was quite a large organisation,

29:00 you know, that sort of, and they eventually thought they'd perhaps remove the possibility of TB in the state but on occasions the odd case crops up, I believe now.

### **How long would these patients be in those wards, on average?**

Oh don't ask me about that, I can't remember.

### **Would it be months or weeks or..?**

29:30 I think some would be months and some would be many weeks.

### **It's a job that you can't really afford to be squeamish in, isn't it?**

Oh yes, well, you sort of, you have to, compassion is very much

30:00 part of nursing and empathy. As one of our old matrons used to say, "Put yourself in the place of the patient."

### **Did you see other nurses around you when you were training that just couldn't handle it?**

Well some, just the odd person used to drop

30:30 out in the first year. They found they couldn't stick it. Well it was long hours then in those days. And we'd start at six in the morning and go through until six at night. Or you'd go off for a few hours and come back and work until eleven

31:00 o'clock at night or something. One day off a week. But we had a lot of fun. We didn't get much pay. My first pay on the labour had one pounds nineteen and eleven in it and that's what we started with. We

used to have to take a penny down to the pay office and they gave us two one pound notes. Usually we had to find a cordial bottle, sell back to the canteen to get the penny. We got threepence back from the bottle.

31:30 **What type of fun would you get up to when you weren't working?**

Well we did a lot of, believe it or not. We walked to Mount Wellington. On our day off we'd go for a walk up the mountain and, it's a lovely mountain to be, for walking, lovely lot of tracks up there. Up the zigzag track we used to go, full of energy, despite the fact that it was out in the fresh air,

32:00 kept us fit I suppose. And we'd go, we'd go for picnics and all sorts of things you'd do in that day off.

**Were there great friendships formed with the other nurses?**

Well of course living in the nursing home like you did, you really formed a, you know, I still have contact with people I trained with. And we meet when we can. When I first retired back here we used to continue our walking up

32:30 Mount Wellington. But our knees eventually gave out and we couldn't. We had to give up. But it was a lovely, used to enjoy that walking. We not only walked up Mount Wellington, we went all around the Hobart area.

**When you're working in your profession I'm guessing that you have good days and bad days as anyone else would. Were your friends**

33:00 **someone you can rely on and help you through those bad days?**

Well of course we often think about it these days, the things that used to happen, and what we did was, when we came off duty we used to all get into the, each floor had a sitting room and usually the same group were in, on the different floors and we used to get into the sitting room and we'd sit there and we'd talk about the day. We'd laugh about it and carry on.

33:30 See the funny side of things as well as the traumatic times and we think all that chattering amongst ourselves like we used to do, did us good. We never had stress or anything like that in those days. We'd go, did our own counselling.

**And a sense of humour?**

Oh yes you developed a great sense of humour because, you know, because, a New

34:00 Zealand nurse, she joined the Australian Army at one stage and she said to me, she said, "I'm amazed at the sense of humour of Australian nurses." And I said, "Well we need it, don't we?"

**What were the most traumatic things you did see in training and so on?**

It'd be the tragic accidents on motor vehicles, motorbike accidents and things like that. Or the

34:30 vehicles and because, but they don't get them like they do these days I suppose because they got bigger and better cars and they go faster. But, then the tragic things were kids, everyone has seen perhaps some who can't be treated.

**From accidents or...?**

From illness or disease.

**So that's the worst**

35:00 **thing, when you see a kid, a sick child?**

Yes, it's a bit hard to see that, yes.

**With the motorbike incidents, what would happen, what would they be suffering?**

Some would have broken legs or, oh and of course the worse ones of course were the head injuries which couldn't recover.

35:30 **Even at that stage in training do you develop a sort of desensitisation to what's going on and the trauma that's happening?**

You, because you're sort of there to do a job and you do it and the thing is not to let your emotions become

36:00 involved in the... you don't get, you don't become hard or that but you just learn to cope with it yourself in your own way, I think.

**When you don't let the emotions become involved, do they later, maybe months later, weeks later crop**

36:30 **up or they never return?**

No, well, can't say that they never return but if you were, I find if you talk about casualties and things a lot and that sort of thing, it stirs one up and you sort of find yourself back in the situation and perhaps it reminds you what,

37:00 you know, what it was all about sort of thing.

**On the penicillin, when it was introduced and you were using it, how big a factor was it when it was introduced?**

It was dramatic, particularly for those with those pneumonia cases. You know it was unbelievable to see them recover, a couple of injections of penicillin and you could see them recovering, you know.

37:30 It was wonderful feeling to see that.

**Must've been like a miracle, was it?**

Well it was really. It was certainly a wonder drug. But of course they have a lot more antibiotics now but, and different types, but unfortunately

38:00 perhaps they've been used too much. People have got used to them and they don't do what they are supposed to do.

**You already have in some way, but can you describe a bit further the difference of what it was like before antibiotics and that change**

38:30 **with the antibiotics and penicillin coming.**

Well another group of people that it was wonderful for them to have the penicillin were the timber cutters. They used to come in with their jarred hands and an infection in their hands and they used to have these dreadful painful hands and we used to treat it with radiant heat and hand baths and

39:00 sometimes they'd go to the theatre and they'd be opened up for drainage and things. It was, they were in for weeks interned in the hospital with those sort of things, but penicillin cured it in no time.

**When it became used you must've been thinking, "How were we coping without it?"**

39:30 Well I don't know that we thought that much about it because really in those early days I think the doctor would prescribe something or rather but it was up to the nursing care that really pulled that patient through. And it was the standard of nursing care. And I've, even in later years, in the army,

40:00 and I've nursed a patient and had a patient on my ward who was a motor vehicle accident and he was a quadriplegic and he was terribly, and he came up to us from Sydney, I was up in Brisbane at the time, he came up to us from Sydney and

40:30 the doctor, specialist sort of looked at him when he arrived up in the hospital and they just turned around to me and said, "All yours, sister." So I sat down and wrote out a plan, his care, and of course communication was a problem because he couldn't speak at that stage and, but he had a bit of

41:00 movement in one hand so I got a chart with the alphabet on it and he could wink in one eye and I'd say, "If you mean yes, wink. And if you mean no, don't say anything, don't do anything." And then I gave him this card and I said, "If you want something, spell it out." He could do that. And so

41:30 that's how he began communicating. And of course the other old fashioned nursing care, looking after pressure areas and what have you, you know, and at one stage his hair was long and he wanted a hair cut you see so I got the barber in and the barber came in to me and he said, "He wants it shaved off." And I said, "His mother will have a fit."

**We'll just have to stop**

42:00 **there Nell. We've run out of tape.**

## Tape 3

00:35 **So what do you remember about when World War 11 finished?**

VP [Victory in the Pacific] Day. Yes everybody was in the Hobart streets then. It was unbelievable. They really let their hair down and I'd never seen Hobart do that before. It was great excitement everywhere. I was off

01:00 that particular day and I came in from Wingfield House and went to the nurse's home to see if I could find who was off duty and found some of my old acquaintances there so we went down the street and it was the day so we decided we'd sort of drop in at each hotel as we went along Liverpool Street there

- and
- 01:30 it was incredible and the people you met around those places then in that day, it was great excitement.
- And relief?**
- Yes, feeling of relief with everybody. Yes.
- Have you ever seen anything like that since?**
- Well I suppose not really, not in my, not the whole city responding the way it did.
- 02:00 **Would you describe it as people going wild or just happy or...?**
- Deliriously happy.
- And open and talking.**
- Oh yes, complete strangers you found yourself talking to as well as your friends.
- Was there a big sense of community**
- 02:30 **during those times?**
- Yes, well people were sort of pulling together. They had one aim in life, I think, to see the war through and finished.
- What about VE [Victory in Europe] Day, was that, were there many celebrations for that as well?**
- I can't recall
- 03:00 that much happening really because at that stage, it sort of didn't mean to us what it would to the people in England and Europe and those places. Because our troops had come back, except for the air force I suppose. And the Japanese kept us busy out in this part of the world.
- 03:30 **After the war and you saw the soldiers coming back from the Japanese POW [Prisoner of War] camps and so on, what were you thinking?**
- Well I suppose foremost in our minds of course was, "Thank God it's over." But you wonder about
- 04:00 the cruelty that had gone on and the horrors of war really at that stage. And the bombing of civilians and that.
- So at the end of World War 11 you knew what war was all about?**
- Yes I think, something anyway even if I didn't know fully, yeah.
- From a nursing point of view when you saw**
- 04:30 **the guys from Kokoda and so on and the Japanese POW camps, what were you thinking about the health and state they were in?**
- Well down here we didn't have very much to do with them as far as them nursing's concerned you didn't see them. Of course I had cousins that had returned from Changi and that and
- 05:00 they were very withdrawn and didn't want to talk about their past two years' experience, whatever time it was in the camps. But they had a great, they had a great sense of humour those boys. I suppose
- 05:30 it's what helped them through a lot of their times at the camps. That Aussie spirit I suppose.
- As a nurse at the end of World War 11, what were they teaching you and telling you in the profession to do about the effects of war and**
- 06:00 **how soldiers would be feeling and so on? I don't think they called it post traumatic stress disorder at that time but was there any talk amongst the profession about it?**
- Not in our hospital, unless you were really actually involved with any of them I think. And of course
- 06:30 I was always remember the Italian POW when they were out here during the war. And my aunt up in, along West Hame there, they had an Italian POW from, he'd been in North Africa I think. He'd been in Abyssinia in those days when the war was on with the Italians,
- 07:00 And he was very grateful to Australia. He actually migrated back afterwards, after he went home and his family came out. But he was the, I can remember him because I used to go up to my aunt for holidays. And we were sitting, he was treated as one of the family, and we were sitting by the fire in the lounge room

- 07:30 and I was playing Chinese checkers with him and of course my aunt she had been a school teacher in her earlier days and she taught him English and she learnt Italian from him. And so but he was, we were sitting there playing these Chinese checkers and I remember my
- 08:00 aunt saying, "Your wife's probably back there in Italy thinking what dreadful things we Australians are doing to you fellas and here you are sitting up in my lounge room playing Chinese checkers with my niece."

**How was counselling viewed after the war, after the Second World War?**

We didn't hear much about it

- 08:30 really. It wasn't, you know, I think they had their psychiatric cases from New Guinea and that, we used to hear of them always coming back and they were, but of course they would be treated at the repat hospitals normally or wherever they, the repat looked after them perhaps at Millbrook Rise.
- 09:00 But they were, and I think those World War 11 diggers had their troubles too, the same as I think a digger in any war does. It's something that goes with the war service really, but unless that's, they get the, like I
- 09:30 used to find in Japan when the, our patients came back from Korea, you know, I used to get them to talk about their experience over there to, because I felt it helped them to cope as they went on in life and help them to unwind from the whole situation, get it out of their system sort of thing.

**After World War 11, that wasn't the case was it?**

No, it didn't happen.

**What was the theory then?**

I don't think they had much theory did they? But the, I remember talking with a priest one day about, about the stress of war and the soldiers

- 10:30 and that and of course the Americans had apparently done a lot of study in that and he was talking about that and he said really nothing happened in World War 1. He said the people that looked after the World War 1 veterans were their wives. If it hadn't have been for their wives, they would've been really wrecks. And I was sort of thinking of the situation
- 11:00 at home, you know, and with Dad and that, I thought, well that's probably true too. And then after Second World War of course, nothing like that was going on and it wasn't until after the Vietnam war really that they took up counselling role.

**After Second World War, what were they calling it, shellshock or ..?**

- 11:30 Shellshock or, what did they call it? Fellows coming from New Guinea...

**Going troppo.**

Yes that was one word they used and there was another one, I can't think what it was now. But when the boys came down from New Guinea, some of them were real wrecks. Their jungle warfare wouldn't be very good, would it?

**12:00 In the medical profession was it known that a lot of these soldiers coming back from New Guinea were killing themselves and having a really, really hard time dealing with what was going on, or the medical profession at that time just ignored or didn't know what was happening?**

Well I suppose, you know, I didn't have that much to do with it really but

- 12:30 they probably... When I was doing my midwifery at Concord there they had the psychiatric wards and the friend of mine that went over there with me, she used to enjoy psychiatric nursing and she went to a psychiatric ward to look after them. But I had no desire to work in a psychiatric ward, it just didn't appeal to
- 13:00 me and I felt I couldn't cope with it. Anyway the matron sent me down one day to a psychiatric ward. They were moving one ward to another one so they could do some painting or something and she said to me, "The patients will move everything." I had a dreadful day because I got them all organised with their bedding, you see, and said to them, "Now the ward's identical up there, you go to that same bed, you know,
- 13:30 out of the..." When I got up there to see how they were going, all the bedding was on the floor in the middle in a great heap. So I didn't do too well. I said to the matron the next day, I said, "Look don't send me there again." I said, "I'll be as upset as the rest of them. You won't know whether I'm the patient or..."

**14:00 So a lot of diggers were being sent to psychiatric wards?**

There were some. They had their, they'd filter through into those areas, those that had problems.

**Do you know if it was long term care of they'd just be shifted in and shifted out pretty quick?**

They'd spend a certain amount of time there and I suppose they'd have other convalescent type patient places where they

14:30 sent them after they were being moved, after they had received treatment there. But I can never follow psychiatric care really, it wasn't my cup of tea I'm afraid.

**When World War 11 finished, what was your status? Had you finished training then or were you being...?**

'45 I finished my training.

15:00 So, and that's when World War 11 finished really. So I was sister in charge of the, I'd just taken over as sister in charge of the Wingfield Crippled Children's Home out at Wingfield where, which was used a lot as a convalescent ward for the children's ward at the Royal as well as

15:30 former polio victims and we used to get lots of burns cases too.

**You said you were placed in charge is that right?**

Yes.

**How do you get placed in charge?**

The position was advertised and I applied for it and I was appointed to the position.

**Were you surprised to be...?**

Well I was really but anyway the

16:00 retiring sister in charge said to me, "Why don't you apply?" and I said, "Oh I don't know. I don't think I'm ready for that yet." Anyway she said, "I think you should." So I applied.

**Was that common or uncommon to come from training and be placed in charge of a...?**

I had about six months out there and the sister in charge felt I could, was quite able to manage that

16:30 place.

**You must've had good leadership qualities then.**

Well I must have done I suppose. Perhaps I was developing them then.

**And how many nurses were you in charge of and so on?**

I can't remember now. I suppose there would be more than a dozen out there altogether. Mostly nursing aids.

**And what is it like stepping from being**

17:00 **an everyday nurse, if I can say that, to being in charge of the nurses, what's that jump like?**

Well you're sort of accepting responsibility and I, you know, and I always seemed to be able to do that. And it didn't really and of course you find yourself in a different situation and

17:30 you just, you don't have to change totally when you take over in charge. I think you start developing other skills, of listening and all those other things and being much aware of what the other person is feeling or can do or is capable of.

18:00 You learn, you find yourself assessing people as to what their limitations are and things like that.

**And their types of personality too I guess.**

Yes.

**Do you have to become tougher?**

Well you need to be firm I think and not laissez-faire about things?

18:30 **Were you a tough lady controlling all those nurses?**

Oh I wouldn't think so, not at that stage. And I suppose over the years, of course when you're dealing with life and death you need to be, you need to be firm and have discipline around I think, self discipline.

**How would you**

19:00 **discipline others if they did the wrong thing or went out of line?**

It depends what they did really and of course you'd certainly have to point out to them what they, what they did wrong and teach them the right way to do things and then

19:30 wait and see how they respond to that.

**How would you describe your management style? Was it quietly spoken and well, how would you describe it?**

Well I wouldn't know at this stage. No, a lot of diggers have said to me that I

20:00 ran a tight hospital at (UNCLEAR - Runos?) Field. But, so my reply to that was, "Well I had to." If you were going to be, you had to survive.

**How would you run a tight hospital?**

Well I don't know, I kept my finger on the pulse I suppose. I knew what was going on around the place.

**How did**

20:30 **your initial relationship with the nurses change when you got promoted? Did...**

Well that didn't really, there was no great change. They just respected me as the, the thing is to get the respect of the juniors really.

**How do you do that?**

By the way you manage them and

21:00 your own practice.

**So that would be your leadership style, wouldn't it? Leading by example?**

Yes, I suppose it would be.

**"We got there."**

Painful process.

**Was it physically and mentally demanding**

21:30 **taking charge of hospitals and so on?**

Not a small place like that was. And of course you know you've got your ordering and, of your stores and things, and your rosters and your, all your general administration aspects, you know that you, as long as you know what you've got to do.

22:00 **When you take charge and you're in charge of the hospital, how much nursing are you actually doing on patients?**

In a situation like that you do quite a bit actually and if you're the only trained nurse on duty and that was special dressings and things like that, you'd do them.

**So you're not overwhelmed by administrative matters and so on.**

22:30 No, you plan your day.

**Which did you prefer, the administration or the nursing on patients themselves?**

I always enjoyed the administration but I also enjoy looking after patients. You miss them when you don't have them around.

**It sounds like it was what you were meant to do. Is that**

23:00 **right?**

I think so.

**It came easily to you?**

Yes, I didn't have any hassles really.

**And you enjoyed the work. How many hospitals did you take charge of before you started to get interest in joining up?**

I relieved as matron upper desk in the home there for a

23:30 period before I entered the army and it was, I quite enjoyed that because I enjoyed looking after the elderly people and but of course you had a certain amount of office work there. You did all sorts of things really and you know, ordering the stores, the

24:00 groceries and of course I had to order the meat for the butchers for the cook and that, so I was a bit green at that side, just ring up the butcher and say, "I've got so many staff and so many patients, we want to have this and that." He'd send me the meat so that worked quite well. He was a very, very good butcher, helped me a lot. And because

24:30 at that stage I didn't know much about ordering food to that extent. I'd have a vague idea but, and I knew what a joint of meat was because Dad used to kill his own meat on the farm and so I knew the different joints and things, you know. And I'd learnt basic cooking.

**When you were...**

Even relieved the cook at one stage.

25:00 **Yeah? What was that like?**

I didn't mind it, I enjoyed cooking.

**When you get to be in charge of hospitals and wards and so on, is there a lot of politics that comes with the job and the relationship with the other managers and all that?**

Well I would say it's much different now to when I was around. And

25:30 Perhaps in those days I wasn't very much aware of the politics going on around me, but the, so if I'd had a job to do I did it and got on with it and anybody else

26:00 that was doing something else, I wasn't too fussed.

**It didn't concern you at all.**

No. I didn't let it get into my hair.

**Why did you want to join up?**

Well that's a good question. I suppose there were various reasons, I felt it, I suppose there would be a certain amount of patriotism in

26:30 my actions because of the, in those days, at school and that you were sort of talked a lot about loyalty to your country, your king and queen and that. And so it was all part of growing up really and when it came to serving your country

27:00 it meant something to me. And as a nurse I thought I could really contribute.

**How important was Empire in those days?**

It was very important. I can still remember that map of the world with all those red patches over it and you know, they've been reduced over the years but

27:30 the Empire was important in those days.

**How would they enforce Empire? In the singing of songs and so on or...?**

Well you know, we always had the national anthem and we were always

28:00 commemorating Anzac Day and attended Anzac Day here at Oaklands. It used to be a full day, all the schools would come in from everywhere around the district and we'd all march up the street behind the soldiers and the boy scouts and the girl guides. Everybody used to march, it was quite a

28:30 big march in those days. We'd go, start at the dam down there and go up the high street and back down to the town hall where the service was held. And after that we'd go up to the rec ground and the sub-branch organised the Anzac sports. It was a competition between the schools in the

29:00 athletics and all sorts of things, like sack races and egg and spoon races and those things. And I can still remember the RSL provided lunch for us all, all these kids. And there was these great long rows of kids and the diggers would be going down with great trayfuls of food, up and down they'd go till it was all gone. Yes it was a great day

29:30 and then we had sports afterwards, yeah.

**So when you joined up you said it was through patriotism. Was it more patriotism to the empire or to Australia?**

To Australia really, yes. Course at that stage Australia was really developing or developed as a nation.

30:00 **Did you feel there was something missing in your professional career that...?**

No, what, why?

**Just asking if you, because you took a, to sign up is a pretty big deal and...?**

I felt there was still nursing I could do in the services and

30:30 of course when I first joined up I had no idea of making a career of it.

**How long did you think it would be for?**

Well I signed on for five years. We had to for the first commission and then I was getting myself organised to go out and perhaps

31:00 do, the College of Nursing had been formed at this stage, that was just after the Second World War and I was sort of contemplating doing a course there before I started working and I was sort of looking for a means of doing it and the, I decided, "No," and actually I think

31:30 I'd put in my resignation and when the matron chief got it I had an interview with her and she convinced me I should stay. I thought, "Oh well, I suppose I've done it now." Anyway so I signed on for a long service commission. I thought, "Well if I'm going to stay, I might as well stay instead of going out into the civilian street."

**When you initially joined up,**

32:00 **did you know about Korea and what was happening there?**

Yes it was because of Korea actually that I put my application in.

**And there was just that little ad in the paper that said...**

Yeah, that was the hook.

**So once you'd sign up, what's the process after that, the initial training. What do you do?**

32:30 At that stage it wasn't too well organised it was sort of the interim period between the war and the, it was what they called the interim army. When I joined up, down in barracks they had a great discussion as to what regimental number they'd give me and they didn't know whether they were supposed to start with the interim army numbers or I don't know that they even had them at that stage. So they gave me a TFX

33:00 number which was Tasmanian, female, [Expeditionary] forces and it was a war time number actually. TFX 700-1015, I've never forgotten it because it's caused a few problems over my years and I'd go to a unit and they'd say, "Do you know where your medical documents are?" and I'd say, "Well haven't you got them?" and they'd say "No," they can't find them anywhere.

33:30 And sort of the first time it suddenly hit me, "I reckon it's that TFX number." Because I had my other regimental number at that stage F6/4 and so I said "You better go to central army records and look up TFX 700-1015," I said, "You might find them," which they did and they found them.

34:00 They thought I was war time and they filed it away and changed the number on my documents. So on occasions it happened again but, and then it was interesting when the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] had me recorded apparently under the TFX number because when they gave the gold card to all the ex-

34:30 servicewomen of World War 11, they sent me one. So I rang them up and I said, "You sent me a gold card but as much as I regret I'll have to send it back to you." I said, "I don't qualify for it." They said, "But you're a TFX number." And I said, "I was, but," I said, "That was the first number they gave me when I joined the army but I was, I joined the interim army actually." I said, "I wasn't World War 11,"

35:00 so.

**I would've kept it if I was you. I think you earned it. I think you knew that too. So as a woman joining the army as a nurse, what do they go through? Do they suit you up with a uniform and off you go or what happens?**

Well at that stage women didn't have uniforms to give me

35:30 you see. So I first, I flew over one evening at, on a DC-3, what they used those days, Ansett across the Strait. I flew to Melbourne and

36:00 there I was the, I was to be met by somebody and the, and taken down to the nurse's club down St. Kilda Road and where they booked me in for accommodation for the night. And I was to go up to Sydney the next day but I had to have an interview with the matron-in-chief before I went over to Sydney. So,

36:30 anyway I arrived at the Melbourne Spencer Street there and the, there was nobody there, it looked like army to me so I just sat there and waited. I was in mufti [Civilian Clothing] anyway. And anyway I saw this gentleman come in and he looked as though he might have been an officer and

37:00 turned out later he was a major I found out, but he'd asked at the desk and they just shook their heads and he pranced, walked up and down waiting and so in the end I got up and I walked over to him and I said, "You're probably looking for me. I'm Nell Espie from Tasmania." And he said, "Oh thank goodness

for that." He thought I'd missed the plane or something. Anyway he took

- 37:30 me down to the nurse's club and there was the World War 11 ladies there who greeted me as a newcomer and I was sitting there chatting to these ladies and there was a knock on their door and this lady came in in uniform, she was a, she must have been, I don't think she was five foot tall, she was a very short lady and she had a few ribbons on her chest and
- 38:00 I thought, "Oh that must be the lady." So I stood up and said, "Good evening." And she said, "You must be Miss Espie," and I said, "Yes," or Sister Espie she used to call me, and I said, "Yes I am." So she said, "I want you to come to my office tomorrow morning. There'll be a jeep call here and pick you up and take you to my office before you go up to Sydney." So I went along there and in the course of the interview she said to me, "Have you brought any
- 38:30 uniforms with you?" And I said, "Well I certainly haven't got any army uniforms but I put a couple of civilians uniforms in and a couple of others in case I might need them." And she said, "In case," she said, "a very good idea." So anyway, so I eventually got up to Sydney and when I got to Sydney I didn't know too much about where Ingleburn was or
- 39:00 anything so they got a car to sent me out to Ingleburn. And the driver stopped outside the ward door and I can still see these World War 11 ladies lined up on the verandah greeting me. It's never happened before and it'll never happen again. The fact that a sister in a staff car coming in, being
- 39:30 brought, transported out, so I laughed for... So anyway so that was my initiation into the army. I was sent to the Q store [Quartermaster - Supply Store] the next morning to find, see what they had up there for me, but they had nothing beyond that dreadful World War 11 underclothing they used to issue to the girls and a white shirt, which is what the army nurses wore in those days, with a chocolate tie and silver badge.
- 40:00 And a hat. And a handful of buttons and things which I didn't have anything to put them on. And that was it. Oh I think they might've had shoes, the brown shoes. And some of those lisle stockings. So that was my initial kitting. So anyways,
- 40:30 when I got down to the quarters the sisters that were there said to me, "Well you won't have any uniforms I suppose?" and I said, "No. I haven't got any army uniforms." So they said, "Oh the rag bag." So out in the laundry was this bag where sisters who'd left the system put their indoor uniforms, see
- 41:00 and left them there. So they dragged out a few uniforms and found three that fitted me more or less and we, I found some white collars, cuffs and things which we wore and so I got dressed.

**Nell we'll have to stop there. You got dressed, we've finished another tape.**

41:30 **End of tape**

## **Tape 4**

- 00:38 **Nellie we're recording now, I'll start my first question by asking you about the Korean war. Can you please tell me how, the process of you joining up as a nurse for the Korean war.**
- 01:00 Well it didn't mean I went to Korea straight away. After I went to Ingleburn on my first posting I was, the matron-in-chief said to me that we'd be attending a school to learn about the army and how to march and how to salute and etc. And
- 01:30 when I told the ladies that at Ingleburn they just laughed, they said, "Oh they've been talking about that for years. That'll never happen." However in a few weeks we were all, there were three of us went down. Myself with the intention of sending me back here to Tasmania to open up six camp hospitals at Brighton, an army camp when the first National Service started.
- 02:00 And that was an interesting session, my introduction to the army. Though we went to this course at Portsea at the Lord Mayor's camp it was, you know, where the scouts of somebody used to go down there for camps annually. Well this was in the middle of winter and snow fell all over it, it was a freezing time
- 02:30 But anyway, and of course it was the first such course they'd ever held, the school of army held, they went to Healesville after when they really established themselves in Victoria there. But when we got down there, between ourselves we worked it all out that, where we were all going, you know. There was
- 03:00 one sister for each state on this course. Some of them were World War 11 ladies and I was the only raw recruit there and as far as the nursing sisters were concerned, the first morning we went up for, they weren't really prepared because the first morning we went up to a classroom for our first lecture and it was freezing, as I said, and there was no fire in the fireplace and
- 03:30 the walls had holes in them so we found some newspaper, plugged up the holes in the walls, set a fire,

found some wood somewhere and got us, lit the fire then we ran over to the Q store and got a blanket for each one of us to wrap ourselves in. So we wrapped ourselves up and said to the lecturer who'd arrived, said, "We're ready now." So that was the beginning.

- 04:00 It was an interesting couple of weeks I spent there, the principle matrons from all round Australia came. They were the senior nursing lady in each state who had been appointed. They were civilian nurses actually, but they were in what they called in those days the CMF [Citizens' Military Force], which of course is what they call the Reserve these days. And they had to learn to march and salute and everything else. The matron-in-chief herself
- 04:30 arrived to join the squad and so that was our beginning and I spent twelve months or so down at Brighton and that was an interesting experience in a somewhat primitive situation that sorted out a lot of problems and then I was posted to
- 05:00 Japan, I think for detachment to Korea and of course at that stage the nursing officers weren't allowed to go to Korea. What happened with the casualties were that when they brought in from their RAP [Regimental Aid Post] to the, they started using helicopters there for
- 05:30 evacuation to, which really came into vogue in the Vietnam war but the, and they were either taken to the American MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] or the Norwegian MASH or the Indian Field Ambulance where they were resuscitated and their wounds cleaned up. But they never sutured any wounds over there or that they just cleaned them up and
- 06:00 put a dressing on them or plastered them or something like that. Made them secure for Air Medivac [Medical Evacuation] over to, from Seoul over to the Iwakuni, to the air force base, the RAAF's [Royal Australian Air Force] nursing sisters looked after them on that flight. When they got to Iwakuni they were handed over to army staff where, who manned the,
- 06:30 what we called the hospital train which was a couple of railway carriages converted into two hospital wards suitable to care for the patients on their trip up to Kure. And they were hooked onto the end of the afternoon train from Tokyo and dropped off when they got to Kure. And they were transported by ambulance then to the British Commonwealth General Hospital which was situated in the old Japanese
- 07:00 Naval Academy and there was a main ward there which was the main surgical block and they were each an eighty bed ward and the British had the, or the Canadian had the first floor. The Canadian nurses looked after the first floor. The second floor was British and the Australians had the top floor, third floor.
- 07:30 And we took week about, not week about, a month about admitting. What happened were the patients arrived in the ward and then they were, the next morning they were taken to the operating theatre to, for what they called DPS which is delayed primary suturing. And so their wounds were cleaned up
- 08:00 and they were stitched up or whatever and treated in the operating theatre. This procedure was used because of the infection of wounds from Korea and they always came over from there having the wound infection which we ourselves used to call the green wog. And it was a
- 08:30 pio-sinus type infection which was treated with penicillin and, though because they'd already started before they left Korea. And when it was your week for admission the ward was filled up and then the next ward took the, they'd emptied their ward out and were filled up and so it went
- 09:00 on and took our turn about going through, first to the British and then the Canadians and then the, ourselves. We looked after Canadian, British and New Zealand, all the Commonwealth troops. Indian troops were there then too. So, and that, and I was there on the night the battle of the,
- 09:30 when the Battle of the Hook had taken place and the Black Watch was almost annihilated. And they had seven, well lots of casualties of course, a lot of dead as well as wounded including their pipe major.

**So exactly where were you when the Battle of the Hook took place?**

I was in Japan at Kure where we looked after the

- 10:00 patients then, at that, they were always evacuated over. And so when I went on night duty that night they said to me they were, the medivac hadn't come in but there were eight patients they'd heard, through the system. Well the system went wrong that night because we waited until about half past eleven and then the lift started coming up and,
- 10:30 and it kept coming up one after the other with the patients. Of course we had our beds ready for them. And after, you know, I'd received about thirty patients I said to the stretcher bearer, "How many more down there?" A broad Scottish voice said, "There's dozens of us." So we went on and on and on.
- 11:00 And eventually I ended up with eighty patients, the ward was full. It was empty when I went there except for half a dozen beds on the verandah which were a few diggers waiting to go to the convalescent department and back to duty in Korea. And so when the, and this was a group of British National Service boys, eighteen year olds, and they were a great bunch of kids,
- 11:30 I've never forgotten them. And of course a lot of them, we had to, as well as give them their treatment

when they arrived on the ward, we had to, they had to have a meal. And because it was like the middle of the day, running lunch or something. I rang the kitchen and ordered so many light and full diets and what have you, got the diggers

- 12:00 out of bed from down because there was only myself and a British orderly there down from the verandah and asked them to come and talk to the boys and to try and as I said help settle them down and give them their meal. And those half dozen diggers were really great. The way they looked after those boys and anyway we eventually, but
- 12:30 when I was going around the, I made out a list, I had a check through all their documents and see what immediate treatment they needed and their injections that were due etc. I made out a list for the orderly to go ahead and do that while I attend to the rest with the help of these diggers and was one particular lad, I always remember him,
- 13:00 he had a lot of shrapnel wounds down his back and he'd been in the Battle of the Hook and he was describing the battle to me which I sort of encouraged him to do and get it out of his system. And it was a bit horrifying the whole thing and he was telling
- 13:30 how the Chinese soldier was, the north Vietnamese soldier, north Korean soldier was, after the battle he went around and any of the boys that showed any sign of life he bayoneted. And so, because I asked him a silly
- 14:00 question, I said, "How did you survive?" I don't know if his description of how he survived. He said he waited until this soldier bent right over and to see whether he was breathing and he said he grabbed him round the neck, strangled him, his description of strangling that soldier I've never forgotten. I thought, "Well serves me right I suppose for asking him that question." But anyway
- 14:30 he was, he thought he was home and hosed and ready to go back to Scotland after this, his beloved Scotland. And he, and when I came back from my nights off I'd, the MO [Medical Orderly] was writing up the documents for medivac for
- 15:00 return to duty etc and I said, "What are you going to do about my friends, the Scot in there?" I said, "He's dying to get back to that Scotland." And he said, "He'll have to go back to Korea." And I said, "You can't do that to him. It'd kill him." And I said, "He thinks he's going back to Scotland." And I said, "He's done his bit, he's only eighteen, give him a go." Anyway he said, but the
- 15:30 CO [Commanding Officer] would never agree to it because I'd seen the CO when he'd been doing rounds and things on the ward and that and I thought he was a very compassionate fella and so I said to him, "You write him and see what happens." So he did and he went off to Scotland. But they were a great group of boys those Scotties. The poor old pipe major, his piping days were over.
- 16:00 Had both legs injured and both arms and, but it was interesting. Before I went up to Korea in '52, or to Japan, the Black Watch visited Tasmania that year and the band was in Launceston playing when I left Tasmania and he was the pipe major.
- 16:30 **Was that your first time that you'd seen people, battlefield casualties?**  
Oh no, we'd seen others before then but I'll always remember that particular group.  
**What did you see before then?**  
Well at the, casualties coming from Korea, over, British and Australian and New Zealand troops.  
**Any particular battles outside that?**  
Oh just the, oh well I can't remember the names of them now.
- 17:00 I'd have to have a jog on that. But when we finally did go over to Korea we went on detachment for three months. It was in '52. That they allowed the sisters over there. They'd established this unit
- 17:30 in Seoul called the British Commonwealth Communications Zone Medical Unit, the BCCZMU.  
**That's the longest abbreviation I've ever heard of.**  
And it was a bombed out school building actually and so it wasn't, it was functional the whole thing but you know, and our quarters were on top of the officers' mess and
- 18:00 how we got there was up a fire escape on the outside. And for our fire escape and stairway, that was, for our fire escape out the other way there was a rope chained to our window sill and I presumed that was where we went down if we couldn't get out the other way. But we just had cubicles up there and that, in that part of the, it was a very
- 18:30 primitive. It was the three-holer at the top of the stairs. And we were only allowed one shower a day. They had the one shower for the whole unit and they would clean it out at five o'clock every afternoon and the sisters had first use of the shower. The medical officers went after us and they used to accuse us of using all the hot water. But the,

19:00 we weren't too concerned about that of course. But the, if we were on duty we took our sponge bag and towel with us and ran off down for our shower otherwise we didn't get one. And otherwise we bathed in our cubicle with a dish and a jug of water.

**Sounds pretty rough.**

Oh it wasn't,

19:30 it was primitive enough but anyway we survived it. Had lots of fun doing it and of course the North Vietnamese air force used to fly over. We had an air raid siren every night. They used to fly over Seoul every night, down to in Chonnam, round that area where the oil tanks

20:00 were and bombing down there. And they were used to, we never went to bed before that siren went otherwise we'd have to get out of bed in the dark. That wasn't too much fun trying to get down those old wooden stairs outside to get downstairs. So that's what we used to do. We had to

20:30 report to the ward for duty you see, so we'd sit out on the step outside the mess waiting for these planes to come over and usually the didn't drop anything but before, the time before I went over there, a few weeks before, must have had a couple of bombs left over when they were after they'd finished bombing down south further and they dropped them as they went over Seoul

21:00 and they straddled the BCCZMU. And the girls (UNCLEAR - darby?) because the CO used to have air raid practices, getting the patients out of bed. He'd have the stop watch on them because the diggers wouldn't get out of course. And anyway this particular night they didn't need any inviting, they shot down the stairs whether they could walk or not. So fortunately we didn't have anything like that while I was there.

21:30 But we weren't allowed out of the area at all. If we went to the American PX [American Canteen Unit] or over to the Parall [?] bombed out cathedral, the shattered cathedral there, to mass, we'd used to always have an armed escort. So

22:00 Unless there was anything special. Another occasion when I did leave the area, because I had to get extra special permission from the brigadier and everybody for that, but the Red Cross representative, Phil Damon, she was another Tasmanian, she'd been in AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] in the Middle East and she'd worked with the Red Cross after the war and

22:30 she was going up to P'anmunjom to the Parallel [38th Parallel - border between North and South Korea] to where they were handing over the prisoners of war and, or some of the prisoners of war, this particular day and I had a day off. So the sister in charge got permission from the headquarters for me to go up with Phil Damon. And it was an interesting experience.

23:00 Really. Right up there in that Parallel, of course it's better built now than it was in those days. They had this great big long building, room, with, it had wooden floors and hessian around the bottom part of it I can remember and there was mosquito netting

23:30 all around the top part and, but of course I wasn't allowed to speak with the diggers or anything as they came through but the, I had to sit right over in the corner out of the way, but it was interesting there sitting and watching those boys come through those gates. The expressions on their faces, you know. They were somewhat mixed.

24:00 Some with a bit of misbelief, you know, didn't know whether, I don't think they knew whether it was going to happen or not. Or what was going to happen to them until they got there probably. And some of those boys, prisoners, they had a bit of a rough time with the Koreans.

24:30 But the air force medivac ward was attached to our ward and when we were on night duty we used to go in and say hello to the diggers around the ward and see how they were going. But the hospital,

25:00 our wards, we treated a lot of minor sick because there were a lot of malaria, things like that there and that people on their way to, in Chongju Convalescent from one of the larger medical establishments and also the sick, from that area. We used to get a few heat exhaustions from the military corrective establishment. And the odd ones with

25:30 malaria from there. I always remember some poor Frenchman, he was from the French Foreign Legion that had been sent up to, from Vietnam to Korea to see the ENT [Ear Nose Throat] specialist because he was deaf of something. And he was a little quiet little fella and I always remember him and he would say to me he was taken over to

26:00 the specialist and anyway the specialist apparently had a French-Canadian, he was having trouble understanding him so he put his head out the door and he said, "Can anybody speak French?" Anyway poor little Frenchman puts up his hand. So he was sent back to Vietnam but he was,

26:30 when he got back to us I said, "Well, you can understand a little bit of English." And I said, "Well you were a bit silly weren't you." He looked sheepish and said, "Yes." Though he was no longer deaf.

- 27:00 But we had some sick boys there. I always remember a Kiwi with malaria, had temperature of a hundred and seven. We didn't think he'd survive and of course we didn't have any air conditioning, it was summer time and we didn't have any air conditioning or anything like that. And we had him on the bed on a macintosh, and stripped him off with a bath tub at the end with the macintosh down into it where the water can run and we'd just spray him with a
- 27:30 watering can to cool him down and eventually we did. But there was nothing much we could do for him there with those facilities. A temperature of a hundred and seven, it's a wonder he survived. But he did, he was a tough little fella. It wasn't the first time he'd been into us. He was from the MCE [Military Corrective Establishment], so at one stage he'd come in because he'd chewed his toothpaste or something to put his temperature
- 28:00 up. Get a break from the MCE. They were pretty tough those Canadians.

**Can you tell us what it was like, what were the problems you'd have to deal with soldiers outside battlefield injuries and things like that?**

What

- 28:30 exactly?

**Like illnesses, what were the illnesses?**

Oh the illnesses. Well as I said malaria or accident cases or normal sickness, you know, flu or gertie as they called it in the army. And anything like that. We didn't have an operating theatre as such. And,

- 29:00 but it was an interesting, anyway to get over to that part of the world and see what was going on over there. Like Seoul was a very poor, bombed out city then in those days. Very different now as the Korean matron of the hospital in Vung Tau used to say to me, the Evac [Evacuation] Hospital, she used to say,

- 29:30 "You wouldn't know Korea now." Because very Americanised, or their nursing was anyway, their uniforms and everything. But it was a very poor country in those days.

**What conditions did the people live in, in Seoul?**

In very little, any shanty, any shelter they could get,

- 30:00 really. Some were living in cardboard boxes and that. You know, and these big vehicles come in, you know, big crates like that, make a home in it. Because they'd be belted up and down the country for a while before the Americans moved in of course. The Australians and

- 30:30 when the Communists were making their big push. We used to get a lot of, not a lot, but a few, nuns from different orders but they were working in Korea, North Korea, when the, and of course they had stories to tell about their evacuation out of from the north. They'd come down in all sorts of vehicles

- 31:00 with the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and everything else. And because they, if they weren't well they used to send them over to us to, we used to have them in our wards on ward three. And you'd get them fit enough to make the next move. Because in Japan we came across a lot of missionary

- 31:30 people there and we always used to help them wherever we could.

**Was VD a problem amongst the troops?**

Yes that was though I don't know how big a problem because we didn't deal with it, they had a ward there that was specifically for

- 32:00 the VD and venereal diseases and that. And they had their posts around the town of Kure, the fellas could report treatment and that. But it was, but of course in Japan of course the,

- 32:30 you know, the occupation forces were there before we were and the families were up there too. Because they'd gone home at this stage back to Australia. But Hiroshima I went out and saw that with just the one tower standing there,

- 33:00 course nobody ever said to us how dangerous the area could be. Nobody knew I don't think. I never went rummaging around the place for souvenirs but some people did. A few sisters got cancer coming back from Japan, so you'd wonder wouldn't

- 33:30 you whether that was the cause of it.

**Can you tell us what Hiroshima looked like at that time?**

At that time, it had been rebuilt a little bit but it was very flat, Kure was a very old area and there was massive building going on. Tokyo itself was a bit flat too. Even then. They'd started to rebuild but they had the

- 34:00 old Ginza markets as we used to call them up there in Tokyo and they were magnificent. There was this huge area with these long rows of stalls and the Japanese used to love to barter with you. And you'd get

- things for a song, you know, binoculars, cameras, all sorts of things. And they wouldn't sell it to you unless you bartered with them. And they were, we used to always
- 34:30 love going to the Ginza markets but now of course it's high rise, multi-storey department stores and that now. I went back to Japan, I couldn't believe the difference in the city. It was a modern city. We went, one evening we went to, one day because we used to have a few days off from leave
- 35:00 after night duty and we always hopped on the train that went through to Tokyo and stayed, it was the leave centre which was right near the railway line of the city circle. And we used to love going into Tokyo and just rambling. You wouldn't have a clue where you were but you'd walk for miles and at the of the day you'd get a taxi and come home. Or to the nearest railway
- 35:30 station or something. But yeah, it was, one day there was a Scottish QA [Queen Alexandra Nurse], British nurse and myself and another Australian, we went in to Tokyo, course we wore uniform in those days, and it came to later in the day and we were feeling hungry and we thought, "Where can we find something to eat/" So we were looking around for something which we thought might be suitable and I saw a sign,
- 36:00 'Skyview Restaurant' or something. I said, "Let's investigate that and see what it is." Anyway we got into this lift and it was quite rickety and anyway we got to the top and when we got to the top we couldn't find the restaurant. We were roaming round the top floor and we eventually found what looked like a reception area. There was this little Japanese girl there and course she didn't speak any, didn't understand any English at all.
- 36:30 And we were trying to get, tell her we were looking for the restaurant. At first she thought we were looking for the toilet and then she started to take us to the toilet and I said, "No, no, no, Banjo," which we used to call the toilet. And then she got the giggles, and we said, "Chop, chop." So eventually she said, so she took us into a little room where the,
- 37:00 it was winter time at this stage and there was snow outside on the ground and there was, there, a little fire pot was sitting in the centre of the room with the warm coals and these arm chairs and what have you, so we sat, went in there and sat down and eventually a Japanese came in dressed in his, with his bow tie all dressed up as a waiter and asked us would we like a drink. He brought us a menu and we were sitting
- 37:30 there and I think we were having martinis or something and we were sipping away at the martini and we were waiting for ages, I think we'd ordered some sort of chicken, we'd be safe on that, and the, and I was facing a window. It seemed to be a central room but there was a window looking out to enter the corridor and all of a sudden I saw a Japanese, little Japanese
- 38:00 fella run past the window with a couple of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in his hand, feathers and all. And I immediately started to laugh. I said, "Well girls, we'll have fresh WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [chicken]. There'll be no doubt about that." Ah dear that was the funniest lunch. Well we spent all the afternoon there having that lunch. It was extraordinary, really.
- 38:30 And the fella, waiter was getting round us and in the end I said to Mac, the Scot, I said, "This'll be costing you something, Mac." And the Japanese waiter, he spoke English fairly well you see or understood it and Mac was a captain, we were only lieutenants and he tapped her on the shoulder and said, "Captain, she pay." That horrified us, the thought of...
- 39:00 it was a funny afternoon. Then when we went to go home the lift wasn't working, they shut it off at a certain time of the day and so we had to go down the stairs and it was pitch black dark, you know, the power wasn't on. So he led us down the stairs with a torch. We went round, down, down, I don't know how far up we'd gone. It seemed a long way down. We eventually got out course it was dark when we got outside.
- 39:30 We couldn't believe it. So we found the railway station and went home. So we had lots of fun, whatever we did as well as, you know, we had some happy moments and some sad moments and saw some tragedies but
- 40:00 the Japanese were amazing the way they were rebuilding this city. They worked twenty-four hours a day doing it. They left the lights on at night, rebuilding roads and that. Incredible, very industrious people they were.
- Okay we'll pause.**
- 40:30 **End of tape**

## Tape 5

- 00:35 **You had a lot of admiration for the Japanese, did you have any brushes with them?**

There was only one incident where I remember because we used to go for a, on our day off at

- 01:00 Kure we often went for a walk and started, in the summer time particularly and started out early in the morning, you know, release of day break, and there was this single hill they used to call it and we used to go across the paddy fields and walk up that. And on the way we used to meet the Japanese school builders and boys going to school.
- 01:30 And they used to teach them English then, in their school, and there were so many of course of the Japanese, they used to have a couple of sittings a day for the schools and we met the early classes and they used to stop and talk to us to practise their English. And they could speak a little bit of English
- 02:00 themselves but we couldn't speak much Japanese. But those kids, they were delightful kids anyway. But on the way up there one morning there was like a little stall where you could get drinks and they had fruit and this old, don't know if he was an old soldier or what. Of course we were in civilians, but he knew we were Australians I suppose by our accent probably, perhaps he'd had some experience
- 02:30 with Australians but he wasn't very pleased to see us and, we don't know what he said to us but he didn't sound very welcoming at all. We took off and left him, we didn't get, we were feeling thirsty and we thought one of those nice juice pear type apple things they used to grow up there, we thought well that'd be nice to have to quench our thirst but we didn't wait for it. He was really abusive
- 03:00 the way he carried on. But that was the only experience.

### **Unusual isn't it?**

But he must've had an experience himself that sort of brought it on or something, I don't know. But anyway the, we had Japanese staff in the hospital doing domestic work and, you know, working the lifts and they were the plumbers and things like that around

- 03:30 the hospital. And we had Japanese cooks in our mess. And Japanese girls looked after our quarters and that. And they were all very pleasant people, you know, to deal with and I found they'd do anything for me. Some British girls used to say to me, "How do you get them to do that? They wouldn't do that for me." I said, "Well, just ask them."
- 04:00 But anyway I never had any problems with them, but they went on strike once in the, it was near Christmas time when we were having all functions in the mess. Christmas activities as well as the, and it was winter time and of course and we had trouble with the boilers,
- 04:30 because we got the hospital, got the men up from the navy to see if they could work the boilers. They only succeeded in blowing one up, so we didn't use the navy any more. And I don't know what finally happened but for days there in the middle of winter we didn't have hot water for showers or anything. So we used
- 05:00 To, it was, those cold showers in the middle of winter, they weren't too good. Anyway we, they eventually settle the dispute. They wanted more pay or something because they were on a mere pittance I think, not very much and so they got a bit more pay and they were happy. The old mama-sans came back up the ward and bowing
- 05:30 to us, "So sorry Sister Sarge, so sorry Sister Sarge." We had our, of course when we were sitting at the desk, we were sitting at the desk you know, when they were polishing the floor, they'd polish our shoes too. We got our shoes polished lots of times that day, they returned. But we never had any trouble with them apart from that, you know, on the wards or anything like that. We were in the mess. Except
- 06:00 I remember I was the messing officer and we, we always had a trifle for our evening meal and we used rum to make it and I saw the bar lady and said, the sister in charge of the bar and I said to get the bit of rum for the trifle, and there was just a bit left in the bottom of the bottle
- 06:30 and she goes, "Oh take the bottle, we won't worry about it that much. And there's nothing much there and there'll only be enough for your trifles." Anyway because it was in the bottle I suppose, usually we took it out in the glass or something, I went in for the meal that Sunday evening, I nearly died. The trifle, it was full of almond essence, there was not rum in it. So I went out to the
- 07:00 kitchen and I said, "Well papa-san, who drank the rum?" And they all looked at me and giggled, you know. I said, "You're all number ten." Of course, I said to her, "British matron - pissed-o," thinking she'd be very mad and she was mad too because I copped it the next morning when I reported
- 07:30 to her about the almond essence in the trifle. But otherwise they were a very obedient crowd and good, reasonable at their job and the house girls they were excellent and you'd only have the slightest tear in something and they'd mend it. Their needlework was incredible. And it'd be something you'd throw out yourself
- 08:00 but they'd mend it. Because I suppose they'd grown over the war years very frugal in their habits. Anyway but it was quite a large mess actually. There was the English, the British, the QAs, Queen Alexandras and the Canadian

- 08:30 sisters as well as the Australian sisters in those quarters. And as the messing officer you had to look after all the menus and the kitchen and the order the meals for the day and look after the maintenance of the quarters and things like that. So and course if you had, we had weddings and
- 09:00 all sorts of functions like that to organise. So it was, I was there altogether two years up in that area and it was quite an interesting tour of duty actually. Very satisfying from the
- 09:30 employment point of view and plenty of activity otherwise. If you made the most of it. But the Koreans of course were getting over the, still getting over the war. They were still at war when we were over there and of course
- 10:00 that affected them, of course, greatly in their attitudes and everything. They were, because they were different again to the Japanese, well all the Asians are really, they're all different.

**How do you see that?**

Well in their personalities and their attitudes and everything.

**So you found the Vietnamese**

**10:30 and the Malaysians different, in what way?**

The Malaysians, because it's, we probably had more to do with the Japanese too than we did perhaps the Malaysians. The Vietnamese we had a certain amount because we had a certain number of them or course

- 11:00 employed around the hospital. And the Vietnamese lady, she used to look after our quarters. But there were some interesting individuals there. There was one little old lady who used to look after our quarters and her fingers were all nailed and worn, and she was quite a, she could
- 11:30 speak broken English and I used to chat to her on occasion because if I was chasing up the Vietnamese, because I didn't know their language at all I'd lapse into Japanese or something. And she said to be me, "You speak Japanese." And I said, "Only a little bit now." I said, "A long time ago in Japan." And she'd talk about the time the Japanese were in Vietnam and they were just treated as coolies.
- 12:00 Nothing else. They did road building and all sorts of things. And by the look of her hands, you know, they were all worn, she probably did. It's interesting. But the Malaysians, we used to have Chinese Malay working on the wards and
- 12:30 we used to, and the Malaysian, the boys used to, the men used to work with the British army, they used to work for the British army and they had some sort of agreement with the British army where they accepted our customs and what have you and they were, their
- 13:00 own customs didn't interfere with their work. But the, they were very good because the Australian sisters hadn't, had been running the family's ward where I was put on to work when I first went up to Malaysia because it was, because
- 13:30 of my qualifications. I had my midwifery, obstets [obstetrics] and the child health care and so I was the dead sitter I realised when I got there to go on the family's ward. And I quite enjoyed it but it had been many years since I'd looked after kids and mums. But anyway they had their obstetrics ward there, I didn't have to do any active obstets
- 14:00 work but we used to have the Ghurkha ladies, they'd come for antenatal care and postnatal care. They'd be on our ward. They were dear people, the Ghurkhas and the kids were lovely. And they, the Ghurkhas had their own kitchen at the
- 14:30 hospital there. There was the kitchen where the English meals were cooked and everything, the European type meals, but the Ghurkhas had their own where they cooked their own curries and things. That trolley when it came round with their Ghurkha meals on it, the delicious smell of curry. And of course the kiddies used to, they'd be standing, at the
- 15:00 ward looking out at the trolley positively drooling, wanting some curry. But of course when the European food came round the Ghurkha kids wanted the sweets off that trolley because they loved them and of course they weren't used to that sort of thing I suppose. I don't know what it did to all their diets. But we used to give them a little bit of curry if they wanted a bit of curry, if they were well enough to
- 15:30 have it. And the kids used to love it. And we were having meals all day because the Ghurkhas ate twice a day, ten o'clock and then four o'clock.

**That's it?**

That was their meal time.

**How did you get transferred from Korea to Malaya?**

Oh well I came back to Australia after Korea. I went to Duntroon Military Hospital there and then for twelve months

16:00 and then I went, then I came down here to the CMF Nursing Training Unit where I was adjutant quartermaster. When I came back from Japan I did a course at the WRAAC [Women's Royal Australian Army Corps] school for adjutant quartermasters.

**The WRAAC school?**

Yes. That was up at Mildura at that stage.

16:30 **Did you have any sort of military training at all? Even though you were in the military and you were a nurse, did you have any sort of training in any way that was...?**

In those days we weren't allowed to carry weapons or anything like that.

**You weren't allowed?**

No. And it didn't happen until more recent times. When I was up in Vietnam I realised

17:00 that we had to learn something about weapons because there were occasions where you had to handle weapons and you wouldn't know whether they were safe or not, for a start. And so I introduced as part of the training for the nurses when they entered the army that they learnt something about weapons, whether they were safe or unsafe and

17:30 whether, how to load and unload and a few things like that. But they still didn't carry weapons on parade. But that of course has since changed because of the nature of things and the system. But I could see it was coming anyway. But it was

18:00 necessary I think because one occasion when I was up there in Vietnam my 2IC [Second in Command] was down in the outpatients department. And I found she was receiving the weapons from the soldiers as they came into the outpatients and she was putting a label on them and slinging them up on the rack and I said to her, "Do you know if those weapons are safe or

18:30 unsafe?" She said, "No," swinging another one up and I said, "Well I'm going before I'm shot." There was a warrant officer there with his tracker dog waiting to get some injections and he said, "Oh I'll check them for you matron." And so he did and so I went and found the quartermaster and I said, "What's my staff doing, the nursing staff doing checking weapons in when they don't even know whether they're

19:00 safe or unsafe?" So I said, "It's your job, not mine." So, exit. So anyway, but he says, "Well I haven't got anyone." And I said, "Well find somebody. Nurses are not that easy to find." I said, "They'll be shooting themselves next."

**You must've been relieved to come back from Korea in a way?**

Korea? Oh yes,

19:30 and it was, two years I suppose was long enough up there but it was an interesting time and I'd done what I went up there to, care for the casualties in Korea regardless of which nation and so I felt very satisfied about my service up there.

20:00 I've had a very privileged career actually, caring for the soldiers.

**It seems to be quite a heavy thing to handle, being a nurse handling battlefield casualties**

20:30 **regularly. How did you deal with this?**

Well that's what I went there for, to do the job. And if I'm doing a job I always like to do it well and I just don't let things upset me, then I can't do it.

**Did you have**

21:00 **an outlet to control, control the...**

Well we had our social activities when we were in Kure there. They had a club, an officers' club which, and we attended functions there and any special occasions and we could go down there for our meals and that and the

21:30 different units used to have some functions and things and I was up there the matron decided I could be the sports officer for the other ranks of the corps who used to be what they called during the Second World War, the AAMWS. They were like the nursing aids and of course they were a bit younger than I was, not that I was that old

22:00 up there. And she'd organised some officer to take them for a basketball, it was men's rules, you know. Tearing up and down that basketball court. I got a phone call one day and it was the adjutant from the, or the admin officer of the hospital.

22:30 He said, "Can you play tennis?" and I said, "I play hit and giggle." He said, "Get your racquet and go down to the tennis court." And I got down there and I found I was playing in some British competition

as a partner for somebody. I nearly died. Oh that was just as well he was a good player.

23:00 **How did you find the Americans in Korea?**

We had very little contact with them actually. We used to, unless it was on a, we used to, we'd meet them, in the course of duty we'd meet the American nurses but we didn't, and of course they were over in Japan too and we

23:30 used to see them socially on occasions over there but we had, we didn't actually have that much to do with them. And our troops had our own hospitals and that up there so, but had more contact with them in Vietnam actually than we did up there. In Vietnam when I first went up there,

24:00 33 Evac was in Vung Tau, the American hospital, and they closed down soon after I went up there. But they were very supportive to the one Australian hospital, field hospital, course when they got an overflow of patients they took them. But of course when the Americans moved out of that area we were the only hospital

24:30 there for the allies and the, in the area because the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] South Vietnamese army they had their own hospital and the Koreans had their hospital. But of course some patients, because we didn't have the equipment to, in specialist areas we used to have to send up to Saigon to the American field hospital up there,

25:00 but they, some of our patients would come to us from Bien Hoa, down to us, evacuated down to us once they'd been resuscitated up there.

**From Bien Hoa?**

Bien Hoa, yeah.

**Before we get to Vietnam though...**

25:30 In Malaya I was posted to the British Military Hospital at Kamunting which is in Taiping in north Malaya there. And it was, it had medical and surgical wards

26:00 for the troops and it had this families ward for the, where the wives were looked after. Because the Australian wives went up to Malaya too and the New Zealand wives and the British of course were there too. So it was a general sort of

26:30 ward for as far as the adults were concerned and then we had the general kids ward where we had a mixture of children from the families of New Zealand, Australia, British and the Gurkha regiments. And it was tiring work because

27:00 we didn't have that much staff there. Because my staff was, well initially when I first went up there I worked with the QA in charge of the British army. Nurse in charge of the families ward and then after she left, I was put in charge and then I had a QA working with me, we were both of the same rank and we worked well together at the,

27:30 it was interesting to see the British in Malaya after working with them in, although we didn't work that often with them but on occasions we worked on their wards in Japan and they were a somewhat different and more relaxed people when we got to Malaya. And I, but the,

28:00 the Americans of course when, in Korea, we didn't really have that much to do with them. Before I left Vietnam the American chief nurse invited me up to the day at the field hospital in Saigon

28:30 and to Bien Hoa to have a look at that hospital. I'd seen Bien Hoa a few, earlier in my year up there but they had, there was a different nursing officer in charge of it and I couldn't believe the difference in the atmosphere in hospital between those two people. But the chief nurse in Vietnam there, she said to me, she said "When you go there you must go up to the

29:00 place," where was it, Quang Tri or something, up north and where the ARVN had one of their older hospitals, the field hospital and some pharmaceutical company from American had built them a new hospital, brick, you know, proper hospital with wards and everything. And it had never been occupied because they didn't know how to use it. They

29:30 didn't have a nursing corps or nursing service as such in their army and there was a, in Vung Tau there was an ARVN hospital with two hundred paraplegic patients and the families used to look after them and the,

30:00 and they had no running water. I remember at one stage the Becau [?] said to me from our hospital, he said, "Go over and have a look at that hospital and see what Australia can do to help them." When I got over there and walked around the hospital or what have you, I went back and I said, "Well running water would be a good help for a start." So I think they fixed that up for them. But

30:30 when I went up to see this hospital up in the north, it was, you know, they had an open, like an open air kitchen where they cooked, they always had these huge vats of rice cooking and what have you and the rest of the hospital you couldn't really work out what it was and then there was this new building.

- 31:00 And the Americans had got whatever their nurses and it was a male nurse doing about his third term in Vietnam and they got him to select from that old Vietnamese hospital what he thought might, he might be able to train to start up the new hospital you see. And how to run a ward and things like that.
- 31:30 And he had a couple of American nurse educators to help him and an interpreter and then these students who were doing the nursing in the older hospital. They hadn't done much in the way of training and he was, this nurse apparently, I don't know what training he'd had or where he'd trained or anything
- 32:00 else but they appointed him as the first trained nurse in the South Vietnamese army. And what they were doing, they went up to the hospital and they opened up a ward and taught these nurses how to run the ward, how to keep it clean and everything else and then they put some patients in for them and taught them how to look after these patients
- 32:30 and they were doing quite well and then they opened up another ward and did the same with another group and they were gradually teaching them how to take over this building and use it at last. And then he decided he'd send a couple of his staff that he'd trained down to the old hospital to clean it up, and their triage
- 33:00 and help them down there. They didn't want to go. They said, "It's dirty." So he eventually convinced them and they went down and had a ball cleaning up the place. That was something I saw, useful being done there in Vietnam. But as the chief nurse said to me, she says, "It's like looking at the Boer War in present day." You know with the two hospitals,
- 33:30 well it was, it was unbelievable the contrast. And then I spent some time at Bien Hoa because the American pilots who ran the, oh blank - dust-offs [helicopter evacuations] -
- 34:00 they were a wonderful group of people that used to bring our casualties in to our helipad which was called 'Vampire'. And of course one stage when one of the battalions was having a bit of rough time and had a lot of casualties, and of course we didn't have the Americans over the way to help us out,
- 34:30 the theatres had been going all day and all night and we only had two surgeons there and I was in the triage sort of helping to keep that going and setting it up once when one lot went through we would set it up for the next lot and the, and I heard a chopper come in,
- 35:00 and I thought, "Nobody said there was another dust off coming, what is it?" Anyway I sort of peered around the door of the triage and the, and I saw this gentleman get off with a
- 35:30 duffle bag and, off the chopper and come up the, towards the triage, and he said, "I'm Colonel Leslie." He said, "I've just come up from Australia to Saigon and I heard you were having problems down here. You were busy or something. So," he said, "I've come to help." And he
- 36:00 said, "Where's the theatre?" and I said, "In there." I didn't see him till over the Weeties next morning at breakfast. But it was a hectic time over that particular period but he was, and of course he'd been in World War 11, New Guinea, and he was quite a, he was one of the surgeons from Melbourne. But it was good to see him, he came at
- 36:30 the right time. And he said to me, he must have had a look around the hospital because he said to me, "Well Matron," he said, "I know what your problems are, you need some of those nursing assistants of yours up here." I said, "Well we certainly need more staff, whatever they are." Because it was a hundred bed hospital and there were only nine of
- 37:00 us including myself there to run the whole place and we had an outpatients and the two medical wards and the two surgical wards, an intensive care ward and the operating theatre. And if you had to have somebody special or intensive care, isolated, that took two nurses in twelve hours shifts and the intensive care wards used to work twelve-hour shifts.
- 37:30 It was all wrong as far as I was concerned because I needed, so I used to see that they always got their day off, regardless, and was able to have a rest. But it was, it was a busy time but anyway it was intensive nursing and a bit hard for the younger nurses I think because I'd been, I'd had battle
- 38:00 casualty experience before and I knew what to expect and what I'd be seeing. But it was a bit of a shock to some of those younger nurses I think.

**I presume you would've reacted the same way when you first worked with battlefield casualties?**

Not so much I don't think.

**Why is that?**

It might have been part of my training I think.

- 38:30 And I was prepared for it, you know, I sort of prepared myself for it. And I had control of the situation I

suppose or something. But I didn't, although you didn't like seeing these young men disabled and losing legs and arms and what have you and,

39:00 but to me it was all part of the, something I had to expect.

**What sort of wounds did you treat in Korea for instance?**

Well the ones that came from Korea a lot of them were broken legs and limbs, but gunshot wounds and chest wounds. There were a lot of chest wounds,

39:30 and also a lot of burns cases. Because in the winter time there in Korea it is a wicked place, cold. The boys say the socks used to freeze on their feet in their boots and it was, and of course they'd make these home made heating systems in their hootchies and

40:00 their dug outs and what have you and that really and of course there'd be the odd accident where one would blow up and they'd get these dreadful burns. And so they were very painful things, burns.

**We'll have to stop there because we've run out of tape.**

40:30 **End of tape**

## Tape 6

00:33 In fact you can never get lost in Tasmania.

**While you were serving in Korea how did the helicopter change medical, the medicine on the war field.**

Well it was recognised there I think what a quick evacuation

01:00 would do because when you've got air control you can make good use of it, but if you haven't got air control there'd be problems with it. And because in the Seoul air itself all day you used to hear the choppers coming over.

**Without them what would've happened?**

I suppose they would've had to use road transport

01:30 and of course some of the, some type of casualties, you know, serious wounds lined you need to, the quicker they get to resuscitation the better for their recovery. Because you know there'd be some no doubt that wouldn't be lifted out soon enough and they'd die on the battle field, like chest wounds and things

02:00 like that.

**Was that recognised, the importance of the helicopter, in Korea?**

Well I suppose it would. We didn't hear that much being said about it but when I think about the using, they were lifted up from the RAPs over to the MASHs [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] and that, quick evacuation of course would've helped a lot of the boys. But really it came home properly in Vietnam

02:30 when we used them there.

**Do you think they were taken for granted?**

Well I suppose they always expected them to be there because it was the way because it was the fact they had that air control and they could expect it to come unless ground fire prevented it,

03:00 which of course could happen some times.

**Did you deal with any of the chopper pilots, talk to them or...?**

No we didn't have because they just dropped their patients in and went. And so we didn't see much of the dust-offs except for the occasions like when you went up to Bien Hoa or something like that you might meet

03:30 one of them up there or something like that.

**From your limited meetings with them, do you know how tough it was for them or anything or...?**

It wouldn't have been an easy task for them I wouldn't think.

**Did you visit a MASH unit while you were in Korea?**

Yes, oh, not Korea. No.

## **In Vietnam?**

04:00 Only in the Vietnam, I saw the MASH.

### **And what was a, can you give us the whole details of what a MASH unit looked like in Vietnam?**

Well it was a hospital under tentage I suppose is what you'd call it and then they'd have their operating theatres and everything in these, of course they refined (UNCLEAR) our lot

04:30 over the years. Since Korea of course they're, and there was the chief nurse that was in Vietnam when I was there, she'd done a lot of work in the researching and work in improving the hospitals, the MASHs. And she, when she was,

05:00 because after she was matron-in-chief she was posted to the ordnance in the American army there and she was an amazing woman. The detail that she had in her head about hospital equipment and she went around our hospital and she,

05:30 I couldn't believe it, the knowledge she had. Every item in that hospital, of course we had some American equipment as well as... the only real Australian thing we had there were our Australian beds, particularly designed for the army. Because inevitably she asked me how much they cost and how much they weighed

06:00 when they were packed up etc, etc. Course I couldn't tell her a thing, because they didn't tell us such things in those days. But autoclaves and stoves and everything in that hospital she could tell you where it was made, how much it had cost to buy and what it would weigh when it was packed. Because you'd have to know that for the MASHs of course. But,

06:30 in the pharmaceutical department I thought now, "She'll dazzle this pharmacist," so I just left them. Afterwards when I saw the pharmacist, "Oh," he said, "that girl (UNCLEAR)," he said, "I couldn't believe it. She knew more about drugs than I did."

### **How did they improve the MASHs from**

07:00 **Korea to Vietnam?**

Well I suppose it was the whole structure of them. The ventilation and everything else and that, I don't really know too much about them myself except the, and of course we had our own mobile hospitals of course now in the army but that was introduced more or less just as I was finishing so I never

07:30 really, I was very knowledgeable on the whole thing. But certainly they're certainly ideal for a war service situation.

### **How mobile are they? Do they move around a lot?**

Well they can be packed up and moved?

### **But did you see them being moved?**

No I haven't. Course our MASH would probably be smaller than the Americans ones

08:00 of course. But I wouldn't know what size they get them down to when they're packed up or anything.

### **Do you know if in Korea a MASH unit would've stayed in one spot for a long time or would they move around with the front lines and so on? So the last question, do you know if in Korea if the MASH units moved around or they just stayed in**

08:30 **one spot for most of the time?**

Well once the situation was stabilised no doubt they stayed in an appropriate position. Because in Bien Hoa the nurses lived in one of those big trailers, trailer home thing, which had a little kitchen in it and lounge room two bedrooms and a shower and everything in the

09:00 whole thing. A home on wheels.

### **Have you seen the sitcom or the film MASH?**

Yes when I was in Vietnam and I was leaving there, when I left Bien Hoa the Americans had been down to Australia and they'd seen film in Sydney and they said to me, "When you back home, when you go through Sydney,

09:30 you'll have to go and see MASH." They said, "You'll enjoy it." And so I had a couple of hours to spare in between planes and things and I was in the city so I thought, "I'll go and have a look at that MASH." so I went into the theatre and I sat upstairs in the back of the theatre all by myself and laughed my head off. And everybody was looking at me and wondering what I was laughing at half the time. I thoroughly enjoyed

10:00 it. I thought well nothing like that happened to us. We laughed, I thought it was huge joke the whole thing. But it was very entertaining and the padre, I thought

10:30 he really played a part there, yes.

**So how different was it from the real thing?**

Well you know, as far as our showers were concerned the diggers sat outside with a gun, with a Tommy gun. Outside the showers while the sisters were showering. Course it was right near the showers actually

11:00 just more or less inside the gates of the compound because there was a guard on the gate, but anyway he sat on a chair outside while we, used to often wonder whether the gun was loaded.

**Maybe he was there for other reasons. What about the relationship**

11:30 **between the doctors and the nurses. Was that similar or different to the film you saw?**

Oh that was a bit different really. The doctors lived their own life and we lived ours. But we live in the same, we had the same mess, social mess where we had our meals and things. But they had their quarters and we had ours. But the,

12:00 something, oh it's gone, what I was going to say? But it's, as I say, it was, a lot of people when they think of Korea they think of MASH. It was the entertaining film for me just the same.

12:30 **In those shows it showed that doctors would need a way to escape from what they were seeing or what was going on, was that the case in real life?**

They needed some form of relaxation, even if it was madness amongst themselves sort of thing.

**How would they relax?**

Well you know there was,

13:00 the units used to have various entertainments and things and shows and that and they'd put on a party themselves or something and, but you never had much time for that in Vietnam and we didn't, apart from on duty we didn't see that much of the doctors. They probably could go out, put a pistol on their

13:30 hips and go, whereas we couldn't.

**Would they wear Hawaiian shirts and play golf?**

I don't think so, not like what's-his-name, I can't think of his name now, the surgeon.

**They wouldn't go as crazy as that. You were saying they just had parties and so on. Would there be much...?**

You'd need a certain amount of relaxation otherwise you would go mad

14:00 in that place and sort of get away from it all. And that the R&R [Rest and Recreation] and the R&C [Rest and Convalescence] used to happen in Vietnam during the year, you know, we had R&R. And I went over to Bangkok with the American planes and that going through and to, for my R&R. And in the R&C we used to go

14:30 down to Penang with the Australian Air Force that used to go down to Butterworth. And they'd be taking planes down, coming back to Australia from Vietnam and that, they'd go through Butterworth. Well we used to go down in one of those planes for our R&C and we stayed at the Runnymede Hotel, it was quite interesting going back there

15:00 because I'd, that's where we lived when we were in, at the Australian hostel when I served in Malaya and the same old trishaw man was outside the gate. And he recognised me too, what's more. And I went into some of the shops around Penang there and they said, "Hello, what are you doing back here?" Unbelievable the people you met

15:30 amongst the locals who still remembered you.

**What happened, how did you relax in Bangkok?**

I stayed at a hotel there and there was a Thai who did the admin course with me at the College of Nursing a few years before and her husband was a captain in the Thai navy

16:00 I think it was. And you know, she was very good. Took me out to their officer's club I suppose it was. Had lunch and she showed me around Bangkok and I, we weren't allowed outside Bangkok while we were there except we could go up to the River Kwai at the, at the POW, the bridge on the River Kwai. We'd

16:30 go up there. So I had an outing up there, I went up by bus and we had a good look at the whole area there, down amongst the caves where perhaps the prisoners might have escaped and stayed. It was

interesting and we saw the cemetery there on the way up and war grave

17:00 cemetery and of course the Thais look after it beautifully. And there was bougainvillea all around the cemetery and it was out. Beautiful, the whole spot. And of course we were able to get off the bus and look around the graves. And I found the graves of lots of boys I used to know from here and everywhere.

**How did that feel when you**

17:30 **see the gravestones of those boys you knew from here, there and everywhere?**

It makes you feel really sad I think and to think that their lives ended so tragically there. Particularly those boys that were in Timor, they didn't have much of a chance of fighting. They were more or less taken prisoners, soon as they arrived, a lot of them. So

18:00 it was interesting when I was, when we had our memorial, the nurses' memorial dedicated over in Canberra. Have you seen that one? It's a beautiful memorial, it's glass and you should see it, it's different to all the other memorials. Concrete and stone and what have you, it's beautiful with a lot of the history of army nursing on it.

18:30 And while I was over there we had a big dinner. We took over some football club I think. We were in every room everywhere, so many nurses from all round Australia. It was a great reunion and Des Jackson and his wife was there. His wife was in the army during the war but she never got overseas because she wasn't twenty-five when she joined,

19:00 she was only finished her training and joined up and you couldn't go overseas until you were twenty-five in those days. Which perhaps might have been a good idea. I used to think when I saw those youngsters in Vietnam and anyway because I was twenty-six I suppose when I went to Korea. But these

19:30 and Des, and there was this sister, a group of Second World War sisters sitting there and they'd been in Singapore and they were evacuated on this ship. It was one that got through and they were going past Java I think it was and they saw these Aussie boys being offloaded of a ship as they went past and they waved to those boys

20:00 as they were going, this girl was telling this story, and Des Jackson was sitting there and he said, "You know what? I was one of those boys." All these years later, you know. Small world isn't it? Yeah, because he was taken prisoner.

**When you saw those gravestones and all those boy's names, do you remember them all?**

I don't, you know,

20:30 I could recall the names as I went through. We couldn't delay too long because the bus only had a certain time to stay there. But I found where the Tasmanian group was, there seemed to be a lot of them together. But there were Indians there I think if I remember correctly and British. There were some British ones too. And

21:00 it was quite a, just feeling a bit melancholy I suppose but it was good to see them. When I was going up to Japan, I stopped at Lam...,

21:30 we stayed overnight at Labuan [Borneo] on the way up. We were on a DC4 Skymaster when we flew up there. It was a troop plane, Qantas. And we stayed overnight at Labuan and when we arrived I asked to see the cemetery there and they found somebody to run me over

22:00 to the cemetery, it wasn't very far from the airport but unfortunately the, pardon me, tropical storm started coming over so the driver frantically chased after me to get back into the bus and get back home I didn't, I wasn't able to ever able to

22:30 have as good a look as I might've like to up there. And I saw the war graves up in Yokohama in Japan. They're all beautifully looked after.

**Where were you stationed in Vietnam, in the hospital or mobile unit or...?**

No, at the hospital, it was on the, sitting on the sand dunes of the South China Sea

23:00 and it was there in Vung Tau and of course the, because of all the sand you see there was all this metal, heavy metal spread all around the sand. It was really, probably dealing with the problem of sand but

23:30 when I went up there the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] said to me, he said "If we ever get attacked with mortar fire or something like that, wrap your mattress around your bed and get your bed and get underneath it. Around yourself and get underneath it, around the bed." And I sort of stopped and thought well, "Well RSM," I said, "I wouldn't have much chance doing that, you obviously haven't seen my bed. It's about six inches

24:00 off the ground and it's got an inner spring mattress on it." But anyway one morning the B52s were raiding the (UNCLEAR) across the water from us and apparently lots of people had been told about this raid was going on but they didn't tell the sisters and they didn't tell me. We might have been prepared

24:30 for it. But I used to get up early in the morning and have my shower before everybody else and get back on the bed and I'd just back from the shower and I started to hear this rumble and it was, and it was getting louder and louder and louder and I couldn't work out what it was.

25:00 And I thought, "What is it?" so I thought of what the RSM had said to me so I grabbed my pillows and got under the desk that was in my room and I sat there for a few minutes and I thought, "It's getting louder and louder, I wonder what it is?" I didn't know if we were having an earthquake or what we were having. And so I peered around the door of the hut and I found three other sisters doing

25:30 the same thing. "What is it?" We didn't have a clue, but eventually it disappeared, all this, rumbles and what have you and noise and anyway, I learnt at breakfast that the Americans were bombing the Long Hais from the B52s. I thought, "Thank goodness they dropped it on the Long Hais and didn't drop it on us."

26:00 Because of the noise and the percussion I suppose that'd be there. You know the earth, you know, I thought we were being attacked or something. I didn't know what. And anyway as I went down the commander from RSG [Reserve Staff Group] was there and he said to us, he said to me as I was walking past, he said, "Were you disturbed this morning?" And I said, "We had no idea what was happening. We thought

26:30 we were being invaded." And went on my way and I heard him say to the CO, "Didn't you tell matron?" We hadn't been told, everybody else in the place had been told it was going to happen when they got word of it, but they didn't tell us.

**Did you ever come under attack?**

No not in Vietnam at all, not at all really. It was fortunate.

27:00 Then they had a tidal wave scare just before I went up to Vung Tau there. They had to evacuate the hospital because it was down on the lower parts and they had to evacuate the hospital onto the higher sand. And the theatre sister was there and the stories she tells about that, the fun they had. They had this patient on extensions and that on the fracture bed there and they had to put

27:30 him on the back of a truck and took him up to the top of the hill. And then one of the orderlies was busy burning off the toilets or something and he put too much something into it and he blew the whole thing up. Toilet seats were going in all directions.

28:00 So it had its moments.

**You said earlier that the helicopters weren't really recognised or came into their own until Vietnam. Can you explain that a bit further and why they were so important in Vietnam compared to Korea?**

Well they were important to

28:30 the recovery of the casualties there in Vietnam because the patients were treated very quickly, sometimes in ten minutes or so of being wounded, very quick evacuation to 1 Aust [Australian] Field [Hospital]. Consequently we had very little, we only, we didn't have any deaths while I was there I don't think, from people coming to our hospital, because of that quick

29:00 evacuation. You know they'd had their first aid in the field while they were waiting for the chopper to come in and pick them out and of course at night time it was, you know, sometimes they had to penetrate the jungle to get them out and things like that. But it really made the world of difference to the care, their ongoing care too to get them so

29:30 quickly to the point of treatment.

**Did you just say that you didn't have any deaths or...?**

Not in the hospital.

**Not in the hospital.**

Somebody might have died on the way in or something but actually in the hospital. And I suppose some really serious ones we'd sent onto Saigon

30:00 to the field hospital up there to specialist areas, like the renal units and things like that. Of course the odd ones that died up there.

**Do you find that amazing that no one died in your hospital from the helicopter?**

Well not while I was there.

**That's a fair effort on your part and all the doctors and nurses.**

Yes, the care was excellent there. Couldn't have been better.

- 30:30 I remember when we had a very sick patient there once and the physician there, it was a medical case and the physician was very concerned about him and didn't think he'd survive. His blood count had dropped down to, his white cell count dropped down to zero and it was the nursing care that kept that fella going and he, and
- 31:00 he recovered to go back to Australia on medivac. But he spent a couple of weeks or more with us and I used to see the physician over the breakfast, Weeties, you know, and I'd say to him, "He's going to recover I know." Because I had that feeling about him, I thought he was going to get better and his white cell count was going down, down, down all the time and I used to run around to pathology
- 31:30 and sit on the doorstep and wait for the results every morning. But eventually one day it started to go up again. But I had two nursing officers looking after him. Everything was autoclaved that went into him, the bedding, sheets and that, course you didn't need blankets up there, the sheets and the pillows and everything was autoclaved and he was fed intravenously and the nurses gowned up
- 32:00 as they were in the operating theatre and the doctor, when he went in, used to do that and I used to see, visit him through the window, wave to him. Keep him com... and so eventually he did make a recovery and sent him down to Butterworth and still white cell dropped down a bit while he was there but they built it up again and got him off back
- 32:30 to Australia. Had a very nice letter from his wife afterwards thanking us for looking after him. And the physician wrote it up in the Australian Medical Journal that if it hadn't been for the Australian and the New Zealand nursing services in Vung Tau there, some patients would've died. The nursing care was excellent.
- 33:00 So that was a good reference for us.

**When the soldiers come in injured on the helicopters and so on, from battle, they're not only injured physically but mentally as well. How do you deal with all that?**

With our TLC [Tender Loving Care] I suppose. Because when they do come in from the battlefield like that,

- 33:30 they've usually got their grenades and their rifles and everything with them and so, and of course what happened when they landed at the Vampire [Helipad] the Q staff were there to grab their grenades and their weapons and everything like that as they came down path towards the triage. They didn't delay them up at the chopper, they just took it off them as they came down, walked down
- 34:00 the path there. And they went straight into the triage and their clothes were all immediately cut off them and they were fully examined for injuries and what have you, immediately blood pressure and everything else taken. Somebody doing that, somebody else doing anything else, he's already had his blood type from his tags and
- 34:30 you know and organise those sorts of things as well. Be given his injections of penicillin and tetanus, what have you, and boosters and then even if there was half a dozen or so with triage they'd be probed as to who went to the theatre first.

**With them taking off all weapons,**

- 35:00 **was that standard practice even at MASH units and so on or was it only...?**

I should imagine it would be. Because our hospitals we were never allowed, weapons were never allowed into a hospital ward when I first joined the army. And that was following World War 11 because normally as they were evacuated during the Second World War, they

- 35:30 were, the weapons would've been taken off them further back up the line, field ambulance or somewhere and by the time they got down to the hospital they didn't have their weapons with them. And the, so it used to happen, like the outpatients where they came in another entrance off the road or somewhere they
- 36:00 were, they'd still have their weapon on them. And of course visitors coming through had weapons at that point too as they came into the hospital. Sometimes the officers when they came in if they landed on the chopper they'd leave their pistols with, in the sister's office, the ward when they went up there because the orderlies carried too and they
- 36:30 had to carry them on duty. And we had a locked cupboard where they put their weapons when they came on duty. Because when the sisters went over to Rwanda they carried weapons there and they'd go on duty with an SLR [Self-Loading Rifle] on their shoulder, carrying an SLR. So I presume they had a similar arrangement there where they put their weapon when they went
- 37:00 to the ward. But that was all after my time. But so it's, I always remember this very sick case we had the fellow still came, General Hay came down from Saigon and he visited, put him in a gown and he went in to see him. And
- 37:30 the general came out and he said to me, "Well matron, I believe the medical profession's given up but

the nursing profession haven't." I said, "That's right sir." I said, "He'll go back to Australia." And they all used to say to me, "I wish I had your faith."

**At this stage in Vietnam what was your rank?**

I was a major then,

38:00 as matron of the hospital.

**Was that rare for a woman to be a major and...?**

Well there was only limited, there would've been more majors around Australia in the RAAF corps, the admin areas, clerical areas and the admin areas and that but they wouldn't attain major rank there in various positions and they used to work in different corps.

38:30 But when I became matron-in-chief or director of the corps, I started up non-corps positions for nurses, for army nurses. Because I realised they had the training and they could do certain positions of employment within the system, like

39:00 pharmaceutical area and ordnance and things like that, which made life more interesting for them and they felt more part of the system and plus the rest of the army got to know the nursing officers, not only just as a hospital nurse but they could work in other areas as well. Because when I first joined the army in '51, the army didn't have a

39:30 community services organisation within their army. And really the nursing corps that were quite a lot of it because if the diggers had any problems they always came down to the hospital and spoke to the sister on duty to try and solve their problems. And they had to help them by giving them the advice as to what to do and who to go and see in their unit

40:00 and the sister would contact the unit and let them know about this digger with his problems. And so, and with the help of the chaplain, we used to work with the chaplains too on that, and together that's how it was done in those days. Consequently there was a wonderful respect and relationship developed between the nursing officers and the

40:30 diggers over the years which began with the Boer War. And they started this, sort of caring about and so it's gone on over the years.

**Right Nell we'll have to stop there.**

41:00 **End of tape**

## Tape 7

00:32 **We're recording now so get into gear. When you were in Vietnam, why did you need an escort for, if you went shopping?**

That was Korea.

**Not in Vietnam?**

Not in Vietnam, no.

01:00 Because they didn't think it was safe I suppose for nurses to be running loose in Seoul.

**You had the advantage of serving in three different theatres of war. Can you tell us what the differences in your role was in the jobs you'd do in Malaya, Vietnam, Korea.**

To start with Japan and Korea, I went up there as raw as far as battle nursing was concerned

01:30 and spent, and my nursing duties were as a ward sister and in Japan we had a sister who was in charge of the ward who was an Australian, she'd been up there in Japan for some years because she'd been working with the families when the families were up there.

02:00 They'd gone home when the Korean war had broken out and she'd stayed on to continue with the Australian Army and then we had, so I just had the ward sister duties which was straight out nursing care and then in Korea because it was still a ward duty situation, no charts possession

02:30 or anything like that but just senior sister. Although usually they called the captains the senior sisters but in the Australian Army there were so few vacancies within the corps for promotion that we often found ourselves doing senior sister's duties as a lieutenant. For instance when I was, just before I came home from Japan

03:00 I was made the junior night super of the British Commonwealth General Hospital, as they must have

been short of senior sisters to give it to me, probably as a lieutenant. But I quite enjoyed that. It was a sort of a supervisory role making sure the hospital was functioning all right and

03:30 so, what was exactly your question?

**About the similarities, the differences...**

Oh that's right. So we, then when I got to Malaya, because Malaya was a totally different situation again to Korea, and because the battalions would be out fighting in the jungles chasing the Communists out.

04:00 There were a few casualties but not that many from Malaya really, but of course not being in direct contact with the soldiers as I was on the families' board for the first twelve months, I was out of touch of the actual service side of it. I was too busy looking after their families and the, and I became a sister in charge of the ward there as I was a captain when I went up to Malaya.

04:30 And then, and Vietnam, I was the matron of the hospital which was an administrative position that I sort of worked as because of the lack of registered nurses within the hospital roster I used to spend what time I could around in the wards

05:00 assisting in the wards in any nursing duties and when I was on night duty, when I was on day duty and the dust offs came in at night, I used to get up and go over to the, go over to the triage and look after that and if I needed any extra help there, if the night sister had a few moments to spare and wasn't busy she used

05:30 to come down to give a hand if it was a busy time. Otherwise I used to get one of the nursing officers from the quarters to come down and assist but that rarely happened. Because I used to feel that they needed their rest and if I was coping there it wasn't that necessary really to drag them out of bed.

06:00 And so, and I felt that during the day if I got weary I could put my head down in the office for five minutes and forget everything. But in the, but otherwise I would just kept going the day and night. And of course it didn't happen that often where I had to do it too often.

**Now with the different theatres**

06:30 **there would've been different types of weapons used and...?**

Yes well the weapons got bigger and better or more powerful as the time went on, science, technology went on.

**Well can you tell us about the differences say for instance the weapons used in and the types of injuries you'd treat, say in Korea and Malaya. What were the differences between the two?**

Well of course in Malaya, in Vietnam, well as far as

07:00 Malaya is concerned, as I didn't work on any surgical wards I didn't really actually see but they were just the ones I heard the other sisters talking about, you know, they'd be just gun shot wounds and as they used to call them but when the, from rifles and that, but in Korea they used to get,

07:30 there'd be the occasional mine casualties and as I said before we got, we had the dreadful burns but also there were chest wounds from gun shot wounds to the chest and any other part of the body really and sometimes there was a lorry, truck driver, his truck turned over and he lost his leg

08:00 but it was taken off right at the hip and he was in with us for a long time, he was a Kiwi. But he recovered. But the, and you get the accidental, but the accidents sometimes from vehicles and that and of course when we, and then in Malaya and Vietnam again of

08:30 course there was the introduction of the changes of the rifles and things that went on and the Strom gun. The wounds got bigger along with the explosive charge and the, and we used to get, in Vietnam we went through a stage there where we had a lot of mine, injuries from mines.

09:00 The APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] would go over a mine and the whole group would be would get blown up. But the workshops people there did a magnificent job. They developed a steel plate that was put in the base of the APCs, the armoured personnel carriers, and consequently we got less casualties as a

09:30 result of that from the mines. But if anybody trod on a mine or something like that, of course then you had, that was disastrous results because we're, you know, there were lots of boys that lost limbs and not just one limb, sometimes two. One casualty I saw, he'd lost all four limbs.

10:00 And of course these days, with the, so the SLRs produced nastier wounds, larger wounds than the ordinary .303s they used to use in the older days.

**Well what were the differences between the**

10:30 **.303 wounds and the SLRs? In what terms?**

There'd be greater, the body would be shattered more. And it'd be a greater expanse of the body like,

the abdomen or something and consequently there'd be quite seriously wounded people from those weapons.

**What was your view of politics from all these three wars? They**

11:00 **were all fought against communist forces, how did you see communism at the time in each of the wars?**

Well they were the enemy. And that was it, you know, we didn't, you don't worry about the politics of it, you just get on with the job you've gone to do. You'd be getting all mixed up if you went and

11:30 started studying the politics of it all I think. I went to a lecture once, before, not long before I went up to Vietnam about the whole situation up there between the north and the south and that. It explained a lot of things about the development of the war and of course over the years,

12:00 you know, when the French were there and the, it's well I don't know really how I'd describe it, but it's something that the, I don't think I can talk much about it from what I can remember. But it was,

12:30 as I say we don't, you know, we don't think about the politics while you're up there doing a job.

**You said in one of your conversations before with a Vietnamese woman, she was talking about the Japanese, what sort of thing did she say about the Japanese for instance?**

Well she wasn't very happy about them because she said they were cruel people, which apparently they

13:00 were those days when they went down through Indochina there.

**Did she tell you what they did?**

No she didn't really go into any great detail about what they did except the harsh treatment they gave the women, treated them as coolies?

**Did any of the Vietnamese talk about the French occupation.**

I never heard them speak about that at all. I had a neighbour here that was in the

13:30 French Foreign Legion in Vietnam. He came from Alsace-Lorraine or somewhere over in that part of the world. I think he was living there actually but then the, but I think the Nazis annihilated all his family. He was the only survivor I think at one stage. Don't know whether he was Jewish.

14:00 But he was wounded in Vietnam, got shot through the scalp. Fortunately didn't damage his brain too much.

**In Vietnam can you just validate for me what**

14:30 **time span you spent there, from what year to what year.**

Vietnam was, I was there for twelve months, '69, '70.

**Bien Hoa was known to be fairly, that area was quite dangerous though wasn't it? There was quite a lot of insurgent activity around there.**

Yes there was activity around there but the Phuoc Tui province where the Australians were, they'd more or less cleared

15:00 it, out the trouble spots there, while they were there. But there were still areas around Vietnam that used to be troublesome.

**Have you ever seen any battles take place, any skirmishes, or gun fights?**

15:30 No, not really. The only thing the results of the bombing and things. I once flew over the jungles in there in Vietnam with the chopper and it was unbelievable the holes the B52s make in the jungle there. Huge great

16:00 craters. I wouldn't have been liked to have been underneath them. But of course the Vietnamese were, the Viet Cong were of course living underground a lot of it. They had a hospital there which the 6th Battalion found and they, I went up to the field ambulance up there at Nui Dat and they had up there

16:30 the, there were some of the Viet Cong there who'd been taken prisoner from the hospital, they were the patients in the hospital. And they were there in the field ambulance getting, they just had minor wounds. And they had the, then I saw the surgical equipment, some of the surgical equipment

17:00 and drugs and things that they got from out of the hospital and these what looked like the old kerosene can. They were full of these drugs from all round the world, by their labels and they carried them in down the trail, you know, on their backs down underground there, put them into their hospitals underground and the surgical

17:30 instruments were excellent looking instruments. Good quality. It's what amazed me you know how little

nursing had developed in Vietnam, because that was one of the roles of the civilian teams, to teach them to, not to help them (UNCLEAR), but

18:00 they certainly needed a lot of help in that area.

**Did you understand the controversy at home, in the home front about Vietnam at the time?**

Well we used to hear about it, which I felt very sad about really because I don't think it helped those boys at all.

18:30 And up there, you know, you never heard the difference between the National Service or regular army or anything they were all soldiers doing the one job.

**Were you in agreement with conscription, National Service?**

19:00 Well of course I think National Service was started for another reason, not for Vietnam originally. But I'm afraid I'm not one to, in a position to discuss any of it really. I think that's how most armies around the world have their National Service to, for their manpower.

19:30 So hopefully we're going past that stage, where they need all that manpower for armies.

**Do you think that, well at the time did you think that it was necessary for Australia to fight in Vietnam?**

Well at that stage I thought so, but, you know I really don't

20:00 you know, like to discuss it much further really because it's a very complex question really. There's lots of reasons why and lots of reasons against it.

**Well because it's such a controversial conflict, that's why I'm asking you the question,**

20:30 **I mean, in hindsight I suppose now...**

You can all very well just turn back and say now that we shouldn't have been there, that sort of thing, but that's all very well because things were happening then at that stage when they made the decisions that they didn't like what was happening. And it was spreading down the, getting too close to home.

21:00 **Do you, having looked back now, having so many years to think about Vietnam, has your views changed on it?**

Well I don't think that much about it to that extent.

**Have any of your views changed in that regard to Australia's commitment...?**

Not really at this stage but I was sent up there to do a job and I did the job and whether I should've been there or shouldn't have been

21:30 there, you know, or whether we should've been there or we shouldn't have been there is something I think for more expert person than me to comment upon.

**The Vietnam moratorium was going on, the peace movement. How were they seen by other nurses serving in Vietnam, your colleagues?**

22:00 **The anti-war movement.**

Well we never talked about it really. We had much, other things on our mind I suppose. We were too busy looking after what was up there and the, and I don't know whether that influenced any of the nursing officers while we were up there, I

22:30 don't think it did. They went there to do a job just the same as I did and they did it to the best of their ability. And whether we should've been there or shouldn't have been there was the, was not our problem at that stage.

23:00 Because I know a lot of the boys that weren't called up for National Service wanted to be called up but they weren't. Their numbers didn't come out of the barrel. But so whether that's, whether there are better ways of doing, of selecting National Service

23:30 is another thing which was a bit grim, you know, rolling it out of the barrel. If your number came up, that was it.

24:00 So I'm afraid I'm, I don't think about that situation.

**What about Malaya and Korea. In**

24:30 **the eyes of your colleagues and yourself, was it seen as a just war at the time?**

Ooh, I think so, yeah. Because the South Koreans were in trouble and the, and of course the terrorists,

25:00 the CTs [Communist Terrorists] as we called them, we were very much alive in Malaya and I think there were probably pockets of them around when we were there. Because when I first went over there they had their black areas where we weren't allowed to carry food and things like that with us and in the,

25:30 in the, and seemed to be, of course when they ran the CTs out of Malaya I suppose they ran over the borders to Cambodia and all those other places. I suppose they

26:00 built up in that area and then. But of course some dreadful things used to happen there in Malaya of course in the early days when the British were there and before the Australians went up there, how they used to raid those planter, plantations, rubber plantations and that, the homes and that of the planters.

26:30 And the matron of the Taiping General Hospital was a Western Australian nurse who worked with a group of nurses in Malaya there and she told me some extraordinary things about what used to happen when she was there. They,

27:00 used to go out into the aboriginal areas looking after the Malaysians and that and they'd complain about all sorts of illnesses and sore things and limbs and this and that and the sisters knew that they, that there was nothing wrong with them. But they also know that if they didn't give them a

27:30 bandage or a dressing or something, that night when the CTs came back to the village they'd cut their throats. So they were desperate for something and that's how the CTs got a lot of their medical supplies, that way. And they used to

28:00 protect those sisters because the, they said they'd be driving along the road, the highway, and they'd come across a bus on fire and dead people lying around everywhere and the CTs there with their rifles and they'd decide whether they, whether to put their foot down and keep going or what they'd do. And anyway, the

28:30 soldiers would pop around from behind the bus and just wave them on. They knew their cars and that that was one of their sources of supplies. And of course Ally said when they came back from work at the end of the day they had to report into the local police station. She said one night she'd had a big day

29:00 and she was so tired she forgot to report to the police station and they were all out searching for her that night. So she was in trouble. But of course when the story of the bus, the particular sister that was driving it was an English woman and she always wore a veil, a nurse's veil wherever she went and she had it on this day

29:30 and she said when she put her foot down after she left the bus and got to Ipoh and she went to the police station there and told them what she'd seen, she was in a collapsed state by the time she got there. But they'd be out visiting perhaps the planter's plantation and that and these raids would come on the properties while they were there and they'd hide under the beds and everything, the

30:00 men would be around with their rifles trying to fend off these CTs, you know, it must have been a dreadful time they were living in up there then. So they were trying to take over the country I suppose. Then we got to Vietnam and there were Viet Cong. I used to feel sorry for a lot of those

30:30 Viet Cong because they'd been probably pushed into the situation and of course when we, they came in as patients, of course they'd been living in these underground for so long and the dirt had been ingrained to their skin and no matter how much you washed them you never got them clean.

31:00 **Could you speak Vietnamese?**

No, I didn't pick any up, not much at all. I didn't, I don't remember it like I remember the odd Japanese words.

**Did you at any time... so you did treat some Viet Cong in Vietnam?**

Yes they were in, they used to come in, because after the American

31:30 hospital left, they used to come in to us of course when they were wounded in that area. And the intelligence people interrogated them but we used to have to in the ward, at the end of the ward, and a guard used to sit there, an armed guard sat there all the time. Not only stopping him from escaping I suppose but also protecting

32:00 them from the rest of the Vietnamese. But they were, the North Vietnamese army, they were a bit educated soldier. And you could tell they were, they knew what was going on,

32:30 but then they spoke the English. I think they knew and understood more than they would let on. Because that's always an easy way out of course, "No speaka da English." However,

33:00 as far as nursing's concerned, a POW or whatever they are, you treat them. And the same way you'd expect your own soldiers to be treated in different, in the same circumstances.

**What about the ARVN troops, what sort of reputation did they have?**

We didn't see that much of them, as nurses we

33:30 didn't see that much of them. And of course they, and you know, I wouldn't know what training they had or anything else.

**Where there no, I mean, I understand it was quite a politicised army.**

Well it probably was, like all things in that part of the world.

**You treated them though as well.**

34:00 We didn't treat the ARVN.

**At any time?**

No.

**What about civilians?**

No we didn't normally treat civilians, we had once a civilian there who was the, I don't know whether she was the sister or something of the interpreter of the hospital.

34:30 But she was desperately ill and he picked her up out of the hospital and brought her into us, which caused a bit of a problem. But normally we didn't treat Vietnamese civilians.

**Was there any particular time in Vietnam where you had to treat a lot casualties from the battlefield?**

35:00 Well it depended what incidents were going on and one of the battalions there they went through a stage where they had quite a number of casualties and...

**Do you know which battalion that was?**

It was 5 Battalion and they seemed to have quite a number coming

35:30 through, but they were in a particular spot at a particular time and so that's how it worked out. And I suppose the same with any, in Long Tan when the 6th Battalion met that stoush and the Viet Cong attacked them, or they ran into the ambush or something.

36:00 But they were, they had a lot of casualties that particular night. It was a nasty situation but the, but of course I don't think they had the, we didn't have the number of casualties of course that,

36:30 of wounded that came through Korea I suppose, when you think of it in that way, but of course we didn't have the number of troops up there anyway. They were all Commonwealth troops, you know, and there were a lot of casualties. There were some hardened bitter fighting there and plus the environment, the cold winter and then the summer was

37:00 terrible too, it was hot and dusty and filthy. Extremes I suppose but, like Japan's climate.

**With**

37:30 **your military career, your ranking, I'm curious to know whether you found inspiration in women joining the forces initially from outside nursing. But like, say for instance the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service], the WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] and WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service], were they, well, a part of the icons, iconic reasons why you would've joined up**

38:00 **the nursing service and the military?**

Oh I don't know. Army nursing has been round a hundred years.

**Did you feel a part of the movement though, the women's movement?**

No. Nursing's been around for too long.

**Well at that time there weren't many women who were colonels. Well I mean eventually**

38:30 **it began...**

No but the, there's, you see after the war they re-formed the AWAS into the WRAC corps and the, and of course the air force and the navy had their women services as part of their regular forces. And there was really a continuation of

39:00 the what was recognised and what was done in the World War 11, what they could do.

**Can you please tell us what you thought about the feminist movement in the '50s and '60s?**

Well I never worried about the feminist movement. It caused a lot of problems in many ways and...

**Such as?**

You know,

39:30 I don't, you know, I couldn't see how, it was really more justice to me, it was more justice than equality.

**You didn't agree with what they were protesting about?**

Well they went to extremes sometimes didn't they, to get their point over but perhaps

40:00 sometimes they have to. But I wouldn't call myself a feminist.

**Did you agree with some of their principles?**

Any justice that they were after, yes, certainly. Because there are a lot of, you know, even in the army at that stage because the sisters had never,

40:30 you know they couldn't get a housing loan or things like that because they were single. That was the attitude. And there was such disparity in pay and that was, had always existed for the nursing services. And every matron-in-chief tried to do something about it, more

41:00 just pay for nurses. They weren't asking for equal pay, they were asking for a just pay and the, and every matron-in-chief in the various stages they were asked to join the other women in their equal pay claims and things and of course in the end course we got males

41:30 nurses, so we... and of course when the first male nurse was appointed the matron-in-chief then said to the authorities, they rang her up and said did she want a male nurse and she said, "Yes and he gets the same pay as we do." So they fixed that up. They made her pay for nursing, listed pay list, state scale for...

## Tape 8

00:31 **Off we go. Last one, Nell. Can you describe the relationships between patients and nurses?**

Well.

01:00 The nurse, I don't know how I can answer that. A nurse is part of our, is the caring and the compassion that

01:30 you feel for individuals no matter who they are or what age or whatever and as we go about our caring it's our concern for an individual and his recovery back to normal

02:00 or, can't think of the word I need, that they might... when you care for a patient and care about them you look at them as a holistic approach and you,

02:30 and as to, you look at their, and of course it might be that their living standard or whatever that might, it's their surroundings and the whole thing might affect the health of an individual. And their employment and their

03:00 total adjustment to their, to life as to how they are managing it and coping with it.

**Did you know nurses who fell in love with their patients or some...?**

I've known some nurses who eventually married their former patients.

**Really?**

Not so much army nurses, but even when I, as a civilian nurse.

03:30 **Was that common or...?**

No it wasn't that common. I suppose in early days it wasn't common because once you're married you had to leave your profession. However those days have changed.

**Can you understand how that happens, that a nurse and a patient would fall in love?**

04:00 Well I suppose if Mr Right comes along, that's it, isn't it?

**These were successful marriages were they?**

Yes, yes, they were lifetime marriages.

**And this didn't happen so much in war time, in war battles and so on.**

04:30 No. Well of course usually when their caring for their patients you care for them that you're up, of course it's interesting that army nurses I think the boys tend to look upon them as reminding of their

womenfolk back

- 05:00 home and they, and that sort of came home to me once in Vietnam when I was in the triage one night and the chaplain was there because we used to work very closely with the chaplains, particularly on that occasion and they were very useful around in the, helping to look after the
- 05:30 patients. Not only were they looking after their spirituality but they keep a check on drips and all sorts of things and if they notice something going on they give you a call. And then I came across one padre that was pretty good at sponging patients and I said, "Where did you learn that?" and he said, "I was an orderly in the Second World War."
- 06:00 So they, so anyway this particular night this chap at, had a leg hanging off and he was waiting to go to the theatre. He was the last one to go in. And he was having a blood transfusion, he had a tourniquet on which had to be released every
- 06:30 ten minutes or so which one of the doctors came out and released the tourniquet and I checked the blood pressure and the padre was there saying his prayers and of course he'd let the blood flow through which was what was needed to help preserve what was left of the leg. And of course I could see that his pulse was
- 07:00 getting weaker and weaker and we could recognise... And I'd say, "Stop it, stop it. A little bit more." He nearly hadn't got a blood pressure and anyway so he, anyway and we went through several stages of that during the night while we were waiting to go to the theatre and I was over busy cleaning up the,
- 07:30 the shelves and the trolleys and things for the, ready for the next round and the padre called me over and he said, he said, "Matron, you'll have to come over and hear this." So I went over there and I said, "What's the problem, Lenny?" And he hesitated you see and the chap had said to him,
- 08:00 "Now you tell matron what you've just said to me." And then he said, well he said, "I think it's wonderful having you here." And I said, "And you're looking at a grey-headed old lady and you say that." And I was thinking, "He's probably thinking of his mother," or your grandmother or somebody. And
- 08:30 I said, "Are you sure you're not looking at that?" because the night sister had come over to help me and she was mopping the floors and I said, "Are you sure you're not looking at that blonde down there?" He said, "No," he said, "On occasions like this we need somebody like you." So I thought that was a wonderful comment for him. And I said, "Well thank you Lenny. That's the nicest thing that's ever been said to me."
- 09:00 **Did you see many cheeky soldiers trying to chat up your nurses in there?**
- Oh, they were always around of course. And because we used to chuckle, they'd come in on the stretcher and they'd open their eyes and say, "Round eyes." I suppose they'd seen so many slant eyes around.
- 09:30 **How many, how did the nurses handle that when the soldiers were trying to get a bit frisky with them and so on?**
- Oh they could always seem to manage them. Call them to order, yeah. Oh yes, just make a joke of it and get them along and away they'd go.
- 10:00 **Was it commonplace?**
- No not really because it always had its serious moments but it had its humorous moments too and I remember going around the ward and patients were getting ready for the medivac the next day or something and there was this sergeant who didn't have any teeth and I said, "Where are your teeth?" and he said, "They were thrown out." And I said, "What do
- 10:30 you mean?" He said, "I don't need them," he said, "I don't want me teeth, they were no good anyway." And I said, "You're going home tomorrow and you can't go home without teeth." So I went out and I said to the sister, I said, "What's happened to the sergeant's teeth?" And she looked all embarrassed, she said, "I must've thrown them out because I can't find them." She said, "He had a heap of rubbish
- 11:00 around his locker and I gathered everything up and I must've gathered his teeth up too." So I thought, "Well." So I went over to the dental department and said to the dentist, "How quickly can you whip up a set of teeth because we've got a sergeant going on medivac and," I said, "he can't go home without his teeth, he's lost his." So he came, went over to the ward and made him a set of teeth to go home in. Anyhow,
- 11:30 whether he was able to use them better than he could the previous ones or what and he went home with teeth anyway.
- Could you describe how doctors and nurses work together?**
- Well they work together as a team really. We both have our individual roles complementing each other. And that's how it should always be,

12:00 as a team. It's the best way to get results.

**Is that the same in a hospital or in a war hospital?**

Same as...

**Same as in peace time as in war.**

Oh yes in the peace time hospitals too.

**How close do those relationships**

12:30 **get with the doctors?**

Well it's just an individual matter I think, but they mix socially afterwards in the unit and that, and some of the doctors of course already got their own families

13:00 and it's, so it's a matter of an individual situation for them to deal with.

**They become good friends for life or...?**

Well there were ones that you do, you know, I find that a lot of the doctors around are still, we still remember each other, you know,

13:30 over the years.

**Do you think the work of the nurses in war time was fully appreciated?**

Oh yes I think so. Certainly used to be by the diggers. And of course because there are, it was this,

14:00 I was reading in the paper there that I'd written about for the college thing. It was, title of their meeting was called 'Compassion in War' and I had to, and I was asked to write my experiences in war in army nursing.

14:30 And of course, but I followed on the tradition that had been started many years ago, hundred years ago really at the Boer War and of course developed further in the Second World War, in the First World War and I know the World War 1 diggers had a great respect for their nurses and

15:00 on rare occasions Dad used to talk about the nurses that looked after him and when he was able to get up on his feet they taught him to take temperatures and he used to take the temperatures for them and do all sorts of things. But, whoops... it was an interesting time, it took me a long time to write it because I never really sat down and thought much about my

15:30 service really and then Bullwinkel, you know Viv [Vivian] Bullwinkel? She was another speaker, she gave the oration at the Townsville church at the service and they asked her to do it and she refused to do it initially. But anyway she eventually said yes. Well they asked me and I, to do my paper for the conference

16:00 and I thought, "Oh dear, how am I going to do that?" and they said, "You've got twelve months to do it." But anyway I thought about it for six months. Started making rough notes at that stage and I eventually wrote it and re-wrote it and re-wrote it, trying to put this together and eventually

16:30 I went up to Mackay and it was to stay with my cousin while I was there and I still hadn't done final draft to be typed. And I thought, "Oh, I'll get it done up there." And so anyway, so I'd been doing so much I thought it needed checking out as far as English was concerned and

17:00 so my cousin read through it and she corrected the casual grammar in some of it and so, and her husband worked in a position where he had a typist and so they ran it off for me so I eventually breathed a sigh of relief and went up to, went up to Townsville but when I got up to Townsville I got a dreadful bronchitis. I could barely

17:30 speak. I managed to give the paper though and but it was very traumatic doing it really and it stirred up all sorts of memories and I said and Voom-voom we call her, arrived, you see, and she said to me that she had said no initially but anyway she weakened

18:00 and eventually did it for me. And I said, "Well I've had a dreadful time doing it." I said, "I've never written and screwed up so much paper in my life." And she said, "Well I was the same really." But anyway...

**What emotions did it stir up in you?**

Well I suppose it was the thoughts of all those casualties that sort of went through the system

18:30 while you were in those areas and that. But it was wonderful to, you know, see the ones that got back and they were still about even if they were with artificial limbs or on crutches or something. And there was one Vietnam vet he used to come down to Tasmania before he,

- 19:00 I think he had relatives down here, before he decided to come and live here in Oaklands and he used to knock on my door. The first time he came down he knocked on my door and he was passing through, to say hello. And I went out to the door and I saw this fellow standing there and I thought well he looks as though he might have artificial limbs and I thought Vietnam.
- 19:30 And then I said, "You were in Vietnam, weren't you?" and he said, "Yes." He was one of my patients that went through when I was there at Vung Tau that particular time and because he's living down here now with his wife and they've restored an old house up the road there and they're living there and he's wonderful what he does and he's got a
- 20:00 triple amputee. Got one artificial arm and two artificial legs and he's now become the, he's taken over from me as the president of the sub-branch.

**Was that the hardest thing you saw in Vietnam, for the guys who lost limbs to recover?**

Well yes you know, those boys that had such serious injuries

- 20:30 you know they went through a lot and of course then we got all the mine injuries as a result, those sort of injuries. But the, and you see them around the RSLs and that,
- 21:00 and the fellas, you know, it's like greeting old friends again and you catch up with them. And it's always good to see them.

**Were there many who didn't make it through and get on with their lives?**

Well there's some that don't and they find it hard to still cope

- 21:30 with it all and but the sub-branch here, when the Vietnam veterans came back, the sub-branch offered them membership for twelve months and welcome to the RSL which didn't happen in some places, which was not good.

**Back in**

- 22:00 **1970 when they were putting these limbs on, were they of any good quality or...?**

I think they've improved over the years and I think they're still improving them. But John seems to manage quite well. I suppose there's always a certain amount of discomfort in those situations.

**What do you remember most fondly**

- 22:30 **about Korea?**

It's all the friends you make during your junior service and I belong to the Tasmanian Korean Association and it's great to meet every month amongst those old diggers you know,

- 23:00 and chat about days gone by and what they're up to these days.

**Would you say there was a mateship amongst the nurses?**

Oh yes, you know, well even when we were training we lived in that nursing, nurses home where we'd developed a similar sort of relationship

- 23:30 with each other and we made friends that we never forget. And the same in the services because we have our nursing corps association where we meet from all round Australia, catch up with people.

**Do your fellow nurses around you and doctors and all them become a family unit**

- 24:00 **when you're at war?**

Yeah well you do really sort of develop that sort of relationship. Concerned about each other and what's happening.

- 24:30 But World War 1 nurses went through a lot. They suffered a great deal. I don't think people realised how much they did suffer and because they were serving in casualty caring stations that were tented establishments, a couple of aisles from the trenches.

- 25:00 Of course shells use to fall on them and they went through a lot of traumatic occasions and I mean one particular occasion when there was shells were dropping and when one of these sisters I remember reading how she picked herself up and she felt this leg and she lifted this to see it was somebody's foot lying across the

- 25:30 bed and I think she was lying somewhere round the, near the bed or something and she picked this leg up and thinking it was the, there was a body on the other end of it but it wasn't, it was the orderly's leg that she'd picked up, you know. And of course the sad part about it when those ladies came back from World War 1, they weren't even recognised by the DVA

- 26:00 here in Tasmania. They just burnt their documents and said they weren't there and if it wasn't for the

Red Cross and St John's Hospital where the matron was an ex-army person, and they followed a tradition over the years, it wasn't till the '50s that they got any care from the DVA. And of course a lot of them were dead by then. A lot of them left the profession

- 26:30 when they came back after all the traumas they'd been through in France and that and on Lemnos and they were on the hospital ships from Gallipoli and they suffered a lot and the matrons at the, at St John's Hospital over the years used to take them
- 27:00 in if they needed any nursing care. Because, and, one matron told me once she had a dreadful time trying to explain to the board why she had two extra patients. So they were, it was very sad really what happened. And yet they were wonderful people. I met some of them over the years in my
- 27:30 early nursing days and when I was in Sydney doing my midwifery there was a dear lady looking after the, out at Summer Hill there was an old house, Carol House there that was being, the army sisters used to do the, look the management of it and anyway
- 28:00 we went to this, this was this, where there was this World War 1 nurse and we went down to, took our washing down to the laundry to do our washing and we found this great heap of washing and ironing there, so we got stuck into it. And this seventy year old lady was so grateful and so she'd sit by the fire with us in the evening and chat to us
- 28:30 about her service in France. And World War 1 lady just when I was serving in the army in Sydney there, I was chatting to her once about medical evacuation and that, and she said to me, she said, "We were so envious of those World War 11 nurses." And I said, "Why?" and she said, "They had blood to give their patients,
- 29:00 and if we'd had blood, we would've saved a lot of lives." And I thought, "Well you know, times have changed haven't they?" And of course I thought well World War 1 I suppose they didn't even have, they barely had blood transfusions then. They wouldn't have had it. So the progress that's gone on in medical science and technology over the years even since when I first trained, when I trained,
- 29:30 you know up to present day, it's incredible. And how that's changed the face of nursing, really. Because they'd need to be better educated as well as to be able to work all these magic machines and things. But and I totally agree with that university education, but gone a bit haywire, when they complete it they should be doing a,
- 30:00 like a twelve month's internship in a hospital and learn the art of nursing. After, and apply the practise to the theory. And they'd have, they'd be doing nursing a kindness if they did that, but of course the government wouldn't do that initially when we asked for it. "They couldn't afford it," they said.
- 30:30 So that's rather sad, to see how that's, but you know they're struggling on, but they need a lot of help still. And particularly those students that come out of universities and thrown into the wards. It's not good for the patient or the nurse. But
- 31:00 I suppose it'll all sort out one day. Because there's been so much change in my life, both from a living, social and science and technology. We've got power, we've got radios, we've got TVs,
- 31:30 electric toasters and things and things, wind, washing machines. We didn't even have when I was growing up. So it's a very changed world that we live in to those times.

**Do you think it's a better world?**

In some aspects it is. Sometimes you wonder when you see all the unhappiness and the poverty and what have you around, whether it's, you know,

- 32:00 what's it doing, where have we gone wrong?

**When you're a nurse serving in war time, you're really seeing the worst that war has to offer, aren't you?**

Yes, I suppose I am.

**So saying that, what do you think about war now?**

Well I think the less wars we have, the better for the whole world

- 32:30 and society and I think they're going to have to learn to live without wars I think and solve their problems in other ways. Perhaps some get too fanatical in their beliefs or something, but we must learn to live together as we were all meant to.
- 33:00 **Do you think people appreciate how bad war is and the horrors of war like you're seeing?**

I think, well of course those that have never seen it have no idea what it's like really. But , I think lots of people realise, you know,

33:30 are asking, "Is war necessary?"

**Are you worried about the times we're living in now and what's happening at the moment?**

Well you wonder where it's all going to end and how it's going to end.

34:00 And of course the, you know, all faiths must learn to live together somehow. And recognise that we're as good as, that they're all as,

34:30 each to his own and let them live in peace.

**What goes through your mind when you see more young men being sent to places like Iraq and Afghanistan today and it's still going on?**

Yes well it doesn't seem to improve it, does it, as the years go on? But it's a,

35:00 tangled up in the cords, well you don't like to see young men going off to war really. It's, I suppose, growing up, you know, you don't think so much of the dangers and things associated when you go off to war but it's when you actually

35:30 see the results of it, it's not too pleasant. And human nature being what it is, at this stage they really haven't learnt to live together have they?

**Do you think the leaders of the world who send these young kids to war understand what you've seen,**

36:00 **the things like you've seen?**

I think some of them do, really, and I don't think they make the decisions lightly these days. Particularly in the Western world, you know, if they can keep some peacekeeping forces going, perhaps that might help the situation.

36:30 And start building to a better world. Certainly much better than having a, starting a war.

**What do you miss most about nursing now you've retired?**

Well I suppose what one misses I suppose

37:00 is the contact you have with so many different people, the patients. And they're all so different as individuals and different nationalities etc. It's

37:30 been, I've had a wonderful life really. A very full one and I've really loved it and sort of, I suppose I found my niche when I went nursing because caring seemed to be so

38:00 much part of my nature. And I still think of nursing as caring for and caring about, regardless of the technology and what have you, you have to support that role but that basic role I don't think should be lost in nursing. Because that's very much part of it, that with compassion is very much part of the cure, I

38:30 think and helping a patient get back on to their feet.

**You're still actively involved in the nursing scene, aren't you?**

Well it's becoming less and less so but, and I still belong to our associations and still meet up with the profession and I'm still

39:00 a Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing Australia and I get their literature and I keep in touch with what's going on. And what nurses are doing these days.

**Nell we've got one minute left, this is your time to say what you want, either something you've left out, something that's on your mind or whatever you just want to**

39:30 **say to whoever views this tape in the Australian public. It's your time now for the last minute or so. So go ahead, whatever you want.**

Well I don't know about that because I'll probably think about lots of things I haven't spoken about by the time you go, but it's been an interesting experience. I didn't know I'd done so much over my life. But

40:00 I thank you for coming. But I think nursing will be around for many years to come yet. Their armies can't do without their nurses and the civilian world can't do without their nurses, no matter what.

40:30 And as long as nurses continue to care and care about people, it will continue to grow, the profession.

**Nell thanks very much for today.**

Thank you.

41:00 End of tape