Australians at War Film Archive

Bernice Dimmock (Jonesy) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:43 **Now we'll just go back to your childhood days, tell us about Warragul.**

Warragul oh.

Where were you born, what hospital?

I was born by a midwife, she used to, she had a nursing home

01:00 and that's where we were born, it was just a house, my father and mother lived right next door and my father had a business, blacksmith business in Palmerston Street, right alongside so very convenient. But no hospital in the mid wife's nursing home, yeah. So that was in 1922, 24th of June.

Did your mother stay there in the house or did she go home?

01:30 I don't know I was the newborn baby, but she lived right next door and fathers didn't come in those days, Dad was busy shoeing horses, so I don't know. But they lived there for two years in a rented house and then Dad bought a house in Victoria Street, which was one of the main streets, and there were two private hospitals opposite and three doctors. So you didn't have to go far if you needed a doctor,

02:00 which was very good. But it was different in those days because it was all horse and cart and my Dad made the tradesmen's carts, shod their horses so Mum used to have to go round all those tradesman, because the butcher and the baker and the grocer and the milkman they all delivered. And the butcher would take the order in the morning and deliver it later in the morning, so that was the way it was in those days, not supermarkets.

02:30 So that made life a bit different.

And your dad, so he was a blacksmith?

He was a World War I soldier and he was a blacksmith, coach builder, wheel right and he made jinkers and drays and wagons and anything they wanted. He started in Warragul in 1911 and he was born in Warragul and his father came to Warragul as a fifteen year old, on the back of the bullock dray when Warragul still called 'the Camp',

03:00 Warragul grew when the railway line went through, 1875 grandpa came to Warragul. And the family is still here, I was a Jones and there's lots of them around now. And my great aunt, my grandfather's sister gave the land that the Warragul hospital is on and they've got a wing called the Mary Sergeant wing and that was her names, she'd been Mary Jones. So my lot came here quite a long time ago.

03:30 **Why did your grandfather come here?**

Because his brother in law who was Charles Sergeant, he had a saw mill here and so grandfather was born at Cowley's Creek which is Geelong way and that was why he came to Warragul and he settled here on what they called Rouble Mount Hill. Rouble Mount was a, Rouble was a family name and they were there when it was all bush,

04:00 and we have photos in Warragul of Rouble Mount hill, all bush. So it's interesting isn't it, so my lot came here a long time ago.

Yeah very interesting. So what's your earliest memory?

It's interesting my earliest memory I was about three and a half and I can remember my Dad taking us out into the country to see the 1926 bushfires that wiped out all of the hills around Noojee

04:30 and I can remember the smoke and Dad saying, "Well we can't see anything we may as well go home," and he had a little old Mets car, little thing with a dicky seat in the back, no I was too little to sit in the dicky seat and there were two younger children. And I can just remember that vehicle, but it was a very early model car and that's my first memory.

And you remember what the countryside looked like

05:00 **after the fires?**

I can just remember the smoke because you couldn't see anything and we just went a few miles out of Warragul, to the north just to see what was happening, we didn't want to go near the fires but just to see. And that's my first memory I can still remember that.

Did it threaten, did the fire threaten Warragul?

No, no it was in the bush and there was a lot of people killed in those '26 fires and same with the

05:30 '39 fires, the country north of Warragul in the Baw Baws [National Ranges] they were just burnt out, I believe there was seventy-one killed in the '39 fires, not just in our area but the whole of the state. And I don't know about the '26 fires I think there was quite a loss of life then.

Cause there would have been people living out in the bush?

Oh yes, the mill workers,

06:00 Noojee was a town and there were other little settlements where the people were milling the timber. There was quite a few and in later years you'd go out and see a chimney sitting up in a paddock and perhaps a few blooms in the garden but no house left and those people had been burnt out. In the '39 fires they had dug outs which they got into, they dug into the hillside and some of them survived, some didn't. So yes.

What

06:30 **they had already dug these dug outs in the event of a fire?**

Oh for the '39 fires they were ready for the next lot of fires because they seemed to come, well there was thirteen years between those and then the 1983 fires that was 'Ash Wednesday', they were more recent and there was loss of life there to.

Oh those Ash Wednesday fires come through here did they?

No, no, oh they went north in the bush but not Warragul, no Warragul was quite

07:00 all right, no were cleared these days.

So did you learn to ride a horse as a child?

No I sat on a horse but I'm no horse women. No in my school days you walked, everybody walked in those days cause we lived in the town and the school was just up the hill, just a few hundred yards up the hill. And the school bell would ring and I'd run up the hill and I was there before it stopped.

07:30 **Oh the school, it's still there?**

That's Warragul State, oh yeah, they had their hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary last November and I went to those celebrations and it was great. I was the second oldest one there that had been a pupil and so it was good I went to that reunion and enjoyed it. My father went to that same school, so it's an early school, but it's been enlarged, it's quite a big school

08:00 now. So that was my, I was there until I was in the sixth grade then I went to Warragul High School which was a couple of miles to the south of Warragul and we used to walk because we were too close to have a bus, so I walked in my school days.

You said that Warragul used to be called the Camp?

Oh way way back before it got a name I believe it was the Camp.

And because of the railway, they were building the railway line?

08:30 Right through from Melbourne to Sale I think it went, before that they came inland from the coast cause there was gold at Walhalla and there's a lot of people up there in the gold rush days. And Port Albert was the port and they would go inland, bullock drays I suppose. When they put the railway line through that was much better, so that was it. I could of gone through to Bensdale

09:00 I don't know, I'm not familiar with that part of it. But once they put the railway line through they used to send their milk and their cream to Melbourne and their butter, anything else they grew for sale.

So was the railway line operating when you were born?

Oh yes I got born in 1922 and it went through in the 1800s, so way before my day.

So the town would have been prospering?

09:30 Yes there's some old buildings, in what they call Queen Street, there very early buildings and they've kept them. And there's a few houses in the countryside that have been there for quite a long time, old

houses, good solid houses that will last forever I think.

Was your mum from Warragul as well?

No, my mother was from Scottish stock, her name was Murdoch, she was Margaret

10:00 Murdoch and her parents came out to Australia in the 1800s and they went Queensland, New Zealand before they settled in Victoria at Menzies Creek. And then my grandfather died and my grandmother, little Scottish lady she was left to rear seven children on her own and my mother was the second youngest, so she was born at Menzies Creek. But she was a dressmaker by trade and in those days the dressmakers

10:30 went round the stores and they had a dressmaker employed and they made the ladies dresses and they had a Milner employed and they usually had shoes, they sold shoes. The general store had everything and my mother was, she would go, she went down to Foster because she had a sister there and she went Toro, she had another sister there. And she had another sister in Warragul and she'd sort of move around the district and get a job

11:00 in the store as a dressmaker. And she and my father met when she came to Warragul, so that was it.

And you had other brothers and sisters?

I'm the only one left, my brother who was in the services, Murdoch Jones, he's died and my sister Olwen she was a nurse and she'd died and I'm the oldest and I'm still here.

Right so

11:30 **can you tell me a bit about I guess your childhood days, like what you did as children where you went, I mean it was a very country childhood wasn't it?**

Yes it was a very country childhood, Dad was the sort of chap that you didn't waste money, you worked for what you got and you didn't run up debts and we were bought up that way. I had my Saturday's morning jobs, I used to clean the brasses, which was doorknobs,

12:00 taps, carpet runner ends, they were all brass and it kept me going, Brasso dirty stuff but I had to shine the brasses, that was my Saturday morning job. I think I got paid threepence something like that, that went a long way in those days. Cause I grew up in the Depression and Dad employed men, he had about a dozen men and when times were hard he said, "I can't put those men off, their family men they've got a family to keep." So he employed them,

12:30 they did other things other than what they normally did, they made cement blocks for things, oh he invented a grab stacker for the farmer, a farmer would know what to do, a grab stacker and hay sweep, they were tools they used, implements actually that they used on a farm to rake up their hay and stack up their hay. And so he made a lot of that, for farmers and that kept them employed during

13:00 the depression years. And of course when the depression was over then the war came. So I was told that when the war was at it worst, they were asking Dad if he'd make ammunitions, but they didn't get to that stage apparently, cause I was away, I'd joined up and you didn't know what was going on at home because you were right away. And I found later on that my mail was censored, when I went overseas they censored your mail and if you put in anything that they,

13:30 you shouldn't, they cut it out, with a razor blade. So that was that and there was a lot we didn't know about what went on at home during the war years because you couldn't do anything about it, what did they say, 'loose tongues, sink ships' that was plastered on where they put things up, that's you see advertisements, they were everywhere, slogans

14:00 that you didn't do the wrong thing. 'Black out' conditions you had to have your blinds down at night and coming home on the train the names on the railway stations were all removed, there was, and a building would have it's town named removed so if the Japs [Japanese] came they wouldn't know where they were. So that was in those days.

Sounds like your father was quite a resourceful man?

Yes he was one of the business men of the town, there were others to but Dad,

14:30 he was never in council or anything like that, but I know his brothers would always ring Dad up if they had a problem, cause he was the, they were farmers and he was the businessman in the family, that was just the way it was, he was a good upright citizen. An example he'd do work for the hospital and send them a receipted account, which meant it was paid. And things like that he did just quietly without

15:00 the world knowing, so he was that sort of a man.

And to find a way to keep his men employed during the Depression, like that?

Yes, yes and during those days we'd have people come to the door asking if we had any work and they'd come round with a suitcase with oh, pens and needles, pins, little small things they bought, what we called gill pins which was, like a discount shop now and they'd sell them for

15:30 just a little bit more. This was men, family men making money for their family because there wasn't any other way they could raise money for their children. So Mum always bought something, not much but a little something from each of them. Some of them were good men, you know well educated men but they had families at home. But everybody did that, you sort of helped each other out in those days. Mum made everything, Dad

16:00 soled our shoes and you always had hand me downs but that's what people, everybody lived like that. I can remember boys coming to the Warragul School bare foot in the winter, simply because they couldn't afford boots or shoes. But we survived, it toughed us up, but we always had enough, but we never had anything extra, everybody was like that, you just sort of did without because everybody else did. But that

16:30 was just during the Depression years and we were just getting out of that when the war came, which made employment for a lot of chaps that wouldn't have had work.

So your mum was also dressmaking during that time?

Well she clad us, there were three of us, we've got a picture of my brother with hand knitted socks, so everything was hand made in those days. There he was a school boy with his hand knitted socks on, I suppose we had

17:00 socks on to but I can't remember, this photo of my brother with these, we used to laugh about his hand knitted socks. But everybody knitted socks, I knitted them for a while to, I had an uncle that liked hand knitted socks, once I got the heal turned I was right.

So your father was, as a blacksmith he was shoeing horses?

Yes and he shod horses and made their jinkers and carts,

17:30 and when the high school, they only had three buses, one went east, one went west and one went north, there weren't any other high schools in the close area. When they got new buses on the chassis he built the bit on the back for the passengers to go in. And another fellow he did the upholstery for those buses, canvas top, bit primitive but that was the way it was in those days.

18:00 Things were done as economically as they could.

They were canvas top buses?

Yes and just a row of seats each side and the kids sat, climbed up some steps and sat each side with some canvas over the top. So one went out as far as Neerim to the north and another went to Trafalgar to the east and to Garfield to the west. But now Neerim, Trafalgar and Drouin have all got their own high schools and

18:30 there's quite a few schools around Warragul to, rather than just the one state school.

So what was that like going, for you going from your little local primary school to a high school where you would have had kids from all over?

It was during the Depression and the first form, I was in there were three girls and nine boys, that was the whole form, and there was one hundred and twenty in the whole school. And with a common name like Jones, I was the only Jones in the school, so that's how small it was.

19:00 So I had three years at the high school and then I had two years at the local convent. My Dad used to do jobs for the nuns, there was a convent there and there were boarders and so they thought it might make a lady out of me, but they didn't have much material to work on but still they thought I could study better at the convent, well cause there was less distractions at the convent. Girls were getting into boys, I didn't have a boyfriend

19:30 but they thought well it would be a good idea for me to finish my schooling at the convent. So I didn't want to go but I did go and it worked out very well because Dad did his own books on the dinning room table and grandma lived with us and there were two younger children and the house wasn't very big and there really was no where to study. So I used to go round, after I had tea, round to the convent, which was a few streets away, you could walk the streets in the dark in those days, do my homework with the boarders and then come back

20:00 home. Cause Dad used to have what they called travelling salesman and they'd come and sell him, or he'd order things from the city like horseshoes, horseshoe nails, other things he needed in his business, bolts and nuts and things, and these tradesman, or salesman would come in the evening and see Dad after hours. So it worked out quite well, so that was the end of my schooling. I didn't work for long, I had two years

20:30 at the local milk factory, junior office girl and then I joined up, so that was my childhood.

But, so you had five years of secondary schooling?

Yes, yes, so.

He must have been keen, your parents must have been keen for you to get an education?

Oh they thought it was good to have an education, yeah. A lot of children during the Depression they finished school at grade eight and then they just worked, they'd get a job, or tried to get a job, to help keep the pot boiling

21:00 for the family, cause there were bigger families in those days, so that was it.

So what subjects did you, interest you the most at school, what were you most interested in?

In later years I think I was more interested in history and geography. I could always spell, I was a good speller, I hated maths, they called it arithmetic in those days. We learnt

21:30 French, I was never much of a sports women, I wasn't keen on sport, I don't know why. No, me school years were happy, I enjoyed it and I've been to the various reunions they've had since, for the high school. My daughter was bursar up at the high school and she used to refer to me, "Mum is so and so still alive," when they were making out lists for the reunions.

22:00 And so I got interested in it and I'll go to each one they have, it was every ten years for a while now it's got down to five years and our numbers are thinning out cause were all, as I say 'falling off the perch', so that's it. And I went back to the state school reunion which I thoroughly enjoyed, looking over the old school ground, they've got carpet on the floor now, we just had boards in those days. And everything's so much nicer

22:30 everything is just beaut.

So how big was the state school back then?

The same building is still standing but they enlarged it, I don't know how many pupils are there, I've got the book here on its story. But they bought another block of land and built another, oh set of buildings because it's quite a big school. And Warragul North is another school they've started,

23:00 but they had their fifth celebration this year, my three children went there. My eldest daughter Phil, she was one of the original pupils so there's two big schools, primary schools, St Paul's College and several other schools, there's a Christian school, Marist [Brothers] have got a big school, so there's quite a few schools the countryside,

23:30 around the countryside, the little areas there primary schools are very popular because there smaller schools and a lot of children go from Warragul out to these smaller schools which are two or three miles out.

So how many kids were there at your school, your primary school?

I don't remember, I really don't remember.

How many classes would there have been?

It went up to grade eight, it was prep which was the little ones and then one, two, three…eight. In those days you had to get your merit

24:00 before you left school in grade eight. Well I was at high school then and I got my 'merit' and then I got my intermediate certificate.

And how many teachers, was there a teacher for every class?

At the state school yes, but there was teachers for every subject at the high school. Have you run out of questions?

I'd like to get further into some, I guess

24:30 **stories or experiences that you had, if you can remember then, things that you did with your friends or your family, actual experiences that give us a flavour of what, of who you were back then and what life was like?**

I joined the Girl Guides, there was no Brownies in those days when I joined the Girl Guides and we went for camps. You didn't have much spare time, you never got bored when I was a child, there was always something to do, you did things around the home,

25:00 you helped with the younger children, my mother didn't have very good health. And Dad with his business, he had a saw mill alongside his building and here was this saw mill and there was a trolley with tracks and we kids would get on and whirl down one end and race back up, cause it was for logs but this was at the weekend and we'd play in the heaps of sawdust. And at one stage he had old cars, not many people had cars

25:30 in the early days but there were oldish cars parked at the back of the property, for spare parts I suppose and we'd play in them as children. We didn't go to the pictures much, Dad was pretty economical you didn't have to go to the pictures you could assume yourselves, and we did. But some children of a Saturday went to the theatre on a regular basis, but we didn't. If there was something special, Shirley Temple, we could go and see Shirley Temple and

26:00 that sort of thing. But billy carts, you raced them down the hill, we lived on a hill, made the billy carts yourself and things like that, kids made their own amusement. And we had cousin out of the town, my father's brothers were farmers and we'd go out and visit them and you did what kids did out on the farm, you played in things, in the shed and things like that. But it was just childish entertainment

26:30 so that was how we spent our time. You were chums with the children up and down the street because there were plenty of children, they were big families.

So you knew all the families in the town?

Oh everybody knew everybody pre-war, you knew everybody. And when I was in the army and went overseas, if you struck somebody from your home town, you were instant mates. I met quite a few from Warragul and it was great, you met somebody you knew

27:00 cause you were amongst a lot of strangers. But you did, you knew everybody and I suppose you knew everybody's business to. But it wasn't spiteful or anything like that you sort of, if somebody was in strife you were always there to help them. So it was a different setup altogether, people are more selfish these days aren't they?

Did you go to church?

Yes I went to Sunday school regularly and church, it was just up the hill, it was closer than the

27:30 school. My father, we didn't have to move out of Albert Street, there was two hospitals over the road, three doctors, the school up the road, the church up the road, the cemetery was further up the road and the undertaker had his business out the back, on the other side of the lane at the back of our place. And now Safeway have taken over the area where we grew up and Coles have got the land where Dad's business was. So it's all gone, so

28:00 that was it; it was a more compact place in those days.

So who was a family that you were close to?

My next door neighbour the Jennings's, Mrs Jennings was widowed early and she had eight children and she had a tragic life. She kept boarders, I don't know how she fitted them in, but she lost two daughters and a son while we were there, living next door.

28:30 Dad bought this house next door to the Jennings's and the father had been a baker, the family were early settlers and Mrs Jennings was a really fine women and there she was right next door and our houses were built close together, Dad said they were built in the bush originally and there were sort of three houses on two blocks. Very deep blocks, went from one street right back. And we did things for each other and

29:00 the daughter Edna, who was five years older than me, she was closer to me than my sister. And Mrs Jennings was a very, well she was a wonderful women, she kept the pot boiling, she had two sons join up, one son died at sixteen and her daughter died quite young, I think she might have been about sixteen and another daughter died in childbirth. And she really had a hard life but she never complained and

29:30 her weekend entertainment was to go and sit in the railway park and listen to the band practice. But she was a very fine women and her daughter was fine and she died a few years ago, daughter Edna and she was my closest friend. So that was, they were the closest to me and I'm still friendly with the son and the daughter, don't see them very often but we were sort of, very close.

So what would you and Edna get up to?

30:00 Well she'd come with us. We had a car and they didn't have a car and it was an old Garanta [?], old open thing with running boards and a bonnet over the top. And we'd go mushrooming or blackberrying, out in the country and Edna would always come with us. She enjoyed the company at our place because there were men in her place, her sisters had died and her mother kept men boarders and one of the

30:30 saddest thing they were a very musical family and Mrs Jennings had to sell the piano, that meant a lot to them. But they were a musical family, Uncle Horace used to sing baritone, there was a Henry [Peter?] Dawson, he was a well known singer of the time and Uncle Horace, he used to get drunk a lot, but he sang better when he was drunk. And you could hear it was so close to our place but no they were a great family.

How did

31:00 **her daughter die?**

One died in childbirth and one, I think she had a brain tumour cause the younger brother did, and Edna ended up with a brain tumour but she was in her seventies, she'd married a German POW [Prisoner of War] and they lived south of Warragul. But we had a lot to do with each other, we knew each other's families and relations and that and we were very close, but she died about ten years ago I think. But I really did miss her and then her husband died shortly after,

31:30 so that was that. But that's the trouble now there all passing on, they've all got to that age, you can't live forever can you?

Doesn't look like it?

Yes but the relations we would always visit, Dad liked to visit his relations and we kids would get together and play and have a great time.

So was music a part of your families life?

No my family, I'm not musical at all,

32:00 no I'm just not, I'll enjoy music but I'm not musical and the three children they had recorders at school and they each mastered that, but I could see it wasn't worth buying a piano for the talent that wasn't in the family.

But what did you say the band would rehearse on Saturday's down at the park?

On Sunday's, Warragul had a good band and the Jennings boys were in the band and so of course her sons were in the band

32:30 and she'd go down and sit in the park there and listen to them practicing, so the talent wasn't on our side of the fence it was on the other side. My Dad used to, he was First World War and it was funny he'd get up and light the fire, we had stove in those days and he'd sing army ditties, some of them 'colourful' as he lit the fire. But always on Sunday he sang hymns, he didn't go to church but he'd always sing 'Jesus Loves Me' or something like that on Sunday morning while he lit the fire, so that was Dad's ritual.

33:00 But he'd only burst out in song when he was lighting the fire before anybody else was up you see, so that was it.

Do you remember some of these songs he sang?

'Tipperary' and 'Madam Moselle' from 'Amon Tears' and a few others, can't think just now but First World War songs. So he was in, he was a farrier sergeant, he shod horses in the army but that was what

33:30 his job was, farrier sergeant and he was wounded and he came back in one piece but he'd been shot in the leg. But at the same time he was in the RSL [Returned Services League], my brother, my husband and I were all in the Warragul RSL at the same time. My brother, husband and I, we joined up in 46 when we got out of the army and Dad died in 1950, so we weren't in it that long, Dad died at 64,

34:00 in the days when you couldn't patch up hearts, if you had a heart attack that was it in those days. So that was the story there.

So what about entertainment in Warragul, were there dances?

There were dances, lots of my friends made their debuts, I didn't, I wasn't a dancer but I learnt to dance up in the islands because we got invited to outings with other units, the fellows

34:30 would invite the girls, cause there weren't many girls up there and it was a dirt floor and we had army boots on and we just jigged around. But the fellows wanted to talk, they just wanted someone to talk to, to take a girl, they didn't take us out, they provided the entertainment which was dancing and supper, which was army rations. But it was good to get out, we'd go in a truck, pile into the back of a truck and they'd

35:00 take us down to another unit that had invited us. I've got rather an interesting invitation in the back room that I can show you if you like of a invitation. But we did we went out on our day off and the men that went with us had to be armed, you weren't allowed to just go out with anybody you had to put in an application, they had to apply to invite you out and it had to be accepted and you had to put your name down on the notice board that you'd be off on that day and you'd like to go

35:30 on that trip. So they took us to interesting places in New Guinea, at Lae, we went to a few places there. As I said they were armed but it was interesting, beaches mostly and they'd take a picnic, army food yet again, but it was a day out and it made it interesting.

But what about for the teenagers here in Warragul

36:00 **how did they entertain each other, themselves?**

They seemed, it seemed to be people stayed in their homes, they did things, there was the radio, everybody liked their radio, I learnt piano but I can't play a note now. You played in your own backyard or you played with your friends and the teenagers they didn't get into any trouble, anybody that could work did work. The picture theatre, the odd dance,

36:30 Girl Guides would have there things at the weekends like hikes or camps and the Scouts did the same. I can't remember any vandalism back in those days, they just didn't do it, hadn't thought of it, they had something else to do, it's just in recent years that the boredom set in I think.

The picture theatre, where was that?

Oh it was in the middle of the town, have you been through Warragul?

Yes?

37:00 You know where the Cenotaph is, that big building that's right there, that was the picture theatre, it had downstairs and upstairs. They've now put another theatre in there but before that they made it into shops, and it's sort of the centre of the town.

What was it like back then, what sort of a building?

Oh you sat on kitchen chair, just plain kitchen chairs with a kangaroo or an emu carved at the back of the seat and there was a board underneath that kept them all in a row.

37:30 And lots of people went to the theatre in those days, and there were concerts, the local, it wasn't a dramatic society or anything like that but groups would put on concerts, and of course when the war started they did money raising for them, for the troops and things like that. But there were, there were balls and things there, they weren't in the theatre,

38:00 can't remember where they had their balls, I never went to a ball. I never had an evening dress because we weren't into dancing. Dad didn't encourage, he didn't stop us but he didn't encourage it and if my parents had been dancers we would have been to. But because they didn't, cause Dad worked long hours, he'd be called back, sometimes he'd work through the night if somebody's saw mill part had cracked up, the men would come in on the Neerim train

38:30 and give Dad whatever needed to be fixed up, stay overnight and go back the next day so that the mill didn't have to stop work. So many a time Dad worked through the night. And there's one milling company out there they were deaf and dumb, the Collins brothers, they couldn't speak and they would come and they would indicate at our place, I usually met them in the backyard and I'd point down to where Dad's business was and they'd nod and off they'd go. But they never spoke a word

39:00 and we got the material for this house when Collin's closed down.

But they ran a saw mill?

They ran a saw mill, they were brothers, moustaches in those days. No they were decent chaps but they'd come in with this piece of machinery, on the train, and then go back the next day, instead of running back and forth each day.

So your father was able to repair and, was he able to actually make

39:30 **parts?**

Yes he worked in steel, he could make, I've got lots of gardening tools that Dad made and various other things that he made, around this house all the mouldings were made at Dad's shop, all the skirting boards, not these doors but cupboard doors in the kitchen and things like that. It's amazing, we never bought anything new, Dad could always knock it up. So they did things in those days.

What was your house like?

40:00 Here or?

Where you grew up?

It was, it started off a small house but Dad built onto the back of it, it was a solid house, very high ceilings and when we moved in it had hessian at the top with wallpaper on it and then there was a dado along there and then there was, I think they were pine boards down below and linoleum on the floor. And I can remember Dad taking the lights, cause they were fire

40:30 hazards, hessian with paper and taking it down and putting up, what do you call it, wall stuff?

Plaster?

Plaster, plaster and it was real plaster cause they used to make it, they had fibre stuff and the plaster and they would make it, you could buy sheets of it and it had a pattern in the ceiling, you know rose pattern in the ceiling and that sort of thing, and Dad did it

41:00 himself over the weekends and reline a room. The kitchen was a scullion back verandah and he encased that and made a kitchen and he put a hot water service in for us and built a bathroom and room on the back of the house. He enlarged it quite a bit, he did those sort of things, he didn't think twice he just did it, he was a very capable man. So our house got to be a descent size and when he sold it in 1942,

41:30 he was very pleased at the price six hundred pounds. And then they built a house, he promised Mum a bigger better house, but the trouble was the war was on, they built it and my brother, sister and I we moved in at Easter and by the end of the year we'd all gone. Brother and sister, sister went nursing my brother joined up and I joined up and they rattled around in the big house until we came home and then we all got married, but that's life. But it was, Dad wanted to

42:00 build, bring his business out…

Tape 2

00:30 As I say I think somebody's died and I say, "Oh I remember them," and you go to compare it with somebody else and they don't know what your talking about, so that's modern times.

So were back on now, we'll just pick up where we left off?

You actually switched it on?

Yes it's okay you can relax?

Right carry on.

You were talking about your father's business I think and

01:00 **how, where it was in Warragul, well you were talking about the house and then they moved?**

From Palmerston Street where Dad worked to Victoria Street, which wasn't very far as the crow flies, just went down the back lane. So it was a convenient enough home, it was good when Dad put the hot water system on, before that you had to light the copper which was in the laundry which was outside detached from the house. And they did that in those days, they

01:30 used to have kitchen detached from the homes because of fire, if the kitchen caught alight the rest of the house didn't go, cause open fires. Yes my aunt who lives out of Warragul her kitchen was about oh over the road from the rest of the house, but that was the way they built it.

So, and you had that, you had a kitchen?

No the kitchen Dad built, Dad built the kitchen onto the back verandah and he enclosed the back verandah and put the things that you have in a kitchen,

02:00 there, but he had a hole in the wall and he built the wood box on the outside, so he could load the wood in from the outside and we'd just open a door and there, we could get the wood without going outside, he'd cut it up into lengths. So that was a convenience, because if you had to go out to the wood heap in the rain to get more wood so it was a bit of a nuisance, so little things like that that made life easier. But you'd have to boil up the copper and carry the water in, kerosene tins

02:30 they used in those days with a wire handle, into the bathroom, which was in the house. So that was an improvement when we got the hot water system. So there was other things to that he did, I just can't remember. We had a long backyard and you grew everything yourself, all the veggies and things, Mum was the gardener, Dad would doing the digging and Mum the gardening and we had a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK yard up the back and we grew fruit. And

03:00 then he had a saw bench, I've got a saw bench out there but it's not used, Dad would bring wood up, what he called waste wood from the mill which was off cuts of wood and he'd saw them up on the saw bench that he had, it had a little motor. And it would chop the wood into the right size to go into the stove or the open fire inside. And that was all done in our backyard, cause it was a long backyard,

03:30 and that's where Safeway is now. And when they dug for Safeway, they had to dig into the hill because it's a steep hill, Victoria Street hill, oh they found bottles that had been down people's wells in the good old days, old bottles, there was quite a hoard of bottles. I can't remember a well in our backyard but I suppose there was. But that's what they found, old bottles.

You had rainwater tanks did you for water?

No we had the

04:00 town water when I was growing up, the town water was there, and gas, so Warragul had gas on. I suppose it was natural gas and electricity. But we had a cord that you pulled to switch the light on, instead of a switch which we got later on you just pulled this cord with a knob on the end and that put the light on, I don't know how it worked

04:30 but that's the way they did it. Cause the house had been there, it was an old house when Dad bought it but he did it up and he used to paint it when it needed painting and as I said he relined the inside. And it was quite a comfortable home, it was long and narrow, it wasn't quite like a terrace house because there were rooms on each side of the passage, in a terrace house they just sort of had rooms on one side, didn't they? The passage on one side

05:00 and the rooms, but our place had four rooms and then Dad built onto the back for the kitchen and then another bedroom for my sister and I and the bathroom was just off the kitchen. But it was compact and quite comfortable so that.

Did you work in the garden?

I've always like gardening, I'm still a gardener. Mum loved gardening, Dad said, "The only flower he knew was a cauliflower," but

05:30 he dug for Mum, he'd be out there with a hurricane lamp and digging after work in the dark and then Mum would grow the veggies. Oh we grew all sorts of things, berries and all the vegetables you can grow, cause we had plenty of room, it was a deep block.

Where would she get the seed from?

Grocers I suppose, or you kept your own seed quite a lot, we had raspberry canes and we had loganberries and all

06:00 sorts of berries and fruit and things like that. Just trying to think what else we had, but the backyard was fully utilised, there wasn't any waste space. And of course the toilet was way down the back, we did get sewers while we were there, we left there in 1942 and before that the night man would come around. I had a mishap with the night man, I worked at the milk factory, I was junior office

06:30 girl and he used to come around with his cart and his cans in the back and he used to come around about the time I had lunch, and if I was quick, I could get there before he did. Well I was quick this day and I got there before he did but the chain on me watch broke and it fell into the unemptied can and I panicked and went inside and got a torch and the poker and tried to dig my watch out, unsuccessfully but by that time I had the neighbours having a look through the fence.

07:00 Anyway he came down with his can on his shoulder and he says, "What's the trouble?" and I explained and he said, "Don't worry I'll get it for you," so he did he got it for me and passed it over and my silver watch had turned black, but didn't matter I got me watch back. Anyway worst was to happen it was one of those things you didn't tell people about. But at the milk factory where I worked they used to set the factory whistle by my watch and the engineer who did it he came in the next day with a grin on his

07:30 face and said, "What's the time?" and burst out laughing. My father had told him what had happened to my watch, so anyway I got a new watch and things went back to normal. But I was seventeen and very embarrassed, but you live through these things.

How did it come to be that they set the alarm to your watch at the factory?

Oh perhaps nobody else had a watch, I don't know I can't remember,

08:00 I know I had a watch it had been given to me for my birthday, so I had a watch. I think I got a watch when I started high school so as I'd know what time I had to get to school, cause I had to walk. It was the same watch. Anyway I had to go and take that watch to the watchmaker and he had to ask what happened to it, and he took it and I got another watch, so I think I paid two pound ten for that new watch, I'm going to cough.

08:30 **Have a drink, oh, we can edit coughs and sneezes?**

Now have you got a cold there, Colin [interviewer]?

Oh yes, I think so.

You'd better go and join my daughter, she's just got a fresh one.

Bit of hayfever.

Oh my hubby used to get hayfever badly and then end up with asthma, then end up with bronchitis, do you do all those things?

Not yet?

Not yet, well don't do it, now.

09:00 **Just I was just curious what sort of watch it was, what did it look like?**

It was a silver watch and it had a mother of pearl face, no that was the replacement had the mother of pearl face. It was just an ordinary little watch and it had a chain band and the chain broke, and it wasn't like a stretch band it had a link in it, it was all links and then there was a clip. And somewhere it broke, don't ask me where it broke I didn't really look, and I never had a

09:30 chain band for a long long time after that, but that other watch I had, lasted for years and years cause you could get them repaired in those days and that was it, it was just a ordinary little silver watch.

And how did you set it, where did you get the time from, to set your watch?

The radio I suppose. But they had a, the milk factory was quite a big concern, it was Hollandson and Neilson and it used to supply milk to

10:00 Melbourne and I was junior office girl and they had a little, we called it a 'dog box', it's about as big as a toilet and it had a seat and a counter there and there's a big milk sheet and I had all the suppliers numbers, hundreds of them, rows and rows. And as they weighed the milk, the farmers would bring the milk, not the farmers, the milk carriers would bring the milk in, in cans and it would be tipped into this

big container and weighed and it was tested for

10:30 see if it was good quality milk. And they would tell me the weight and I'd have to write it down on this sheet. And when we'd go for a drive on Sunday with Dad we'd be going past some farmers place and it would have one hundred and sixty five on the can sitting at the gateway, I'd say, "Oh so and so lives there," I knew who lived where by the number on their milk can. And so that was my job, was to do each day and then it was sort of processed and it went

11:00 to Melbourne. There were three girls in the office, the senior one then the next one and then me. And I used to have to go out and serve petrol, they had a couple of bowsers there and the way to get your petrol in those days, you had to pump it, that's why they call them 'petrol pumps' I suppose. And I'd have to collect the coupons, it was petrol coupons and with the milk suppliers, the farmers they had to pass over there

11:30 coupons and pay their cash and I'd put the milk, not the milk, the petrol, just to be sure that they got what they needed. And I had to sort of supervise the truck drivers what they got, that they got the right amount. So that was one of my duties to. And when I joined up and there wasn't a train running in the right direction, I used to catch a milk tanker, and there's one seat in the front and

12:00 some of the local fellows, army navy or air force they'd catch a ride but they had to sit in the back with the cans and I had the seat in the front with the driver. So, but it was great cause you could sort of go down and they'd drop you off at Flinders Street where the depot was and I could catch a train to whichever direction I was going.

So this was the milk being transported from Warragul?

To Melbourne yes and they'd come back. And they had,

12:30 oh what'd they call, oh I'm having a blank, gas producers, it was charcoal and somehow or rather they had it so that it produced power for the vehicles, didn't produce much power and whether they used petrol with it I just don't know but they'd have a bag of charcoal and they'd put it in the back of the truck, into this gas producer thing and they would

13:00 they went slower when they were on gas, gas producer. I suppose it's like these days the gas thing, but they used to put these big potato bags full of charcoal into the back of this container in their trucks, and this was saving petrol. So that was how some of them went.

So would the truck go round and collect the milk from the farmers?

From Warragul there would be the truck drivers

13:30 that went out, it was their job, sometimes they were farmers, and they'd go out and collect milk from the different places and they'd have their cans on their milk stand up at the road. Some of them would have two or three, some of them had lots more. And they'd load them onto the back of the truck and they'd bring them into the milk factory and then the employees of the factory would tip the milk from the cans into the big containers. And then the cans were washed and the empty cans went back the next day

14:00 and they'd bring the full ones in. But to Melbourne it was a big truck, there was one tanker, only one that they had that went to Melbourne, that was back in 1940's. But it was mostly cans and there was about two drivers would take, I suppose they'd do shifts, they'd take it down. I got to know them quite well because I'd get a ride with them. And if the train was going right then I was all right. We found the trains ran one way one

14:30 day, you could come to the country and go back that night and then the next day they'd come from the country and go back at night. Well that was no good if you had a day off cause the train was running the wrong way and when you got a day off you got one day off a week, you'd go home if the train was going the right way. And if it wasn't, I think I didn't go home, but I used the tanker occasionally. Cause sometimes

15:00 you got back about midnight with the tanker, just depends on his time, you fitted in with him, so that was transport.

So when you were working at the milk factory what were your hours?

Nine to five, I think so, that's a long time ago, I think it was nine to five, I might of started at eight and I worked on a Saturday morning, they wanted me to work on Sunday and I said,

15:30 "No." I needed some time off, I was only a young 'un but seven days a week was going to be a bit much I thought, so that was that.

So can you tell me again in a bit more detail what your job there was?

Actually I was junior office girl and I worked in the office and I served the petrol and we used to sell milk, not milk butter one and

16:00 five pence, it was cash in those days, the old stuff, one and five pence for a pound of butter. And if you

had a family you could get your milk for free but I had mother and father but I wasn't married and had children, but the men could get their milk, take home what milk they needed. And you could get a piece of cheese, I liked their cheese and they'd give you a bit and well that was the perks. But

16:30 we worked hard in the winter time you had to take your holidays cause the farmers would dry their cows off, but in the spring time it was very busy and you worked long hours. But we always had to take our holidays in the winter. And I worked as I said up in the, where the milk cans were being tipped, not all the time but as the trucks would come in I'd be up there. And that was about it.

So when would the trucks come in?

17:00 Oh the farmers would milk in the morning and they'd get up early and the trucks would start coming in about nine o'clock. And then, no I don't think they did two pick ups in a day in those days, no it was just the one. And sometimes they'd come in a bit later if they'd been a further and that was the way it was. Oh and then there was the butter factory on the other side of the road and they had cream cans which were a different shape, but they

17:30 didn't come in as often, I had less to do with that side of the road, milk factory was on one side and cream factory was on the other, but it was all Hollandson and Nielson which was a big Melbourne firm. And it was good to work there the manager was a Dane, Danish and he was a good boss, I enjoyed working there, but we were patriotic and you enlisted, we did first aid

18:00 and home nursing and enlisted. And a lot of the men that were there they enlisted, some of them used an excuse as an essential job but in the end they were called up because there was a war on and times were hard and they needed everybody they could get. And if you were on a farm sometimes they wanted to enlist but they were an essential job, milking cows to feed the nation. So that's the way it was, it was an important job really.

18:30 **And there was a cheese, they made cheese there as well?**

They made cheese there to, in big round things, they didn't sell it in little packets like they do these days but they made big round cheeses.

And where would they sell them?

I suppose they went to Melbourne, bearing in mind I was junior officer girl, I didn't know what everything was about. But the butter was packed into boxes and the different stores, grocery

19:00 stores would buy their butter, and it was wrapped up in pound packs and how ever much the box held, it was a wooden box in those days. And it would be sent off to stores around the countryside, country stores, they'd get a box of butter and sell it individually as pounds.

Now you did two years at the private school, or the boarding school?

I wasn't a boarder, at the convent.

The convent,

19:30 **when you were there, can you tell me a bit about those years and what they convent was like?**

Oh it was very lady like place and you studied, you didn't do anything too physical they didn't, oh they played tennis and things like that, there was no sports like there was at the high school. But you did needlework, that was embroidery, that was sewing, whereas at the school, when I was at high school

20:00 we made our cooking aprons and cooking smocks and little cap to wear to, you did that, you worked on the sewing machines at the high school. But at the convent all you did was embroidery, that was the needle work class. They had a singing class, you studied it was a religious place and I wasn't a Catholic so I wasn't involved with that part. But I made some good friends there, there were nice girls and some of them were city

20:30 girls our country girls that had been sent to the boarding school and they lived at the convent. But they did their homework in the evening which fitted in with my lifestyle, so that was the way it was. But I enjoyed my two years there.

Was it in Warragul the school?

Yes it was round a couple of corners from where I lived and it was run by the

21:00 nuns, Marist Sion they are now, the Marists was Marist Brothers and Our Lady of Sion was the Catholic part, was the girls part, and now they've moved out to a big school, outside of Warragul a bit and it's quite a big school. And round this corner here five school buses go in the morning, did you see any buses when you came? Yeah there's a bus stop there, and then five buses come back at the other end of the day.

Going out to Marist

21:30 **Sion?**

No just to the different schools, there's five different schools they cater for because there's a commission there and quite a lot of houses in there.

What were the nuns like?

Ladies, real lady-like ladies, gentle women.

Were they strict?

They were firm, I got hauled over the coals once, only once, I wasn't good at maths but I got one sum

22:00 right and this nun said, "Nobody got it right," and I said, "Take an eye full of that," I don't know why I said it but I said it, and she looked at me and she said, "You go outside." That wasn't a nice thing to say, I just, I should have said, "Just look at this," but I said, "Take an eye full of that," and I was sent outside to sit for half an hour and contemplate my sins. But I did get that sum right, so that was the only time I fell

22:30 foible, it was harmless really but it was a bit of a giggle. No they were good and they were dedicated ladies, they kept a firm hand on the boarders, but no it wasn't bad.

Do any of the nuns stand out as being particularly interesting or?

No not really, she was a gentle faced women this one, that told me to go outside, no, none of them really stand out any more

23:00 than the others, no. It was, no I can't think of anything, I knew quite a few of the girls through girl guides and things like that, and I made good friends there, there's one I still know but she's in a nursing home now. That's where they all end up some how or rather.

Were they Australian nuns or Irish?

They

23:30 were Australian, perhaps there was an Irish one or two but I can't remember, cause it's quite a while ago. No my school days I can say were happy school days, it never, I wasn't a brain but I coped and I enjoyed my school days, that's all I can say about them I think.

So what did you want to be, did you have aspirations about?

I did a clerical course,

24:00 typing and shorthand and I helped in Dad's office at one time, he always did his own books and then he got an elderly lady, oh by elderly I suppose she was all of sixty, she did, she was a friend of Mum's, she did Dad's books. And when she went away I did it for a little while but I wasn't there for that long and then this job came up at the milk factory and I enjoyed that.

24:30 There was quite a staff of men there and there was just us three girls, but no that was all I did until I joined up you see. I just turned twenty when I joined up and then I had four years and then I met me husband up in New Britain and come home and got married. We didn't get married straight away we were going to build a house first but that took two years to build, so we lived with Mum and Dad and

25:00 moved in, I had a three weeks old daughter in a pram by that time, got married and I had a three weeks old daughter when we moved in here, so that's how I know how long we've been here. Les had a pushbike and I had a pram and that was our 'wheels', we started at the bottom. So yeah.

Okay so how long were you at the milk factory again before you

25:30 **joined up?**

Couple of years, perhaps two and a half years, something like that.

And what years were they?

Well I joined up, I went to join up July 42 but they sent me back home to get me teeth out, I'd never had a toothache in my life but they said I had 'chalky' teeth. So I was sent home to get my teeth out so I had thirteen and one here out in the one day and a plate in on top.

26:00 And my father thought that was dreadful, he went three months without teeth and I got the plate in straight away. He said, "When you go you may as well take the ambulance or the herse, you'll get into one or the other." That was his humour. But I had a very swollen mouth.

Why did they take your teeth out?

Because I had 'chalky' teeth and they reckon I'd need lots of dental attention, but I'd never had a toothache in my life. So I had them out in the end and my certificate says, I

26:30 was, I went in on the 1st of September. But I'd been in, I was still not eating crusts when I joined up, you know with your gums like. So that was it, I had the teeth out and then the army provided me with a plate, oh about a year later I think.

Did you question that at all?

Oh no, you did as you were told, my mother took me down to join up because I didn't know me way around Melbourne, I was a country girl, I'd only been to Melbourne once.

27:00 And I bought a Collins Street Directory, I've still got it, 1942 and that was me bible, I carried it everywhere because I still don't know me way around, properly around Melbourne. But it was very useful, I'd map out where I was going and go; it was much easier those days because I don't understand the trams now, the money business. You bought a ticket, no you got on and a ticket collector

27:30 did the honours, that was okay but now I keep off them.

So I'm just curious about having all these thirteen teeth taken out, that's extraordinary isn't it?

Oh he just took them out and…

But did you have an anaesthetic or…?

I had a local anaesthetic, I did have a sore mouth, the horror was, you had to rinse your mouth out and you had to take them out, you got them out all right but getting them back in wasn't funny. But I'm healthy

28:00 and I healed up pretty well, so hmm.

Was that a common thing back then, that people's teeth were removed?

I don't know anybody else who had it done but I know when I was on the switchboard at Heidelberg, we used to have to send frequent telegrams for airman, young fellows they'd joined up and the air force had a thing about whipping out the tonsils and we used to have to send telegrams requesting permission for these fellows to have their tonsils out. And they

28:30 whipped them out frequently, so somebody said that was an 'air force thing'. It was a bit ruthless in those days. So I had the teeth out and in and I went back and we didn't actually join the army, we were under the wing of St John's Ambulance, that's when we were in our navy blue uniforms, but we worked in hospitals and then the army took it all over and that was when we went into

29:00 khaki and saluted the officers and did all that sort of stuff.

Well it would be actually good to go back a little bit and how you came to make that decision to join up and what was going on when war broke out and what was happening in the community. You've, we already talked off camera how boys were going off very early. So can you give us a picture of Warragul then around the time that?

Yes it was just going on quietly, a country town and I remember my sister and I went for a bike

29:30 ride and we didn't get home till after dark and Dad said, "There's a war on," and that was the 3rd of May, '39. And we'd gone for a bike ride out into the country and we were a bit late home, they were a bit worried cause it had got dark and we didn't have any headlights. Well you did those things in those days and when we got home Dad says, "There's a war on," and then everything started to move. And Mrs Island who was a First World War nurse

30:00 she got another lady who, she was, oh I suppose she'd be about sixty at the time, she trained us, the two of them. They asked for volunteers to train in the VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] and of course we were all patriotic and there was, oh seemed to be a room full of us. We went down and they taught first aid and home nursing and we had to pass a test. But from what I can remember

30:30 thinking back, First World War, they talked mainly about incompetence in old men, incompetence in old men, oh we went into that in great detail, don't ask me why. But we had to learn about putting bandages on and all sorts of things and we had to go up to the hospital, the local hospital in the evening and offer our services. One girl went into the theatre and passed out because she didn't like the sight of blood, I don't know how she got

31:00 in there but I never got that far. But they did ask me to bath a bed patient and he looked at me and he said, "I don't want her to do it," and I said, "And I don't want to do it." And they looked at me, "Why?" we worked together at the milk factory and he was a chap who had been burnt down in the boiler room and there he was, so they gave me another patient to give a bed bath to. But we did that sort of thing and then we would go Saturday afternoon, borrow the local

31:30 furniture van and, I don't know what that van was used for but it was, and we'd have people lying around the street with broken arms and legs, round the streets of Warragul and we'd have to go and find them. I think we must of gone in the van, anyway we'd have to put slings on and tie their legs up and tie their 'heads off' and cart them off in the van, this was us learning first aid. And we did that for a while, I don't know how long it was, we had to sit for an exam.

32:00 **Who would volunteer to lie around in the streets?**

We were keep there was a war on and everybody was doing their own thing.

But who would volunteer to lie around, lie in the street?

Oh local people did, they didn't mind, it was all for the cause. And we had to black out our houses, everybody blacked out their houses. And our house, family house, was sort of down the hill here and on a slope and a chappie who worked at the factory he lived on the other side, "You didn't black your window out last

32:30 night?" And you'd forget. And you could buy black cloth and you put it all over your windows so there was no light, this was in case the enemy came and the enemy was getting nearer sort of thing. And Mum said after I'd gone, she said, "We were given a plan if the Japanese invaded to head for the hills, leave your home and head for the hills." This was when things were really getting tough. But no, there was all sorts of restrictions like I told you,

33:00 the names were taken off buildings that had 'Warragul' on them and things like that, the railway station had no name.

But when did this, when did this happen, I mean?

When the Japs started heading south, I joined up in '42, Darwin had been bombed by that time. And I joined up when my brother joined up, he was eighteen and he was 'called up' and my sister went nursing, she was seventeen, she went down to the Eye and Ear [Hospital]

33:30 to train. I joined up and got the knock back for the teeth and got that one sorted out and then I started off at the Caulfield Repatriation Hospital, which had patients left over from the First World War. But they did have some from the current war. But we washed and polished floors and washed dishes.

Can I just take you back though, I mean you said that in May '39

34:00 **your father, you came home from the bike ride and your father said, "There's a war on"?**

Yes, there was a 'war on'.

So was it at that point you went to the VAD?

No, people had to get themselves used to the idea there was a war on, it was over in Europe, it didn't come over this way straight away, it sort of came later. So they said, "We will have," they called for people to do that and your conscious said, 'You'd do it', we were young and able.

34:30 **What about your mum did she get involved?**

Oh she belonged to the Red Cross and things like that and they did things, what they did I can't remember. But the Red Cross, when I was up in the islands I got this, they called it a housewife, and it was a piece of material and it had needles and pins and buttons and cotton and you rolled it up and tied it with a bit of string, or tape, I've still got one. And it was sent by the

35:00 Comforts Fund or the Red Cross from somewhere or other, and I got one in New Britain and it had it that it came from Gazelle and that's out in the hills here. And that was what they did they made things for the services and they sent them comforts and things like that, you'd get a little present every now and again and it'd have pencil and paper or, cause you always wrote home, and little odds and ends that you needed. You couldn't get elastic, your pants had a button

35:30 on them and things like that. But you were always looking for buttons and things, so that's what they did at home, the different ladies would, and they'd send cakes to the troops, they'd make fruit cake and put them in a special tin and seal them off and send them to the troops. And you often got Comfort Funds, parcels from home, some were good, some weren't. But my mother sent me up a tin of walnuts, boy did they go quick.

36:00 My cousin grew them and she sent this tin, cake tin, thought it was a cake and it was walnuts. But they went over well, so they sent things from home.

So it was September in '39 that…?

The war started.

That Australia was actually became involved?

Yes and then they started to enlist the men and the women, there wasn't any women services as such straight away but some VADs were sent fairly

36:30 early over to the Middle East, there was on Warragul girl, she went to the Middle East. But they were older girls than us, their all in their ninety's now, cause they were a bit older. And you didn't go straight, you worked in the hospitals you see and then they called for, no they didn't call you, you got sent if you went AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. You didn't have to though. 'V', we all had a

37:00 number, started off with a V, number for Victoria and if you volunteered to go AIF you were V- 'X' and then you had a chance of going somewhere. Oh I've got a thing that my mother and father signed that gave permission for me to join up.

Was there the Citizens' Military Force around the area?

Oh they did, they had the men, VDC

37:30 Victorian Defence Corps, I had a cousin over South Gippsland, he milked cows and at weekends off they'd go, they had a uniform and a gun and they'd go off and, well play soldiers, they didn't go anywhere but they were prepared to 'defend'. And I remember going down on a milk tanker one day there was a cutting down near Berrick and here they were on their stomachs lying in their uniforms with their hats on and their guns pointing at the road like that. And this was the VDC doing their weekend practice.

38:00 But there they were, if they had had to, they would of defended the country, on the home front. Cause some had to stay back, and they were mostly older people, not ancient but fellows that, I don't know what was the cut out date, in your forties you were old in the army, you had to be young and keen. But they were fellows that had to stay and milk cows, or run shops, or something like that and they joined the VDC.

So your already aware of there being a

38:30 **kind of a army presence in the community?**

Oh yes, yes they had what they called the militia and the fellows used to camp down on the showgrounds and they'd go on bivouac and things like that, and they were the first ones to go. So that was the beginning of it, oh the men went off quite early, the ones that were keen and quite a lot of them rose to be

39:00 officers quite quickly because they were trained and well they were sort of the beginning of it. But it was all Melbourne or the cities they were the ones that got things going. I wasn't in the know on that sort of thing.

And what about your brother, your little brother?

Oh he worked for Dad right up till when he joined up, because he was eighteen and fit that was it, he went and lots of his mates

39:30 of the same age they went to.

Did he volunteer?

Yes he volunteered but he was of the age where he could have been called up, but he had to wait till he was eighteen. So and the girls had to be eighteen to, seems young now, I've got granddaughters twenty five and twenty seven, I was home from the war then and there just young en's yeah.

So where did you go to enlist?

I had to go down to Lonsdale

40:00 Street in Melbourne which was St John's Ambulance headquarters and sign up there. Mum came home on the train and I stayed down there and they told me where to go, out to South Yarra the first night, I didn't know where South Yarra was but I had me little map. And it was one of the big houses out there that the army had taken over and they'd taken the carpets off the floor and the big pictures off the wall, it was a grand house,

40:30 don't know whose house it was. I think it was Sir Norman Brooks, it was somebody anyway, and we roomed there and I think I spent about two days there, wasn't there long and I remember going back into the city and they said, "Would I take something," I had to pick up me uniform at Myers that's right, we had to order our uniform and it was made at Myers and you had blue uniforms for work and a navy blue suit and an overcoat

41:00 and black shoes and grey stockings and a hat. And I had to go to Myers for something, to see if it was ready I think. Anyway, I came out the wrong door and ended up at Spencer Street, don't ask me how I got there, I just didn't know me way around. And when I got back they said, "You took a long time." I said, "I got lost," and I did too, I was really lost. But I found me way about by having to go to the city and then I got posted out to Caulfield Repatriation Hospital and I was there for a while,

41:30 and we did as I said, you peeled an awful lot of vegetables there and you did the floors and any other jobs, oh cleaned windows, just general labouring. Cause what we did, we enlisted to do anything and that is what we did, I never made any beds there, but we served cups of tea, if the patient wanted something, you got that for the patient. But most of them were, in our ward, they were

42:00 fellows from the…

Tape 3

00:30 **Yeah so Bernice you were telling us about Warragul and that sort of episode where you had volunteers pretending to be victims lying on the road with their broken bones, was that, were you VAD at that point?**

I was a learning VAD, we belonged to the local VAD detachment but we hadn't enlisted at that stage, that was just local stuff, that was just learning.

Right so how long were you with the, that sort of training detachment?

01:00 '39, I'm not sure, we might have been months, might have been a year, it was long enough to do our first aid and home nursing and pass our exams. And some of the girls joined up straight away and we had to think about it before, it was a big decision in your life. Cause we were country people and the city was a big place to go in those days. And so I just suddenly decided

01:30 yes I would, cause my brother was turning eighteen, our birthdays were both in June and he joined up as soon as he turned eighteen and I was turning twenty at that same time. So…

So how old did you need to be to sign up with VAD?

You had to be eighteen with your parent's permission. But you had to be twenty-one before you could go overseas, well the overseas wasn't a thought at that stage. So and that was it.

02:00 **Right so that training period you had here in Warragul was still after war had been declared?**

Oh yes everything happened after war had been declared, that sort of shook the nation, 'we're at war'.

And do you remember how you actually heard about the VAD, was it advertised?

No we had Mrs Island who was a First World War nurse and she was very keen to start this first aid detachment, because you weren't trained nurses but you

02:30 could be very useful, somebody had to do the other work, the ground work, so that's why we joined up. And she had this Marion Knead, she was a retired nurse and she was the one that did the training but Mrs Island was there organising, I suppose you'd call her our commandant. And the two of them we met, first of all at her home, Mrs Island's home which was just over the

03:00 road from where I lived in Victoria Street. And then we met, as the group grew we went to what was called the Athenian, which was a building further into the town. And there was quite a room full of us there and we studied, we had this book, 'First Aid and Home Nursing', two little books one black and one brownie colour and we studied and put bandages on people and wrapped up head and did all that sort of stuff. And then we

03:30 graduated to going out to the hospital and then we joined up, not together but individually. A couple of my friends went in, oh a few months earlier than me and they ended up office work at Heidelberg and they spent the entire war years doing that. And one of our friends out of Warragul, farmers daughter, she joined up and she went to the Middle East. And others joined up and went

04:00 the diet kitchen at Heidelberg where they stayed for the duration and we did sort of office work and just where we were needed. I trained as a telephonist, I went to the Ivanhoe Signal School which was the Ivanhoe Grammar School in Ivanhoe and we sat at junior school desks, they were very little desks and we were big girls, but we sat there. Had a month there at this Signal School and came out as telephonists. But it was,

04:30 and we were in the army by that time, the army had taken us over…..

Sorry when did that happen and how did that come about, this is when you…?

I'd been in, I joined up, my certificate says '1st of September', well I went in before in the August after I had the teeth out and went to Caulfield and I was there, I think until the end of the year and then

05:00 we were still in navy blue when I went to the Ivanhoe School and then after that the army took us over and we all went into khaki, and that would be early 43 from memory. I might be out a little bit, that's sixty odd years ago.

Sorry can I just ask, again just going back a step what had been the real motivation for your decision to head off into Melbourne and do the?

Oh the papers were full of you know, the war

05:30 and how it was going and the Japs had started to come in and they were going to come south. And it was an 'all in' war effort, anybody who could, did. There were a few people that didn't but most of us did, and that was what it was about. Cause my father having been in the First World War he was very patriotic and so that was it, it wasn't a big decision, I knew I had to do it, so did lots of others.

06:00 **Right and at the time of signing up, were you aware that there was a possibility of going aboard with that work?**

Didn't cross me mind when I first joined up, my big problem was finding me way around Melbourne,

raw recruit.

Well tell us about that, just getting to the big city and finding your way round?

Well I'd been, Mum had taken me down as a four year old to see my grandparents, that was just to Camberwell and back and then in 1934 the Duke of Gloucester came out

06:30 to Australia and that was a big thing. So Mum and Dad took us three down to Melbourne, to the Melbourne Show and my brother and I got scarlet fever as the outcome of that, and that's all the time I'd been to Melbourne in my whole little life. So I didn't really know my way round and so I just sort of had to start from the bottom, that's where me 1942 Collins Street Directory came into the picture, well worn.

07:00 So, of course Melbourne was simpler in those days, it was just more or less straight forward, and there were lots of people like me self, country girls that didn't really know their way round, they had to find it. But we learnt quickly, you had to, you didn't have a choice. Getting on the train here was a bit of a hassle because the air force had a base at East Sale and you'd get on and it would be full of airman and thought nothing sort of standing, all the way between

07:30 Warragul and Melbourne. And then you'd have to run for a train to go out to Ivanhoe, you had to go to Princes Bridge, which is something else now. And then with a bit of luck you got on the bus at Ivanhoe Station and was standing all the way then, it was packed. So you got used to that sort of thing.

So the service there, the air force boys weren't standing up for the?

Oh they were standing up to. But it was a black out, I had contacts, I was telling

08:00 Catherine [interviewer] about the Jennings who lived next door and one of the Jennings' boy he worked on the Warragul Railway Station and he used to take, we had a leather suitcase each and in the black out he'd take my case and disappear off into the dark and when they'd shunt a dog box on the train, onto the end of the train for more people to go in at Warragul. George would have the key to the door and he'd open the door and there my case would be sitting on a seat, so I had instant seat,

08:30 so that happened a few times, that was good. I had contacts in the right place there, that was the times when I could have a seat. But quite often, and there'd be mothers and children travelling well you gave them preference, but those, you seen those dog box carriages? They just carriages with a door each side and seats like that and limited amount of people can go in. But no I was very grateful to George, quite often.

Is it possible for you Bernice to give us a picture

09:00 **of what your social life was like, at the age of twenty, I mean what would you get up to when you weren't at work or on duty?**

I found I had two elderly relations living in the Caulfield area, never seen them, I just knew that they were my father's relations. So I had me street directory and I found out where they lived and I went and visited them. And

09:30 they were very pleased to see me and I was pleased to see them and it was good to catch up with them cause I never would have seen them otherwise. But we didn't do much, we had to do our washing and things like that and ironing of our clothes, you'd have a clean uniform on each day. So there wasn't exactly much social life but if you had a day off perhaps you'd go into the city on a tram or a train and then come back. And

10:00 day off, if I could, I went home, but we did quite a bit of sleeping when we had time off, you were on your feet all day and being in an office job it tried you out a bit. So the social life, there wasn't that much social life. Quite a few of the girls lived in the city and they could go home on their day off, but the country girls were sort of at a bit of a disadvantage. But there wasn't, once I got to Heidelberg there was

10:30 a bit more activity, they had what they called St John's Hall which was sort of a building and most nights there was a concert on for the troops, there'd be patients in their pyjamas there and different city social clubs would turn on events. There was always something doing at St John's Hall and it was good, they held their church services there and they held their concerts there and if there was something important to tell the world we had to go to St John's Hall. But that was at

11:00 Heidelberg, but Caulfield didn't have anything like that.

You mentioned the, was it the telegraphy or telephonists' signals, it's called signals?

Sig course.

Sig course, can you tell us a bit more about what you learnt there?

Oh I learnt the ranks of officers, I could at that stage, tell you bottom to the top of the army, navy and air force, which order they went in. We learnt codes of various sorts, we learnt to work on a telephone, and there was a lot of

11:30 military procedures we learnt, can't remember about them now. But we had an exercise book and that was full by the time we'd finished. And we marched, we marched like mad, which was good for us, this was at this school, this Ivanhoe Signal School, because they'd been, the Ivanhoe pupils had been evacuated to the country, so we had their school. And I got German measles there in the last week

12:00 of the course, I came out in a rash and there was hundreds of girls there and I thought I'd better report this. So they said, "Well go and see a doctor," and they told me what street to go up to in Ivanhoe. And I went up this street and he says, "You've got scarlet fever." I said, "I've had that." He said, "You can't have that again." He said, "You've got rubella." I said, "I've had that." He said, "You can have that again." And so I spent the last week down at Hampton in a convalescent house there and that house was

12:30 very interesting because years before there'd been a polio epidemic and Sister Kenny was a nurse who treated patients with a special view of putting them into water and the bathroom there was a room this size and in the middle of it was an elevated bath and you had to go up step into this big bath to have your daily dip. And your clothes were hanging behind the door in the corner and the towel was down at the bottom of the steps. So it was a bit primitive

13:00 but that was a week at Hampton I had there. And then when I came back to the camp it had finished and I had a week off home and then out to Heidelberg where I hadn't been before. And that was the beginning of a bit of action, you really worked out there.

Before we get to Heidelberg just a little bit more about Caulfield, the sort of work that you were doing there the atmosphere of that place?

You felt, you did domestic work

13:30 but you didn't mind, I mean everybody was there to do what they had to do. You spent quite a few hours in a room well away from anywhere else, where we peeled potatoes and carrots and prepared onions and things like that for the kitchen to cook the meals. And we swept the floors and we cleaned windows and we served meals, they came along in a container but you passed them around to the patients and you washed the dishes and made

14:00 their toast in the morning and things like that. We were just useful, and that was what it was all about at that stage. Cause sisters were in charge of the ward so that was what we did, you did it without complain because there was a war on and everybody had to hop in and help.

You mentioned how you, how basically the army took over the girls or the VAD, was it still the VAD after that or was it totally consumed by the army?

Oh it was totally consumed by the army but

14:30 we still, we still felt we were VAD so now we call ourselves VAD AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] the ones that joined later they were just plain AAMWS but we were a bit proud because we were sort of the 'early girls' sort of thing, and we were sort of a big older than the younger ones that came on later.

So what other changes did that ring in, I mean there's a new uniform for example, what else?

Well we didn't want to part with our navy blue, but we were allowed to wear our light blue

15:00 work uniforms until they wore out, and they did because we worked hard. But one thing, I came home one day and I met a girl I'd gone to school with and she had a bit of a 'chip on her shoulder' and she said, "That's where our rates went, buying you girls all new uniforms," and we didn't have a choice. But I mean she was a bit sour on that, but that was the only thing I heard that wasn't too good. But

15:30 we'd have preferred to stay in navy blue but it was more economical, everybody in the one uniform, but we had our red cross and that distinguished us from the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] and we were, we did get overseas whereas they, I think they did after the war ended, some went up to Moresby some AWAS went up there as whatever they did. But no we went where the action was, we weren't in front line but we were pretty close to it at times.

16:00 **So what was the AAMWS uniform then, I mean you had the red cross to distinguish yourselves, but otherwise what was the uniform?**

Oh in the wards we wore veils with a red cross on the front, a little, not as big as the sisters veils but we had, and then after a while we stopped wearing the veils, the ruling came out that you didn't need them. And we had the same khaki dresses, we had the same uniform except for our red cross,

16:30 and when we went overseas we had Australia on our shoulders.

And what else was basic sort of, your kit, what was issued to you other than your uniform?

We had, you were allowed, you had half a dozen working uniforms, you had a winter outfit which was a suit, a jacket and

17:00 a skirt and you had one summer, this is once we got into khaki, we had one summer dress and a hat, just a felt hat. We weren't sorry to see the last of the grey stockings we had brown stockings, lyal, no nylon

in those days and lace up shoes, good quality shoes. And we had two pairs, one on and one off sort of thing. And you'd have leather gloves

17:30 and we had a small wallet and that was that. But when we went overseas we got lots of tropical stuff, an awful lot of tropical stuff. That's right we were allowed singlets and nickers normally, buttons no elastic there was a war on couldn't get the rubber. And you just sort of, everybody was all the same, hair two inches from the collar, skirts thirteen inches from the ground, it

18:00 was regulation and you just stuck with it. Some girls used to have long hair which they let down when they could but they got hauled over the coals, we didn't have sergeants and corporals, there was nothing when we were VADs but that all came in when we were in the army, in khaki. I never went to a rookie school because I went to the Signals School and they said that would be enough. So they'd have a month at a rookie school at Darley, they had one there that they all had to go through.

18:30 **Okay, just you want to get onto Heidelberg I know, before that just a sort of a picture of Melbourne at that time, I mean you mentioned Warragul and how life just went on, it was a country town and the industry here?**

Yeah.

How about Melbourne in '42 yeah when the Japanese threat is so much more pronounced, what's the atmosphere like here, there sorry in Melbourne?

Here in Warragul or in Melbourne?

Oh well both, let's talk about both?

Well the blackout business

19:00 was the most noticeable I reckon and they had coupons, you had a ration of butter and tea, can't remember about sugar, clothing. We had a little card with coupons on, that we could use when we came home to help the family with their butter and things like that. But people did without, you just took it as life, and

19:30 we would try on our day off, to go and have a good meal in the city, you could eat in a café or something like that and you'd have a good square meal, what was available. But food at Heidelberg was good, it was good at Caulfield to, it wasn't fancy it was basic but people didn't live high in those days because that was the way it was, everybody was sort of in the same boat.

20:00 I can't think of anything else unless you ask some more questions.

I'll try. All right just to clarify how long were you at, it was one month at the Sig School, how long at Caulfield?

I think I was there for, not that long about three or four months I think, I think hmm.

And is there anything worth noting from that period?

Well it was an eye-opener, simply because

20:30 it was a different life to what I'd used, what I'd been used to, the city girls they were quite at home, that was the way they lived, catching trams and trains and things like that. Warragul you'd walk, if you wanted to go somewhere you walked, did a bit of walking there looking up those two relatives that I found. We used to go to church on Sunday, filled in an evening and you were treated very respectfully at church because you were in uniform, which was good.

21:00 But the social life, nobody had much social life in those days, you was just sort of too busy getting on with the war effort, that's what you always had something to do to help win the war.

How do you think the general public responded to women such as yourself in uniform?

Just, they were used to it, especially in the city,

21:30 it was okay, I sort of looked up to a bit in the country cause there weren't that many girls in uniform. This is just a bit out of the way but when the war was over and I came home, one kid said to another, "Look at that Japanese lady, she's yellow." Well we were on Atebrin for six months and we were yellow. So that was afterwards, but no there was a lot of service women

22:00 and they had a servicewomen's club in DeGraves Street, where you could go spend a night or whatever. And there was clubs, Duckboard Club and all those sort of things where you could go where they catered for service people. And the DeGraves places was women only but you could stay at other places, YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] and things like that. So there was always somewhere and when the Americans came they sort of more or less took over these things, and I was always a bit wary of the 'Yanks'

22:30 but some of the girls I know they married Americans, some worked out some didn't. But we always, they were always sort of skiting sort of, sort of thing. So we sort of stuck together, we Australians, but some of the girls got on very well with them cause the Yanks were pretty free with their gifts. Well they had

much better food than us and they had a

23:00 spot up where we were at Lae, where you could buy things that you couldn't get, we got sunglasses up there and things like that, that you couldn't get at home. So they were a bit more liberal the Americans were. Anyway I didn't have much to do with the Yanks in Victoria before I went away.

You mentioned the Duckboard Club?

Yes.

What was that?

That was a services club in Flinders Street, I never went there but I knew it was there.

23:30 We used to eat, when we had a day off and couldn't go home we'd go and eat at one of the cafes and have a good meal and a good talk and a look around the shops, not that you could buy anything because we had things provided in the army. But on Sunday we often went into Wesley Church where they had a social club there and I met quite a few interesting people that I talk to. In fact I met one chappie he was Tasmanian and he

24:00 had an unusual name, Porch, and I said, "Oh there's Porches in Warragul," and he said, "I've got some Porch relations in Warragul." He said, "I'll have to go and see them." So some how or rather we came to an agreement, I was coming home on a certain date, he was air force and he had the day off and he said, "I'll come to." And we got home in the evening and he'd contacted these people and they met him at the station and he had his day with them and I had a day with my family and I never saw him again. Anyway years and years later, like

24:30 about four or five years ago my granddaughter got married on Phillip Island and her, they got married in a little church at Newhaven and it had been a boys home place and there was this nice little chapel and they got married there. And the minister's name was Porch and I said to him, I told him the story about bringing this chap home he said, "You won't believe that." He said, "He's my father and he's still alive

25:00 in Tasmania and I'll tell him I met you." So isn't that an interesting little story?

Hmm?

Yes, so I don't know if he's still alive now, but this minister Jackie wanted him to marry them and he did, he had been at Phillip Island but he'd moved away but he still had a holiday home there, so he was quite willing to come back and marry them. But I thought that was a bit interesting, yeah, so back to the story now.

Back to the story, which one?

25:30 Your turn.

My turn, I'm trying to keep up with you Bernice?

Slow me down a bit.

You were talking about the Americans, said that you were a bit wary of them, why the wariness?

Well there was a murder, somewhere Albury or somewhere. Somewhere there was a murder and an American was blamed for it, so they advised us to be very careful, cause girls were out on their own and that sort of thing. And the Negro Americans they had a bad name, so you had to sort of be careful.

26:00 So that was it, but they, there were some good ones amongst them, I can tell you later on another story about them.

Okay, well lets talk about Heidelberg and what the set up there was and what your duties would have been?

It was a big place Heidelberg Military Hospital, it also houses the 6th RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Hospital, air force hospital. And there was a big switchboard,

26:30 there was four board and it went right along a wall and oh those plug in things. And there were four girls on at a time and we worked around the clock and it was a busy switchboard. And I was there until I went overseas, which would be…oh I went over in '44, I suppose I had about three years there.

27:00 It was good, we worked as a team, we used to have to take, we didn't take messages but we passed things onto important people, there was a Major Rank, he was one of the first ones to get into plastic surgery and he, we'd have to ring him up, plug him into this that and the other. And it was quite a lot went on that we didn't know anything about, we just plugged them in and connected them up. But it was

27:30 an important job and you had to know what you were doing.

So how many girls would there have been on the switchboard?

Four at a time, and we worked around the clock, so sometimes we'd do a broken shift, or you'd do sort of eight till twelve and then have lunch off and come back and do another bit and then somebody would fill in that time and then do a bit into the evening and then there was the night shift which sort of went on till, must have been till daylight,

28:00 perhaps seven or eight, something like that. We didn't like the night shift because you just slept in the daytime and worked at night. But we were in the older part of the hospital on the duckboards, everything was raised, there was a cover over the top and the plumbing went along like that and 'goggle', 'goggle in the night'. But it was good, you knew you were doing your 'bit'. And we, there were

28:30 big huts that we slept in, Nissen huts [prefabricated dwellings] and things like that, and there was a big mess, sometimes when we were off duty they'd get us to work in the mess serving up meals and things like that. I remember Christmas time there was a bag of peas that big and anybody who went near the mess shelled some peas, didn't have them pre-shelled in those days. No it was good you met lots of people, some you knew some you didn't and you mixed

29:00 with all sorts. It was a great leveller, social leveller, you sort of met people, some came from high places and some came from low places, but we were all in it together, there were hundreds of girls there.

Was it a matter of the city girls and country girls sticking together or everyone sort of?

Oh we merged, yes one of my best friends, she came from Sorrento, she was on the switchboard and I came from Warragul. She rang Sorrento, 138

29:30 and I rang Warragul 138 and she was at Caulfield with me and she went to the Sig's School and she went overseas when I did but she went to Morotai and I went to New Britain. So we still correspond, she lives in Queensland now but were still in touch.

What's her name?

Phil, she's Phil Phillips now but she was Phil Stevens in those days. So you make friends there and there lifetime friends.

So who would be calling

30:00 **in and out, what sort of messages and business was going on?**

Oh you'd get one from outside, you didn't know who it was and they'd ask for so and so and you'd plug it into whoever it was that they wanted. No you didn't listen into their conversations and sometimes it was very busy. And sometimes you'd make a phone call out for one of the officers, you just did, as the little lights lit up you plugged them in and

30:30 put them through.

Can you describe the board for us, what it looked like?

If you go to the museum, I saw one exactly the same. It was a board and it had these little clips that came down and the light came on, little thing, clip and the light would come on. And you'd plug into that number and answer the call, and you had a headphone on and you'd speak into that. And I can't remember, it's so long ago.

31:00 But once I got up to the islands it was a little portable thing that big, it gave you shocks.

And how would you answer those calls?

Heidelberg Military Hospital, hmm and the number was JX1231, I'll never forget that.

And there was a RAAF hospital there was well?

Yes but that was attached and they went through our switchboard. But there was a post office there,

31:30 around the corner, I think there was a private phone there I think, but you could buy your stamps, it was like a normal post office. It was like a little town, they had everything there, there was a canteen where you could buy biscuits and soft drinks. I used to buy pipe tobacco for me uncle because tobacco was a bit hard to get, I don't know whether they thought do I smokes a pipe or not, but still I used to get it for my uncle. So, but it was just

32:00 a little township, it wasn't little it was big, but it was on it own. Then they built what they called the new building, which was east and west one, two, three, four, which was a bit separated from the duckboards. But there was trenches amongst the duckboards where if Heidelberg got bombed you could get down. And some of the poor chaps who had war neurosis, there was a few suicides down there. But

32:30 it was just like a young city there, we had everything you didn't really have to leave the place to get things.

So how much did you learn about the sorts of, you mentioned some of those men who sort of had shell shock or whatever you want to call it, but how much did you get to learn about the patients?

Oh quite often somebody who worked in that ward would say, “Oh so and so died last night.” We had a couple of suicides from the new building, what they called a surgical dresser, it had got too much for him and he jumped

33:00 off the top floor and that was that. And they got another surgical dresser to clean up after him and he did the same thing within a week. We never ever sent another surgical dresser to west four after that, or we didn’t want to. But that was just the tragedy of war, those things happen cause you know they’d see some pretty stressful stuff. The surgical dresser would prepare a patient for an operation, and they were just men, just soldiers.

So I guess you were getting men who were coming back from

33:30 **New Guinea?**

Yes to Heidelberg, I’d go and visit the ones I knew. Yes it was full of Second World War patients and they had a lot there, badly injured ones. And they’d come, as I said to St John’s Hall to a concert and always in their pyjamas and dressing gown and they had to be mobile to go there. No if you

34:00 were doing something at Heidelberg you were sort of helping the war effort and that was what it was all about.

Did any men come through that you’d known previously from Warragul days?

Yes one of those Jennings I mentioned, Keith, he came back with a dermatitis, he was a major I think he got to, might have been captain, I can’t remember, he was in the officers ward anyway, and I’d go and visit him and we’d talk about Warragul days. And there was another fellow in the kitchen,

34:30 no he worked in the packs store, he was a Warragul bloke to and we’d come and chat to him about what we knew about home. And occasionally you’d see somebody that you knew and you’d go and visit them. But we were mostly working and those duckboards were long, I don’t know if they’ve still got them there or not, don’t know. But it was raised, it was pretty flat ground, I think it might of

35:00 been a bit boggy if it was pretty wet and the buildings were sort of up on, sort of that far off the ground.

Earlier you also mentioned that chap, the plastic surgeon, what was his name again?

Ben Rank.

So he was actually doing plastic surgery, sort of developing…?

In the early days, yes I’ve got a book on the duckboards, it’s somewhere there, one of those books there and they mention quite a bit about him, I’ve got

35:30 a few army books over there that I’ve gathered up. I picked up one in a book shop in Melbourne, it had a VAD on the front and I open it up and there’s me picture looking at me, so I got that and a few others. Somebody from Western Australia wrote a book and different other ones have written about army days so I’ve sort of got a few of them, there interesting reading.

So at the time how aware were you of the sort of work that was going on for example

36:00 **the plastic surgery work which is obviously quite a new thing at the time?**

Yes and there were others that were doing all sorts of good works that we didn’t know about, the girls in the wards they knew because they worked with those people but we were just on the switchboard. I never worked in a ward at Heidelberg, I helped out in the mess or mostly on the switchboard till I came back from the islands and then I got put into bed states, which was an office job. I had bother getting out

36:30 from that, so anyway that’s later on.

So you’re a private aren’t you at this point?

I stayed a private yes, I wasn’t officer material.

So who were you answerable to at Heidelberg, who was your officer there?

Who was in charge? Oh, Peg Lewis, her name

37:00 she was a lieutenant, there were others, Barbara Morgan Taylor, there’s a Morgan Taylor in Melbourne I don’t know whether he’s a judge or a magistrate or something, but he was same family. Yes they were officers there before I went away. And there were lots of sergeants, they kept us in order and that sort of thing. But no there wasn’t much trouble, occasionally at night

37:30 when your on night duty you’d get a call from MPs [Military Police] in Melbourne, one girl got caught doing something and please would an officer come and get them. Occasionally we had that sort of thing, but there was always the odd one that stepped out of line.

Can I ask a bit more about that, what was considered stepping out of line?

Well this girl was under the pier at Port Melbourne with an American, that's stepping out of line isn't it?

Sure?

38:00 So I had to wake up an officer and she went and sorted it out. So there wasn't much of that though cause there were Military Police in the city and they just sort of kept an eye on the fellows so the girls were pretty straight.

How did the Aussies, the Aussie fellows seem to be dealing with the American presence?

There was a feeling there, yes.

38:30 I didn't have much to do with, oh I didn't have anything to do with it but I believe there were quite a few arguments in hotels over whatever they argued over. So I can't comment on it cause I didn't know, I didn't have much to do with the Yanks.

Did you have a boyfriend at all at that time?

No I didn't have, lots of them didn't have boyfriends, I was waiting till I got up to the island and I met my husband up there. But no I went out

39:00 with a few fellows at different times, just in a group but I didn't have a boyfriend, I knew lots of chaps but there was no socialising.

So how often would you get out, I mean was there leave, did you have weekend off?

Oh you'd have a day off a week and you had a bit extra when you'd done night duty, you'd sort of have to sleep and then you'd have a day off sort of thing. So

39:30 yes you got a day off regularly at Heidelberg.

And what would you do with that day?

Oh either go into the city or sleep or go home, go out with other girls who had days off. We went to a few picture shows, we saw, took two sessions but we saw 'Gone with the Wind' that first came out about that time. We saw one half and then we had to go back on duty,

40:00 so then we went and saw the other half. And we'd go for walk, cause around Heidelberg in those days it was all paddocks and you could go for a walk out into the country. I remember going for a walk once with a few girls and we came across this little old cemetery stuck out, oh out from Heidelberg, cause Heidelberg was the edge of the city in those days. And here was a Cypress tree growing right up through a crack in the middle of this grave,

40:30 it must have been one of the early graves around Melbourne, and I was rather impressed with that. But I suppose they've covered it over with houses now, don't know. But that sort of thing was a form of entertainment, you just went for a walk in the country. Took very few photos cause you couldn't get film, there was, I've got a book there with the official photos in, we got the occasional film. I didn't have a camera at that stage but another girl had a camera

41:00 and when her film ran out we put mine in, you had to write to Kodak and they'd send you a film. But by the time it got there, it took a while, like months and sometimes it didn't even get there because there was a war on and things didn't go to their destinations quite often, so that's why we used to buy the official photos, cause they were good pictures.

And if you went into town what would you get up to there?

Eat,

41:30 cause you'd have limited time and you had to be back by a certain time. You could get a midnight pass, oh once in a while but then again you'd have to get up early the next morning and it was usually ten thirty you had to be in. There was a guard at the gate and you had to show your leave pass each time you came and went. Although at Heidelberg once it was early '44, came home for the day and there was a bush fire up at...

Tape 4

00:31 **Yeah you were telling us a story?**

Yeah about that fire?

Yeah, from the top if you don't mind?

Yes I had a day off and I had to catch the train at Warragul which was early evening but the train didn't turn up and it didn't turn up and then we'd heard there'd been a bush fire up at Maul and the train couldn't get through and I was suppose to be on duty at midnight. Anyway it did come

01:00 quite late in the evening, can't remember what time, and got on it and everything had signed off at Flinders Street, but they did run one train, first of all it went out to Reservoir and came back to Clifton Hill and then it went out Heidelberg way. And it was after midnight and the guard was asleep at the gate and I snuck in and my friend had covered up for me on the switchboard and I wasn't even missed. So I snuck in to the switchboard

01:30 and did the rest of my time there, and I wasn't even missed cause that guard was asleep on the gate. But they had quite bad fires further up, so that was that, there was quite, I could have been hauled over the coals for being absent without leave and etc etc. But looking back that was a bit surprising then. Oh I had to walk from the railway station, which was about a mile to the Heidelberg Hospital in the black out, that took time.

02:00 And I didn't disturb the guard as I went past him.

So what would have been the worst that would happen if you had been AWL [Absent Without Leave] or…?

Oh I don't know, confined to barracks I suppose. Being reprimanded, being told I was a naughty girl, I wasn't on duty, I wasn't doing me bit for King and Country, it was in those days. But no I got away with it,

02:30 no I was a law abiding person normally but that was out of my hands, officially I shouldn't have gone to the country, I should of stayed within the bounds of the city I think, but anyway I got away with it.

And how well behaved were the rest of the girls at Heidelberg?

Oh sometimes they went AWL and snuck in. Pretty good but we were young and spirited, you just don't know. Some of the girls, no I didn't have anything to do with

03:00 badly behaved girls. We were well cared for, they kept an eye on us, you didn't step out of line, you had to be proud of your uniform and what you were doing, which we mostly did.

So who were the girls that you got close to there, did you sort of form some strong friendships there?

On the switchboard there's the one Phil Phillips from Sorrento, there was two,

03:30 one Yarragon girl actually, the other one worked in the diet kitchen, she'd gone to school before I had a the Warragul High School and I got to know her quite well, Mary Coleman, now she's in a nursing home in Ballarat and she doesn't know, she doesn't know me any more, you know she's got past that stage. There were three Benton girls, two sisters and a cousin and the cousin I

04:00 lost touch with, but the two sister's one of them, they married prisoners of war, when they came back, one of them farmed out here at Warragul, although a Melbourne girl, so out Shady Creek way and she's since died but her husbands still alive. And the other one she married a chap called Smith down at Locke and there still down there and we swap Christmas Cards. There are other girls that came and went but I didn't have much to do with them.

04:30 One of them got to be a policewoman after the war, can't think what the others were, it's so long ago and so much has happened since. But you made friends and you stayed friends and I go back to reunions, although I didn't go this last year because I was in Sydney on a trip. But I don't like travelling alone in the city any more because if I trip over and go flat on me face, as I quite often do I'm a long way from home. So I said,

05:00 "If anybody else is going I'll go with them otherwise I'll give it a miss." But the returned service women are having a sixtieth get together in June and I've twisted my daughter's arm, I said, "Will you come down to Melbourne with me?" and she said, "She would." Cause we went to the fiftieth one in Sydney, we were ten years younger then and I went with a group from, that I was away in the islands with and a husband and one of the girls has died and another ones nudging ninety so

05:30 were not going back there again. But I enjoyed the fifty one because I caught up with a lot of Sydney people that I hadn't seen for years and years, so I'd like to go to this sixtieth one. But the city to me has no appeal, I can't handle the trams and the trains, well I'd rather be with somebody than go alone.

Back then at Heidelberg, or that period did it seem that there was a difference in outlook between the girls from the country say

06:00 **and the city girls?**

No we were all pals together, yep. The city girls had the advantage that they could go home, but no we were all there together. No they were a great bunch of girls.

And what were relations like between the men and women at Heidelberg?

Good, yes we were all buddies, same when we went overseas we were all mates, quite a few of us married chaps up there, we didn't marry them

06:30 up there we came home and decided then.

And so with the switchboard, I'm just trying to get an idea of the, you've talked about the duckboards and the four girls on the board. And idea of how your positioned in relation to the rest of the, I guess you were sort of in the administrative section, how did it all tie in with everything else that was going on?

Well the administrative, the office girls they were, they stuck together cause they worked together and we were away from them, distance wise, our

07:00 switchboard was, oh the dental surgery was just next door but we didn't see them, but there was the works for the switchboard opposite us and it was going clickety clack all the time. And then there was the passage way and then we were there in an enclosed space, quite a descent size room. But when you were on duty you were on duty, you had your mind on the job, you had to do what you were there to do. So occasionally we'd see, people would call in, somebody want to make,

07:30 book a phone call to the country which we did a bit.

So what, what other sorts of calls were being made out, were patients able to call out?

No usually they expected to use the public phone, but we would sort of make exceptions occasionally but it wasn't the rule, it was mostly business calls. I met a few people that called into the switchboard,

08:00 I met a chappie from South Gippsland that knew a lot of my relations down there and we, he used to come and have a yarn. There was another fellow, he was a patient in a ward and he used to ring up on the ward phone, which he wasn't suppose not to do and talk about Warragul, I think he was lonely. But they weren't suppose to do that sort of thing, it was business.

And how reliable was the equipment, did that need much maintenance?

08:30 Oh there was a man on duty, he checked it all the time, he'd have to. But he went that side and there was a door and we were on this side and there was a door. And each time there was a phone call made you'd hear 'clickety clack', it was sort of connecting up, but that was the works of the thing, it took a whole room.

So what sort of problems might you encounter with the technology of what you were dealing with?

I don't remember any problems,

09:00 you'd get an electric shock occasionally, it was sort of sparks. I can't remember any problems, they made sure it ran smoothly, don't remember any power cut outs or anything like that, can't answer that.

Well you have right, electric shocks; I mean what?

Oh just sparks, the one up at the island it was battery operated and you'd get kicks from that, when there was a thunder storm

09:30 you went very carefully. I got a big blast in the ear once, cause you got a lot of thunderstorms up in the tropics. But it was, I think if your hands were damp, cause you were sweaty, it was very hot and I think that sort of 'static electricity'. But that was a one person on at a time.

I notice in the notes we've got something about an Easter break, was that the fire story?

10:00 Oh the fire story was just an ordinary run of the week.

But the, yeah something about getting some leave for Easter?

Oh I got leave one Easter, how do you know about that? Oh you've been talking to Elizabeth.

That's right?

No my mother had a friend who lived up at Yandoit which was out of Daylesford and she thought it would be nice if we could go together up to stay with aunty Flow.

10:30 Anyway I had it all arranged that I could pick up the leave pass when I went off duty. And well some how or rather somebody had slipped up and the leave pass wasn't ready, and this was first thing in the morning, I had to go and find the officer in charge. And I got her in the ablutions block, she had her teeth out and she couldn't argue very well with me and, "You should be sleeping, you should do this, you should do that." And all she had to do was sign this thing, well she did eventually

11:00 I think to get rid of me. And so I had me weekend, cause there was a bus going at a certain time from Flinders Street Station and I had to get into the city by that time you see and my mother would be waiting for me. So I did I had me weekend up at Yandoit and it was very nice thank you, but that was the little incident then. It was Easter and I had the Easter off, I was coming off night duty you see and had the extra time off. So that was that little mishap. But we had interesting little antidotes at different times.

11:30 Can't think of anything, life went along pretty smoothly. When you went to St John's Hall you had to be properly dressed but I had a pair of black slippers, which are very comfy, so I used to sneak into St

John’s Hall in me slippers, and you were suppose to have your shoes on and well laced up you see, but I’d go in me comfy slippers, but nobody looked. Little things like that you made fun of. And various other things, can’t think of them

12:00 at the moment, I’ll try to, but I’ve had a holiday you see. I laid some pictures out before I went away, had the holiday, me grandchildren were here when I got back, there young married couple and they only went yesterday, so I’m still trying to…

Well there’s no rush, we’ve got all day Bernice?

So that’s why I’m a bit confused.

What were the, tell us a bit about the, your living quarters there, what the huts were like and also?

12:30 There were blocks they called A, B, C and D and there were two beds in each block, each room and there was a whole passage down the middle and there was rooms up and down. You roomed with somebody, and usually somebody that you worked with. Anyway there was a bit of a hiccup, I’d been on leave and my friend had moved out for some reason or other, and I came into this room and it reeked of smoke, and I thought which bed do I sleep in, nobody was there,

13:00 it was late at night, ‘eeny meeny miny mo’. Anyway I climbed into this bed and I’d climbed into the other girls bed and she was a smoker, she said, “You’re in my bed.” I said, “I can’t help that I didn’t know which bed to get into,” anyway I wasn’t with her for long. But another ward, room I was in it was a big hut and there was beds right up and down and they had portable wardrobes, one side had shelves and the other where you could hang your garments and they used that as partitions.

13:30 I was in that one for quite a while, I was in the blocks with two beds in the bit, but they moved you around a bit, somebody would move out and they’d alter it. But it was quite comfortable, it was good if you got in with a mate but this smoking one, I wasn’t too happy with but it didn’t last long. And it was all right in the blocks because the shower was enclosed in the same building. But the one where the wardrobes

14:00 were partitions you had to go down a duckboard to this shower place and oh it was cold because it was open to the weather underneath and in the winter it was jolly cold. But you had a quick shower and got out of it. But you were used to doing that sort of thing, you know you roughed it and you just used to taking what was available.

What sort of personal effects would you be able to take with you and have in your hut?

14:30 You had your army issue, personal effects, me mother gave me a New Testament, which I didn’t open. Oh you had family photos, if you had a wall you put your family photos up. But when you were in some of these places at Heidelberg there was nowhere to put the, but once we went overseas we had our family photos. Didn’t have much,

15:00 you got most of it provided, you travelled light, because you didn’t know from one day to another whether you’d still be there or moved on. So I didn’t have much in the way of personal effects, not that I can remember anyway.

And what about sort of getting along, or having anything to do with girls, the WAAAFS [Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force] or the AWAS?

Oh you definitely stuck to your own sort, you were

15:30 friendly with the others but it sort of, you were one family, or another family, that was the way you did it, you stuck with your own lot. So that was it, hmm you were quite friendly but there was ‘us and them’.

Was there, did there seem to be a pecking order in terms of those different services at all, or did some girls maybe think they were?

Oh there was no nastiness, cause there was the officers and the other ranks and the privates

16:00 and you did as you were told sort of thing. If an officer or one of the ORs [Other Ranks] said, “Do that,” you did it without question, you didn’t argue, you just did it. And as for saluting officers in the street we didn’t really do that, but if we were on parade you did, it was just natural to do that sort of thing. And you didn’t argue with an officer, no. But we’ve got amongst our RSL

16:30 members, I went to school with her, she was an officer, Edna Cropley, you interviewing her?

Not that I know of?

I don’t know Ron Blair our president he said, “I put fourteen names in,” I don’t know if Edna was one of them or not. But I know Jean around the corner was.

So Jean, yeah I think were interviewing Jean next week?

On the 5th.

Yeah?

How I know, that's my daughter's birthday.

Okay, sorry, was Jean with your lot or…?

No we were at Caulfield together

17:00 and then we went separate ways, Jean went up to Northern Territory, up to Catherine where there was a lot of action quite early in the piece and she's got quite an interesting story there, and I think she was on troop trains and she went to Japan after the war, no hers is a very interesting story. So you'll have a good time there.

Like we are today?

And she's a good girl, oh she's not a girl, she's a month younger than me so we're no girls,

17:30 but we've known each other since state school days.

Just one or two final questions on that Heidelberg time there. How was the food?

Not very exciting but edible, I had a friend, she's a Warragul girl and she said, "I was fat cause I just ate biscuits, I didn't like the army food," so she'd buy biscuits at the canteen and fill up on them. No I ate what was put in front of me, oh you got mince and you got chops

18:00 and you got sausages, you got a lot of roasts, you were well fed, it was good food, but it was nothing fancy.

Now what about alcohol did that play a part amongst the girls?

I was never a drinker, some of them liked their drinks, only at Christmas time would they have it on the table. Once I got up to the island you got two bottles a week but I used to give that to the fellows cause I didn't like it. And you also got cigarettes, I tried them but I didn't like them either.

18:30 So I didn't worry about them.

And during your time in Melbourne were you sort of keeping tabs on what was going on up in the islands, were you sort of informed?

As much as we could, when that Centaur boat, hospital ship went down [sunk 14th May 1943] there was quite a few of the staff who had family on that, one of the girls I knew her sister was on it and one of the officers, Major O'Donnell his sister was a sister on it.

19:00 And there were others who knew people who were on it. So it really rocked the place, we knew there was a war on then, we knew there was a war on anyway, but it sort of hit home.

Cause it was a hospital ship was it?

Yes, yes. But I was still on the switchboard at that stage.

Okay so you were at Heidelberg sort of 40, up till what?

Up to '44,

19:30 left Heidelberg August '44 and we got equipped with our tropical stuff, lots of it. Trousers, safari jackets, raincoat, oh that hat, boots, lots of tropical, oh mosquito net, camp stretcher, gas mask, tin hat,

20:00 oh lots of stuff, that sort of stuff, and a tin trunk, kit bag. Got a 'veloce' which is a thing that opened out with pockets in it, all sorts of things.

So had the move been in the offering for some time or did it all sort of happen rather abruptly?

Every now and again they'd send a draft away and the girls would go.

20:30 But this was a big draft, the one I went they went to Morotai, Solomons, Bougainville, New Guinea, we didn't know we were going to New Britain until we got to Lae and then we knew we were heading further afield. So we got all that and where did we go, oh we went to Camp Pell and we were in a tent for a few days while they sorted us all out, and then we went off on a troop

21:00 train.

So with Heidelberg did that mean you were sort of having to train people up there for the switchboard or were there enough girls to?

We just left, I suppose they trained more when we went. Once you were told what you were doing you did it, they didn't say you'll do it next week, they'd just tell you and that was it.

So Camp Pell in tents?

That was near the zoo, we went to sleep to the tune of roaring lions.

And then it was train up to

21:30 **Sydney?**

Yes we got on the train to Sydney and…

What was that journey like?

It was all right, we stopped at Albury cause you had to change trains there. They fed you on a platform, I don't know who provided the meal, whether it was the local Red Cross ladies or whether it was the army but you got a meal on a platform when you had to stop. And then we ended up at Ingleburn, which was out of Sydney a bit

22:00 and we were there for a month, where we 'broke in our boots', we marched and we marched and we marched. And we roughed it a bit there, I think we had mattresses with, they were not very big mattresses, I think they might have had straw or something, they were a bit primitive anyway. And we were there for a month training and I could ring home, there was a public phone there and you couldn't say anything you just said, "Hello Mum I'm still here," sort of thing. And then

22:30 when we did leave it was in the middle of the night, dead of night, midnight. But we were there for a month and we marched and we marched, it was very interesting, pretty country there. And we got blisters, but we had to wear the tropical stuff to get used to it and get ourselves organised. So I don't think we did anything but march I think. I don't know how we filled our days in I can't remember but we were, I think we were given lectures, that's right

23:00 on tropical living and they started us on our Atebrin and all that sort of stuff. Adaprin was the tablets, so that we didn't get malaria.

So what was the plan for you continue that sort of work, but up in the islands?

Yes I was still going to be a switch-boarder. There was another girl from Heidelberg with me and we had a Sydney girl to, there was just the three of us on this switchboard once we got to New Britain but we worked with other girls while we were at Lae with the 2/7th. But we

23:30 didn't do night duty, a fellow took over each night, they didn't like us working in the dead of night in the tropics, so that was it. And we stayed at Ingleburn for a month and then we took off on this troop train, we went in a bus first to Hornsby and then we got into a troop train and we had to change at Brisbane and then we got off at Townsville. But it took us the best part of a week to get there,

24:00 stopping and starting, no showers or anything like that, you just got smellier as you went. I had the sense when we were in Sydney to buy a khaki towel and it was great, it didn't show the dirt. We were hot and we had a sleeping compartment, bunks like that and you could stand up or sit bent over or lie down on your bunk, so we did that for a week and the novelty wore off pretty quick.

24:30 But we were all in there together, so.

Had you spent, you did get into Sydney, the city itself?

Oh we used to go, we stayed at Ingleburn for a month and we would go in, they'd give us time off and we'd go in and eat. We did go up, we had what they call 'final leave', well we couldn't go home, we Victorians, so there was a group of us and one Sydney girl, cause she knew where to go, we went up to the Blue Mountains for the weekend.

25:00 And we had a weekend up at Leura and it was beaut, it was cold because we had summer, tropical clothes, but it was great, it was a break and that was final leave for the Sydney ones, the local ones could go home and then off we went. But you didn't know actually when you were going to leave, cause it was all secret.

But this is pretty much your first time out of Victoria, is that right?

Yeah.

So that must have been an

25:30 **eye opener?**

I hadn't been any further than north from Melbourne, oh I was definitely a new chum. But oh when I first joined up I was homesick, you know I missed the family but after I'd been in a while, you were all in together, sort of thing. And I was very interested in it, it was beaut but you couldn't turn me loose in Sydney, on me own, I got lost. I mean I didn't get a chance to get lost, I was always with somebody who knew where they were going. And we went to a

26:00 few films and news reels and things like that. And the interesting thing we saw in news reel, in Sydney, on Gippsland on the bushfires, it was, it seemed like home. But we just sort of filled in our time, saw things and talked and ate, anything that wasn't army food sort of thing.

So what was considered a

26:30 **good meal, you'd get out of the camp and you'd go into town to have a feed, what would you?**

Oh steak, veggies, anything that took our fancy. A lot of the girls went for oysters but I never like oysters, oh they reckon a feed of oysters was wonderful, my husband liked them too, but I never did. So we just enjoyed ourselves, because we didn't know what the future held.

So you really had no idea heading up to Sydney and beyond that you were destined for the islands, or did you?

We knew we were going overseas

27:00 but we didn't know, we just didn't know, they didn't tell you, it was sort of secret, and loose lips sink ships you know was drummed into us.

In what ways, was that just sort of?

You just didn't talk freely about what you were doing, or where you were, anything like that because you just didn't know what would it would be passed onto.

So is this something that was inculcated into

27:30 **you through the army?**

Oh yes well you felt responsible, you know because the Coral Sea battle was on at the time and ships were being sunk and all sorts of things were happening, and you just had to be very discrete.

And did that mean that people tended to ask less questions and not to pry as much?

Oh they didn't ask you and you didn't tell them. No everybody was war minded, 'we've got to win', cause they had

28:00 a couple of submarines in Sydney Harbour didn't they, little miniature ones, I can't remember what stage of the piece it was but they did get a couple of miniature subs in Sydney Harbour. So it had come pretty close.

So what were your parents saying to you when you were heading north, I mean they must of, I mean your father especially would have had some idea that you were probably destined to go overseas where the action was?

I can't remember, they accepted it, you know we all accepted what our lot in life was

28:30 and well, Dad's been through the thick of it in the First World War. My mother, she contemplated getting me out of it because her health wasn't the best, but I'd have been pretty angry if she had because it was the adventure of a lifetime.

Okay so you've sort of got us in the train going up to Queensland?

Yeah it was fascinating, look I'd never seen any of the things that we did see

29:00 before, so it was really beaut. And when we changed trains at Brisbane, at midnight, my brother was in the army and he was at Brisbane but he didn't know I was there and I didn't know where he was and we just went from one platform to another, so that was that.

And where did you finally end up, on that train trip?

Townsville, and we were there for a few days and that was an eye opener, shark nets and things like that, and

29:30 the tropics, we weren't there for that many days but the bit that got me you went down to the water, the beach and here was tin washed up on the shore, not shells but tins. Some were split open, jam was coming out, they were from sunk ships, some were rusty and nothing had it label on cause it had been washed off, but it was a bit of an eye opener, you realised there was a war on and here were all these tins up and down the shore.

30:00 **And Townsville, the city itself what was that like if you can recall?**

I don't think we even went into the town, we were out at Castle Hill which is sort of a bit north of the city and we were camped there. I don't think we were there very many days, and when we did go, I remember me doing me washing and taking it wet with me, was mouldy when we got there but that's beside the point. We went on the Taroona which had been a coastal vessel

30:30 plying between Tasmania and Melbourne and they said it had a flat bottom, and I believed it, we all got seasick. It was a troop ship and they told us later that we'd gone over towards Bougainville and we were dodging Jap submarines somewhere there. But it took I think it was six days and oh we were really sea sick and we lay on the deck with our strawberry baskets, which were little cardboard boxes waxed on the inside. And

31:00 they said, "The women shouldn't be lying there with the men," but the men and the women didn't care who they Laed with as long as they could lay their head on their may west, which was our lifejacket, you

had to carry that with you everywhere. And we, oh we revived a bit later in the piece. When we got to Milne Bay there was an incident, we were down in our cabin, there was five in a four bunk cabin, one slept on the floor and one there and one there. And this Negro American, we were

31:30 pulled up at the wharf and he appeared, he was looking for women, and somebody let out a scream and the military police removed him, that could have been an incident but it wasn't. And we, the Americans threw us candy, sweets to us, cause we'd been seasick and our tummies were empty, so we tried their candy, we were recovering by that time. But it was rather an enlightening trip, it was something I'd never done before

32:00 in me life and I wouldn't like that trip again, but it was good.

Who else was sailing on the Taroona?

Hmm?

Who else was sailing?

Oh it was a troop ship, our unit was sailing there, the 2/7th and 2/8th girls we were all there and why they pulled into Milne Bay, I don't know, but it pulled in there and then we went on up to Lae.

Right so at what stage had you been sort of assigned to a unit, to a battalion?

Unit yes.

When did

32:30 **that happen?**

We knew we were going to the 2/8th but we were staging with the 2/7th which was the bigger hospital. And it was, I think it was seven miles out of Lae on the banks of the Busu River and you could see where things had been bombed, there was only just a big, I think it was an air force hangar that seemed to be the only standing building, course there was army stuff there. But it had really been battered, Lae was, the coconut tree with no top on it

33:00 and belted things down. And they showed us where the battalion was that had crossed the Butibum River I think it was, which was the one that was into Lae. And it was very eye opening, you realised that's where the action was. And we went past a mountain and it had holes in the side and they were Jap foxholes, Mount Lunaman. And up on the top they had the war cemetery, I went to that later on. But you could see it had been belted around. And

33:30 we went out to, a long dusty track out to the 2/7th hospital and there we stayed for months and worked there until our hospital at Jacquinot Bay was built, they had to build it and they said we were the furthest north of any AAMWS at that stage. But we didn't go there till after Christmas, the next March, so we had a few months at Lae.

34:00 **That's the 2/7th?**

2/7th hmm.

So how long was it before you actually had to get into the nitty gritty of work, was there a period of establishing yourselves?

I think they threw us right in, there was no socialising, we sort of had to hop in and do things. And our building, there's two girls to a hut, to a compartment in a hut and it had hessian between us

34:30 sized craft which was sort of, I think it was tarred hessian that they made it out of, it was sort of round the outside and it didn't go up to the top, I think there's some pictures in that book and it had what they called sack sack roof which was coconut palms that they'd made into the roof. And they weren't permanent buildings cause they wore out in the tropics and they burnt them down and rebuild them. So that was it and we called it home, we were there for a few months, I planted a garden outside.

35:00 I had a paw paw growing. So it was pretty rough under foot, cause it was near the river and it was all stony under foot and then you sort of went up a slope and there was a mess hut there and recreation hall there for us.

Right so the 2/7th was sort of, had been established first?

It was an established hospital.

Yep so other than, you said there were

35:30 **three of you, the switchboard operators who came on the?**

We came, but there was some of the 2/7th switchboard girls, they were there to.

Right and just on that ship, on the Taroona who else, was it the Taroona all the way to Lae or did you change at Milne Bay?

No we stayed from Townsville to Lae on the Taroona, it was just a stop, I don't know why it was, I mean there we were just on the ship, we were passengers. But it was a loaded ship, it was mostly soldiers and there was us girls on the,

36:00 I think we were on the top deck, I can't remember where we were now.

So was there anyone else that came with you also destined for the 2/7th, that was going to work there?

Well there was staff already up there and Matron Johns who was the matron of the Ironeer Hospital in Melbourne she was in charge of it at that time, she had a very good name. And then I think, Matron Brindley who took over from her came up with us or whether she was already there, I don't know, and I can't even remember who the

36:30 CO was there. But yes there was quite a lot of us cause the 2/7th girls there were more of them than us and I think, they were all mostly New South Wales and Queensland girls. There was some of us, I think we were half Victorian and half 'New South' and there was one Queensland girl. But some of those girls, that Queensland girl and two or three others had been at Buna when the 2/8th was there,

37:00 when the war was sort of further down the coast. And they were there and they went home on leave and they were allowed to come up with us, so that was it, they sort of knew what they were doing and we were raw recruits at it.

But how much different was the kind of work, like when you first got there how long did it take you to become accustom to the airways?

It was interesting because I can remember one sister ringing up, she said, "I can't find a can of milk," this was at Lae

37:30 and I said, "It doesn't come in cans, it comes in tubes." So she was a new one up there to. No it was different, we had parades up there, I'm just trying to think what we did as well as work on the switchboard because there was two lots of us, there was the 2/7th and the 2/8th. I know we went down to 1st Australian Army at Lae, for experience

38:00 and they'd never had women on their switchboard and few comments made, a women on the phone. Cause they'd been there for a while you see. So we worked on other switchboards while we were up there and, I don't know what else we did I can't remember, I mean so much has happened. I know more about the 2/8th because that was sort of later.

Tell me a bit more about that, going to that, sorry where was it again where

38:30 **they hadn't had women before, the?**

Oh the 1st Australian Army.

1st Australian Army?

Yes that was, oh an army camp, I don't know what they did I suppose they were, I don't know whether they were a Battalion or a Regiment or what but they were army personnel. So we just worked on the switchboard, didn't work there that long but we were there.

So having the girls there was probably both a pleasant surprise and a bit confronting?

39:00 It was a bit confronting I think, not that we were experienced, it was all new to us, we had to learn these things. But it was different and it was interesting. I had a cousin who was in the Red Cross at Medang and he wangled it that he came down to see me at Lae, in a plane. We'd never seen each other and we looked each other over to see what the family resemblance was, but he was a Red Cross worker there and I had an afternoon with him which was good. And I met a few

39:30 Warragul people at Lae, there was one that goes to the RSL now, he was at Lae at the same time as I was. And various other ones from Warragul, if they knew somebody was there they were sort of quite interested. So I met a few locals there, not many but they were different, and we'd be invited out, did I tell you or did I tell that Elizabeth, we would be invited out on our day

40:00 off. There would be a notice put on the switchboard, I think I told you this day off girls interesting coming out with a group of chaps, but they had to be armed and they'd take us out for the day and they'd give us lunch. We went out on crash boats out into the water, or they'd take us to interesting things, that's how I got to see Mount Lunaman and the cemetery on top of the hill. And different other things….

40:30 **So sorry the men had to be armed?**

The men had to be armed when they took women out, they had to be two armed men and that's what they did.

Were there many other women in Lae at that point, in other areas?

Tape 5

00:30 **Were on now, so okay, yeah you were at the 2/7th?**

Hang on.

Have a cough lolly, water yeah you've got water, that's good?

I've got water, I've also got a cough lolly in me pocket.

Okay were on, in action?

I'll try not to chew too loudly.

Yeah so tell us about Lae and the hospital where

01:00 **you were based?**

Yes well the 2/7th, I'm not sure what they had five hundred patients, I'm not sure, I'm not clear on that but I know at Jacquinot we had two hundred, but Lae was a bigger place. And the girls worked in the ward and there was some, an x-ray and various departments through the hospital, some were clerical and there were the switchboard girls. And we worked and we had our day off as I explained before,

01:30 and it was pretty good, we enjoyed it there. But our hospital was being built and then we…we moved in, on St Patrick's Day, we went on the Katoomba which was a decent size ship, troopship and there were men on it too, troops and us girls.

02:00 We were up the top, it was really an overnight trip from one island to the other, might have been two days and a night or something like that. And when we got to Jackenhoe Bay we had to go down a rope ladder, into a boat, I've got a picture of it there. No wait a minute I'm mixed we did that at Lae, we went down a rope ladder into a boat

02:30 and then we came in there. But once we got to Jacquinot Bay we had to go down the rope ladder into a landing barge cause there was no beach and we went in and it sort of came to the shore and we just stepped out. It was one of those things that they let down the side and we went off that way. But there's a picture of us in the boat there and I think that must have been Lae, coming in. But we were looking out over the side of the boat, cause there's coral reefs up there, and were looking at the coral and

03:00 my friend Rita she said, "I'm going to be seasick." The fellows were down below looking, coming in, we were up top and she said, "I'm going to be seasick." So she called out to the bloke down below, or the fellows down there, "Pull your head in." Well that was a remark you made when you didn't like what somebody said, you said, "Pull your head in." Anyway Rita really meant it. Anyway instead of pulling his head in he looked up and he had curly hair and he copped the lot. I don't know who he was but she was real

03:30 ladylike person and she was horrified, but it was a bit of a joke really, but poor Rita, but she didn't travel well but she was such a nice girl. Anyway we came in and we landed and here was this palm plantation and we're in the palm plantation, palm trees all around us. And you'd hear 'plunk' in the night and that was a coconut dropping. And our Unit was there and it was two storey where we stayed, where we women were

04:00 and the huts were sack sack roof and sisal craft around the side and a gap like that for the air to get in there and the air to get in down there. And they had dirt floors and when the buildings got old they just put a match to it and put another one there in the same place. So it was good, it was interesting. And oh when it rained, it poured and they said we could get thirty six inches of rain in twenty four hours

04:30 when it was really raining. And the tremors, you lived with tremors all the time because Rabaul was a bit further up the island and you got them everyday. I had a thermos broken, it shook and fell over and broke. So you know real tremors and you'd be asleep at night and you'd be shaken vigorously and you wonder what it was, it was just an earth termor.

And did it cause any damage to the housing?

No the buildings were made so as they were flexible

05:00 and they told us if you saw the sea receding, cause we weren't far from the sea, we just got off and there was our unit on the other side of the road, which was along the shore line. There was no beach as such, just like that. And when you swam you swam out to a coral reef, you had to swim because, you had to tread water because no beach. And once we got out to the reef we'd pick off cowrie shells and things like that. And the fish were,

05:30 you couldn't believe the colours of the fish up there. Anyway it was good, we were a unit at last, there were thirty girls, of us girls. I think there was about the same amount of sisters and there was the staff and we were pretty far north, as they said we were furthest north of the AAMWS at that time. So, but the tremors you got used to them eventually, but you'd be violently shaken

06:00 or you'd hear this rumble then there'd be a shake. But they told us if you saw the tide going out, saw the sea receding run for the hills, there'd be a tidal wave.

And so what hospital were you at then?

That was the 2/8th AGH [Australian General Hospital], that was our hospital. And we were a happy bunch, we got on well together.

And what about in both Lae and on New Britain, what was the presence

06:30 **of the Japanese, like how close and how under threat were you?**

Well at Lae they had a compound and they had Japanese prisoners of war in it. It was like, oh it was netting all the way round and there was a shelter there and that's where they were. I don't know where they slept at night, I suppose they had something, but they were there in our midst's these prisoners of war. And at Jacquinot Bay we had a prisoner of war compound

07:00 but we never had any in there. We did have one night where we had to hop out of our beds and get into a trench in the rain, cause it rained hard and the trench had plenty of water in it. And that was only one night and that was just a Jap plane circling over towards the end of the war. But we used to get the patients from, you know, where the action was because it wasn't that far away.

So how much contact did you have with the patients?

Not

07:30 a great deal, although I met my husband there and he used to have to sit at night with patients, sedated patients, that were to be transported away and he'd have to stay with them overnight and I'd go and spend the evening and sit there and talk to each other, cause the patient was out cold, he was sedated. So that was all I had to do with the patients cause I was on the switchboard.

But in other ways like informally or just being?

Oh

08:00 we were invited out, not with patients, we were invited out like we were at Lae in a group. I had my twenty third birthday up there and they gave me a party, which consisted of a few of the girls and some of the staff and they took me to what they called Swan Beach, which was a beach, it had a beach to, and a shed and it poured all night. And we just ate army stuff that somebody had scrounged from the kitchen and somebody had made me

08:30 a squashy sort of a cake, and that was my twenty-hird birthday, I had it up there.

You were going to tell me about Christmas dinner to at Lae?

At Lae we didn't have Christmas, we came home just before Christmas, the next Christmas you see. No we had it in the officers' mess, no they came to us, in our mess and the sisters and some of the male staff they waited on us for our Christmas dinner. And there was homemade things,

09:00 you know party hats they'd made out of goodness knows what and everything was done on the spot, menus, might even have a menu amongst it there I'm not sure. But it wasn't anything swish, it was just army food embellished a bit. But at Lae we did have a good meal, very good meal, the air force, the American air force used to transport our patients

09:30 back to the mainland because they had bigger better planes and more conveniences than our lot had so they would fly them out from Nadzab which was about thirty miles away, up the Markham Valley River. And so because they'd done so much for the Australian Hospital we were invited up to an evening that the Americans were putting on.

10:00 And we went up, we put lipstick on and powdered our noses and pressed our uniforms and off we went in the back of the truck, in the dust and then it rained on us, in an open truck and then it dried us out. And by the time we got there, well we combed our hair and tried to look presentable, and they had oh huge tents, marque like things and they had all this food. Chicken legs,

10:30 ham things we hadn't seen food, and the lettuce leaves, boy did we go for those lettuce leaves cause you didn't see a lettuce. It was great it was all Laid out like that and we were paired off with the Americans. And we were instructed firmly, 'Don't go outside, if you have to go to the toilet go in pairs', they didn't trust the Americans with ladies outside. So right oh I was paired off with this

11:00 crew cut chap and I'd never seen a can of beer before, I'm not a beer drinker but I'd never seen a can of beer, cause the Yanks had them and the Australians had bottles. And so we sat there and we danced, we jigged away and they had their, they'd come right up to your chest when their jigging. And anyway I was talking to this fellow and he said he'd been to Melbourne and he'd met a girl there and if he was still down there he might of got engaged to her. And I said, "Oh," and he said, "She was a country girl," and I said,

11:30 "Oh where did she come from?" and he said, "I can't say, I can't say it but I'll spell it," and he spelt out Drouin, which was five miles that way. Anyway I said, "Oh," I said, "A lot of Drouin people went to the

Warragul High School when I did," and he gave me her name. I knew the girl and I'd gone to school with her brother. But it was fascinating, you know away up in Nadzab up in New Guinea. So that was just one of the coincidences. Anyway we came home, but we'd had a good meal,

12:00 it was beaut. But we were on our best behaviour, the Yanks were Yanks. But you had to be careful if you met a black one, a Negro, they caused a bit of trouble here and there. But the local New Guinea natives they were all right, they were quite and they worked, they had them doing things. But the Americans, black Americans they had

12:30 them driving trucks and you'd see this truck coming and you could see the whites of their eyes and the white teeth, and that's all you could see cause everything was camouflaged, no that was that. We didn't have any in New Britain, they were in New Guinea mostly.

Were you scared of them?

Oh we stayed together, didn't trust them, so that was it, what next?

And who told you this about the Americans,

13:00 **like were you officially briefed about being careful of the Americans?**

Yes we were told no fraternising with the natives, well we didn't, they were just there, we'd talk to them but you didn't have much to do with them. The Marys were quite little ladies and mostly pregnant and they all aged very quickly cause that climate was pretty trying, it was hot and humid and wet and if you could get a rash you did. You know we all sort of, your in a sweat all the time, it was an unhealthy

13:30 sort of a climate.

But I'm just wondering in regards to the Americans both the white Americans and the black Americans, were you officially instructed by your officers just to be careful of them?

To be careful of them yes, but we had very little to do with them actually, we met them there but they didn't, we didn't go out with them, we didn't have anything to do with them otherwise.

14:00 **So when were you actually briefed about what to expect when you got to New Guinea, you know things like that the Americans?**

We had lectures at Ingleburn, out of Sydney, we were told, there were lectures there, I forget what they were but you were instructed on what to expect and what to do and general hygiene and look after yourself, which you did because you went to an unhealthy

14:30 sort of a climate. It was it was hot and humid and the wet season your clothes went mouldy, the shoes, your boots you'd polish them up at night and when you come out in the morning they were green, with you know the moisture, the damp so you just brush that off. And it was muddy at times, very muddy although they had a lot of coral, crushed coral laid on the pathways. But when we were unloading, that's right just after we got there

15:00 we had to unload and the girls were given lists and the fellows bought things off the ship, it was wet and it was night and you'd tick off what, everything was packed into bundles and things and you'd tick off what they bought off, ashore. And one fellow said to me, "There's only one place with more mud and that's Gippsland," well that's where I'd come from. But it was very muddy because it was so wet and if you weren't on what they'd laid on coral it was pretty sloppy.

15:30 But it was so hot in the day time it would dry out, but quite often you'd go out in the morning, fine and hot by afternoon it would be bucketing down, so it was that sort of a climate.

And so what kind of contact did you have with the local people?

Not a great deal, they washed our uniforms for us and starched them. They were employed, they had one fellow,

16:00 one of the unit he was in charge of the natives and they worked, they were willing to help. They had a little chapel that had been there from civilian days, oh somebody had tried to convert the natives, whether they had, yes that's right one fellow said, "I'm a Catholic boy," and another fellow said, "I'm not a Catholic boy," so they'd had a bit of religion before we got there, missionaries away back. So and

16:30 I didn't see any chapels at Lae but there was one at Jacquinot Bay, so that was it. There was air raid shelters all around the place, you sort of had to walk the plank to go from one place to another, here and there because they'd dug these trenches around for us to get into if we got bombed, which we didn't. But they were there for the use of.

You said you only had one air raid?

One, we didn't have an air raid but a plane flew

17:00 over and it was a Japanese plane so the alarm went out. And we'd gone to bed for the night so we were all in our night attire, or not anything, cause it was so hot we used to just sleep under the mosquito net. When we came to come home I had me great coat and a rat had bitten a hole that size in the sleeve, I

hadn’t worn it, but you had all your gear with you you see.

You took a greatcoat with you?

You had to cart everything with you, oh you had quite a load when you got going, you had haversack and a water bottle, a

17:30 Mae West, no on the ship you had the Mae West, a gas mask and a tin hat, oh you were well loaded up. The kit bag usually they, you had your name on it and they took that and the tin trunk, we didn’t have to carry that. Oh of course we had our suitcase to, we were issued with a leather suitcase, my daughter’s claimed that and the catches have gone but it’s a good leather suitcase. So it wasn’t very big,

18:00 but it was what we used when we were down here, you carted your clothes around in a suitcase if you went on leave or something like that.

Did you have sandals?

No we were issued some funny looking shoes, they weren’t quite sandshoes, they had a rubber sole and they had a canvas upper and you laced them up, and we used to wear them swimming. Cause when you went out onto the coral reef you had to have something on your feet or you got cut, and if you got cut you

18:30 got an infection, there was lots of tropical ulcers if you didn’t look after yourself. But that was, it wasn’t sandals it was these funny looking little shoes that somebody had thought up somewhere along the line, but they were very useful.

And what about you, did you get any sort of health problems, like for example tropical ulcers?

We had, I got German measles early in the days but I didn’t get malaria, some of the girls did

19:00 I took me adaprin like we do, and we used to have salt tablets every week, a large tablet because you sweated so much you sweated the salt out of your body. And if you were sick you went on the sick parade and they checked you out, the worst I got was the odd rash, but everybody got rashes from the heat cause you were sort of sweating all the time. But no I didn’t get sick, one girl got pregnant and she got sent home, yeah she was the only one sent home.

19:30 **Did you know her?**

Yes she was a sergeant, she was suppose to be a good example but she wasn’t. The odd one went home, at Lae a couple of them went what we called troppo, they couldn’t handle it and so they were sent home. One of the girls on the switchboard she went home because she’d had a baby years before, by years before a few years before and it was, somebody wanted to adopt it and she didn’t want them to adopt it so they gave her a leave pass

20:00 home she went and back she came. So that was it.

That’s interesting isn’t it, it was a cross section of women who had all sorts of things going on in their lives?

Oh it was very much a cross section, yes. Oh yes the different lifestyles, especially up in New Britain we got very close to each other.

Why was that, why did it change, well what made you close?

Well your all close but you sort of, your family and you were sort of right away.

20:30 Now one girl, the one that was pull your head in, she had, her family sent her up oranges and they dipped them in wax and they’d packed them carefully, I don’t know how they managed to get there but there they were oranges. We didn’t get fresh fruit up there, it just beats me how those oranges got there. Anyway they did and they were big and you had to scrape the wax off and we all had a little piece each. And when my walnuts came up we shared

21:00 them around to. But you looked forward from packages from home, you didn’t get a lot. And I got me mother to send me up some handkerchiefs, quite a lot of handkerchiefs, you couldn’t get cotton handkerchiefs they were rayon I think, horrible things for wiping your nose on. And I thought we’d be up there for Christmas and I thought, ‘Right I’ll have something to give each of the girls, a hankie or two’. Anyway cause we got sent home and I had to use those hankies

21:30 me self. But no, we had a sewing machine, a treadle, one sewing machine but when the last needle broke we were stuck until somebody’s mother sent up another needle or two. And if you broke the needle you felt an awful ‘peel’, and we used to be able to get what they called ‘lap-lap’ material, which was what the natives wore, a sort of cotton piece of material wrapped around them. And if we got some lap-lap material we’d make, we had to make our own bra.

22:00 And so one of the girls could sew and she would make them for us, and it was just ordinary little bits of elastic we could get on, if you could you put that at the back if you couldn’t you didn’t have it. And then we found out Marjorie was a good sewer, so I got me mother to sent me up, it was me sister’s dress, which we had to unpick and she made me a two

22:30 piece, we weren't into bikini's then but you could get swimsuits through the Red Cross shop but they were woollen. And course when you went into the water they shrank, and oh did they prickle. And there was one design and three colours, I don't know how many we went through but the cotton ones lasted, the homemade ones. Cause the water was right there and that was a way of cooling off.

So when they made, making your bra how did you do that?

23:00 Oh Marg had a, she put pleats at the side and a band at the bottom and straps, oh seersucker, no wasn't seersucker what did they call it, oh some sort of cotton material that my mother sent up because you see they couldn't get things at home either and she sent, my sister must of grown out of it I think, and she sent it up and it made me swimming costume.

Did you have hooks and eyes?

Yes hooks and eyes and they went rusty.

23:30 And Marg put pleats in the front, I was thin in those days but oh there was all sort of swim suits that they made between them. And while we had a sewing machine needle we could do things, but when we didn't have a sewing machine needle it was do it by hand. And we made doondle skirts, they were in fashion in those days. And we had khaki clothes but from the Red Cross you could get a white shirt

24:00 oh it was captious, it was a unisex thing, it would have fitted a man or a women and that was the top and the doondle skirt and you felt you were in civvies [civilian clothes], that was the way it was

And where would you wear the doondle skirt?

When you weren't on duty, yes and to go down to swim, cause there was the pier just down at the bottom of the hill and we used to have a good time in the water cause you could cool off nicely.

Was there a village nearby?

No,

24:30 must have been one somewhere, there was a mountain just behind us, we were sort of on a slope like that and when it rained it just ran off us into the sea. And we had, oh they had bother getting the Duke of Gloucester, the one I went at fourteen to see, he came out he was Governor General or something at the time and he visited the troops. And amongst the pictures there in my album is a picture of him greeting the patients.

25:00 And the plane landed on top of the hill which was where the landing strip was, right up at the top of the hill.

So what happened that day when he arrived, did you go on parade?

Yes we did, we had a parade but he was with the matrons, she lead him around and showed him things, I think he was only there for a few hours. But we had Gracie Fields, Gracie bought her concert party to Jacquinot and we had it on the Jap airstrip

25:30 and they had, it's sort of like the modern drive in, a screen, but we had oil cans and planks on that and that was our picture theatre and we used to get pictures before they got them on the mainland. When Gracie came we all went down and it was lovely, it was great and she stayed in the matron's quarter and her idea of a rest was to lie on your back with your feet in the air up the wall. And she had Monty

26:00 which was her husband, he was like a little pet, he used to follow her around everywhere, you didn't see much of Monty but he was there with her. But she was lovely, she gave us a beaut concert.

Did you have a gramophone or...?

No.

Music or pianos?

There was a piano in the rec [recreation] room and there was a chappie who used to play on that piano, I forget what his name, he was an orderly in one of the wards

26:30 and it took us a long time to get a TV, but when we got a TV we were watching a show and here he was playing away on the piano. I forget his name now, he was a funny little fellow but he could play beautifully. And there he was on some television show, but he came from Queensland, but he was the same fellow that we knew. Oh one of my girls, Marion was about seven I think when we got television,

27:00 we must have been married about ten years or more. Anyway you still recognise people cause they hadn't got old then, and there he was I can't think of what his name was, but he was very good on the piano. And we had talent hidden there, there was a radio station, 9AE and the fellow who ran the radio station was Michael Pate who got to be an actor later on and he was on the radio station.

Is that broadcasting from where,

27:30 **from Townsville?**

No it was just a local one and it went through the wards, it entertained the patients, they provided music. And you could hear it, sort of broadcast so as you could all hear it, but that was that. And there would be concert parties come up from the mainland, I'm just trying to think. Oh we did see, I think I told Elizabeth we saw at Lae there was a film made in American called 'This

28:00 is the army' and they bought the whole cast out to Lae, cause there were Yanks there and this big hanger, which was the only building of any substance there, they put it on there. And Irving Berlin was the fellow who did it and he lived to be an old man of nearly a hundred, but he was famous cause he was an American actor. And he was there in the flesh. And we went down to see it in buses, trucks or whatever and it went on for several days, there were so many troops

28:30 there at that spot at Lae that they put it on over and over again so as everybody could see it. And it was a real highlight.

What's it about?

It was, This is the Army and American story, I can't remember what it's about now, but it was a musical and acting and all that sort of thing and it went on for quite a long time, would be a couple of hours show I think. But it was the highlight of our stay at Lae. But we did get some good entertainment there and if you went

29:00 to the picture theatre and you didn't like it, we always had a cushion to sit on cause that plank got hard, they said to you when we left, "Make sure you've got a cushion." So we had a cushion and you'd always go with your, we had a gas cape which was oil cloth and it went right round you and your hat on and if it rained and it was a good picture you stayed if you didn't like it you went home, which was just up the road a bit. But that was, we quite often walked out on a show cause we didn't like it,

29:30 but if it was a good one you stayed whether it was raining or not. But you were right out in the open sitting on your plank on oil cans.

You said this was at an airstrip?

Yes and old Jap airstrip, which was just a cleared place, the sea was there, the airstrip was there and the road was just there. Because the hills went up rather steeply.

Was it still used as an airstrip?

Oh no, no the Japs had been pushed further up, they hadn't got to Rabaul

30:00 they were still active up that way. But where we were they'd been moved on. And they cleared one place to make a car park and they scraped up a Jap and somebody gave me a Jap tooth, and I've got a Jap tooth. And it's all round and on the top it's all silver stuff and there's just the root sticking down, it had been sort of encased with, I don't know what it was, the stuff it was,

30:30 it wouldn't be steel it would be something, it wasn't aluminium, but it's there tucked away amongst the bits and pieces. We also have a Jap sword, my husband got it in a ballot up there, they balloted for them, I didn't get one fortunately or we'd have had two swords. So I've kept it for my grandsons, no they haven't got it yet and they tell you pass it in, but I'm hanging onto it. And it's, oh it's nicely oiled it looks as though it would do its job, I don't know how many heads it's chopped off, but it's there

31:00 tucked away in the back of a cupboard. It was legally given to my husband, so he bought it home in his kit bag.

And you met your husband in New Britain?

Yes I met him up at Jacquinot Bay, well he decided I would do, so we used to go out together, up into the jungle and stroll around up there, or go swimming on our time off, and he was in the same unit but he'd had a pretty active life, he'd been to Greece and Crete and North Africa

31:30 and England and then came back and went to the islands. When he was in Crete he was rescued but a lot of his unit, which was the 2/3rd Field Regiment, they were taken prisoners of war. And he was evacuated to Jerusalem and transferred to the 2/8th AGH and they came from Jerusalem back to Australia and then he went up to the island to Buna, Lae and then Jacquinot Bay. And he was

32:00 in the RAP[Regimental Aid Post] there and that was where I met him. So we used to go walking together and he wanted to get engaged but I didn't know him, didn't know much about him so he came home, he was New South Wales, his parents had died and he was one of ten and he was sort of at a loose end. So he came down and met the family and they approved, so we got engaged and he stayed. He was

32:30 a good bloke and we had thirty eight and a half years, happy life which was good and then he just died suddenly, which was best for him, so that's it.

Was there many other romances?

Oh yes there were some, some worked some didn't, some were very happy, one that we thought was well matched it didn't work. But there was about, oh might have been four or five of us met our

partners up there, easily

33:00 there might have been half a dozen. So, oh we had a good choice, I didn't go looking for a man he decided I was the one. But we did things together, similar interests and his family, his sister was married into a cherry orchard family, up at Young and he used to go back, his sister was his next of kin cause his parents had died. So I was fortunate me in-laws were all in New South Wales.

33:30 **Now just, I wouldn't mind hearing what you've got to say about the sergeant who got pregnant, was that, how did you find out about that, did she tell you?**

We could see for ourselves, she got very pregnant.

So she stayed on for quite?

She stayed put and some of the girls complained to our officer in charge and they did something then. But she didn't say anything, the girl herself didn't say anything, but you could see she was very very pregnant.

34:00 And she didn't come up with us originally she filled in for somebody else, I forget what the somebody else had to go home for, I think it might have been family problems. But Anne was there as a sergeant in the diet kitchen and she had to go home and that was that.

So what she would of just stayed if she could have?

I don't know, we were just relieved because she was giving us a bad name, a pregnant girl amongst

34:30 us, it just wasn't done.

Had she been sick?

I don't know, she had a room to herself cause she was a sergeant. We had a corporal there, she was good stuff, she's still alive and she still marches, so she's worn better than some of us. I was the youngest girl in our unit so some of the, I

35:00 sent a card off to one who's ninety on Anzac, no ninety three on Anzac Day and she tried to live till ninety and then she said, "That's it," but she's still alive and she'd down in Tasmania. So we still correspond with quite a few of the ones that are left, but there thinning out, their all dying off or going into nursing homes. I could mention a few that don't know where they are, you know their minds have gone, dementure with age.

And you also said there are a couple of women who

35:30 **weren't, sort of had breakdowns up there?**

At Lae, a couple had breakdowns at Lae, one was a sergeant and one was a private and they just couldn't handle the tropics. Oh there was another one to, Laura, oh she ended up at Heidelberg and you'd think she 'won the war on her own' the way she used to tell people about it. But she was, had a break down too. Some of them just couldn't handle it,

36:00 cause the men were like that to, some of them they had, at Heidelberg they had two wards with people that, we called them troppo but their minds had sort of snapped a bit. Cause some people can handle things and some can't.

What, so was it the heat or was it the fear of being in a war zone?

Perhaps it was I don't know, I'm not into that sort of thing but I think it must have been a combination of everything,

36:30 their just not strong willed perhaps. I don't know.

And I mean you were fortunate you had a boyfriend up there but were, what were the men like towards the women?

Oh they were very friendly, there was an officer who wanted to take me out but I knew he had ulterior motives, so he didn't get any encouragement. But there were some like that and there were decent blokes and there were some that were missing their families, especially if they'd been away

37:00 for a long time, they were sort of, it would get to them a bit. One of the sergeants that was with me he said, "What am I going to tell Rose, she wants me to come home and get married," but he just sort of didn't know what to say to his girlfriend. So I said, "Just cheer her up, just tell her the good things," and he did, he was a nice chap. We used to tease each other, his name was Smith and mine was Jones and we used to tease

37:30 each other just like that. Anyway he found a poster on the wall and it had blue sky, green grass and a white tombstone, here lies Private Jones he souvenired, and he carefully altered it to, she souvenired it and he put in on our switchboard wall, and we'd sort of tease each other about our name. But he was a nice chap, but he was ready to come home, but you just didn't come home, he didn't have any break down

38:00 he was just a bit sad that he was away from his girlfriend. So there was a lot of that, that's why we used to go out when we'd be invited out and we could jolly them along, they could talk about their troubles and we'd cheer them up, and we'd enjoy our evenings out like that. Sometimes we'd just sit and talk, and that was it, but you felt you could help them a bit.

So this officer that you felt had other, ulterior motives, what

38:30 **do you mean?**

Oh he was just very nice, wanting me to go out with him, but I didn't take to him at all, just he didn't do anything he shouldn't but I could sort of feel it was there, women's intuition.

I guess I'm just wondering how come a sergeant you know got pregnant, like how easily that could happen?

Yeah, oh it could of.

Cause it was pretty taboo thing to talk about that stuff?

Oh yes, you just didn't. I don't know if any other, I know a couple got married

39:00 at Lae and they made her veil out of mosquito netting, that's all we had. I wasn't there but it was after we'd gone and they got married but she had to go home, they couldn't stay there as a married couple. I don't even know who she was but I remember hearing about it. So that could happen. And if you were a widow, one of the ladies who was with us, she'd been to Buna but she was widowed, so she was

39:30 allowed to stay. But usually you didn't have any dependants at home, you sort of had to be at the beck and call of the army, which was reasonable.

Well like the women who had the child?

Well yes that was unusual but somehow or rather she managed to get home and get back, I was surprised they let her come home, ah let her come back but she did, she had a way with her, she's still got a charm about her.

40:00 **Did you know the full story there about her child?**

Not the full story, she was rather a colourful character, she always had a few admirers. And she was on tellie the other day, there she was, there's a thing they can do for you now if you have a bowel problem, it's like you know how they give you a thing for your heart, a what do they call it, an implant, well they can do that for your bowel apparently. Anyway so here's Vi on the television at Epworth Hospital

40:30 and they were interviewing here, they just said her name underneath it and I thought 'That's our Vi'. And they interviewed her and she said, "Oh," she said, "If it works I'll go for me fourth husband," and I knew it was our Vi then, it was to. But she had personality, so there she was a bit older than when we knew each other years ago.

Tape 6

00:30 **Okay you can relax, okay so you had a couple of excursions up there?**

Oh we did on our days off, we saw, when we went to Labuan there were some natives and they had this turtle upturned, and the idea was, it was disintegrating the innards, the birds were eating the insides out of it and they could have the tortoise shell. And it was a huge thing, like that

01:00 and it was just washed up on the beach, and that was how they cleaned the insides out to get the shell, which was quite educational. And in later years, when I came home, chocolate box and here's this picture of Labuan, there's a beach up there where we went and the hills in the background and I kept that chocolate box, I've got things in it now. But it was, cause we were freshly back from up that way we recognised it straight away,

01:30 and it said it was a New Guinea beach, and it was to. It just shows the palm trees and the beach and the mountains in the background, but it was definitely familiar to us, which made me keep the tin.

It's a very beautiful place, New Guinea isn't it?

Oh it's lovely, they used to take us out in a crash boat, which was there if something crashed into the sea and that was good cause they took you a bit further. And you went over to Salamaua

02:00 where there had been a bit of heavy fighting there, and there was just like my WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK yard out there, there was just the cement base of what had been a hotel. And there was this istmus, it wasn't very wide and all these vehicles that they'd run into the sea when the Japs came, there was motorbikes, there were cars, there were trucks, and there they were in the water rusting. I suppose there still there, it was amazing there were no people there

02:30 but here was all the evidence of what had been. And then there was this ship, Mytoko Maru round the corner which we climbed onto and it was interesting, it was intact on the inside, Japs must be little fellows they only had little baths. And I collected a teaspoon from the ship and it was very interesting. And they put a rest home over there, the army did and

03:00 some of our girls went over there for a break from working, I never got there, only so many could go at a time, and they had this rest home where they could stay. I think they stayed for a week at a time. It was very interesting, there was a little cemetery there and there was a familiar name, there's a family of Tattersons here, mostly Trafalgar which is further up the road, and they were involved in the services and here's this grave of a Captain Tatterson, and he'd be one of their relations. It was only a small cemetery but there it was

03:30 at Salamaua. But it was very very interesting, so that was one of the day trips we went on.

What's a crash boat?

It's a launch sort of boat, moves faster than an ordinary boat, and if a plane goes down into the sea a crash boat can go out and rescue the bits, pick up what they can. But that's what there there for, I suppose the navy ran it

04:00 but it was there at Lae, and there was one at Jacquinot Bay to. So they seemed to have them wherever there was an army camp I think, cause they'd have to do a rescue cause there was lots of accidents one way and another. And another trip we went up to Nadzab where we went up to the Americans. But there was a, lots and lots of planes in rows, there was an airstrip up there and they had

04:30 bombs on the side and that was how many, how many Jap planes they'd knocked out. Oh there must have been hundreds of planes, you could see them everywhere there, they were all neatly in line, like parked cars, but they were planes. But that was interesting to. And they'd take us for drives, oh here and there, we went up to what they called Waterfall Bay, that was at Jacquinot and this waterfall came down into the sea, the river.

05:00 Sort of came down and just dropped into the sea, and that was Waterfall Bay which was very interesting. So just, you didn't go far or much but it was an outing and you met other people.

Did the local people have canoes, have boats themselves?

They had lakatois [native canoes], which sort of had an outrigger at the side, and that was their, but we didn't really see much of that there. The ones that we

05:30 saw were employed locally, they were helping at the hospital or wherever they were. But that was their means of going out into the water. But where we were at Lae over the river there was a village there and when it was Christmas they had what they call a sing sing, drums and 'boom boom boom', and singing in their own language, and it went on for days and days,

06:00 you got used to it after a while. But that was them living their own life on the other side of the river, it was a fast flowing river and fairly wide. That was something different.

Did you see anything else that was sort of native culture, I mean?

There's a 'poop poop' there on the shelf, that's suppose to be a crocodile, meant to be a crocodile. And when I bought it home they said,

06:30 "Don't put in on any furniture it might have little bugs in it." Well I think any little bugs have died by now, but it's just one of those souvenirs that I kept.

How did you come to get the poop poop?

Swapped a mirror, I had a mirror that fitted into his little bag and we did a swap, trade.

Where did you meet this man?

Oh he was just there and they spoke their pidgin English, but a lot of them could speak English.

07:00 And you just did a swap, didn't have much to do, there was no fraternising with the natives, that was what it was, so we sort of did our thing and they did theirs.

And what about the way they dressed, cause there renowned for pretty exotic dressing for ceremonial costumes?

Oh they dyed their hair with peroxide, they'd be black at the roots and they'd sort of be bright orange, it sort of faded to that

07:30 colour, very curly hair, the ladies wore a lap-lap, sometimes they had a little smock like thing on top cause the young ones were always pregnant, and the babies were beautiful, and the mother's would have their babies. And the men, big fat splade feet they all seemed to have and they have, oh they had pants on mostly, some of them had army pants. But

08:00 they were covered and they were dressed, but we didn't have a lot to do with them. But they were there

and they sort of, if they were in the hospital area they were there on a job, whatever they were doing. And you'd see them sometimes sitting by the side of the road with their babies and things like that. But we did our thing and they did their's cause we were controlled by the services, you weren't suppose to leave the area.

08:30 Les and I used to go down and sit on the pier and look at the stars, oh they were bright up there, extra bright. And when there was full moon it was gorgeous, it would come right across the water. But the hospital was just over the road and up the hill, you see we weren't far away. But no we kept within bounds most of the time.

But you did say that you'd go up into the jungle?

We did on our afternoon off. We did one day, brilliant sunshine off we went

09:00 and got up the top of the hill and it poured, and it poured. We took our watches off and put them under out hats and when we came back here we are coming squelch and the sun's shinning brilliantly, "Where have you two been?" and it was just a tropical downpour. And the bamboo grew up there, it sort of grew wild and I used to take me turn to put flowers in the chapel, we had a church service there

09:30 once a, on a Sunday and would anybody volunteer to put flowers in the church. So oh yes another girl and I went off up into the jungle and we got this, oh red sprays of big red blooms, I don't know what they were and put them in. But that was all that was available, but we did our bit there. And one of the girls, were sitting there politely in church and she whipped her cigarettes out of her pocket, "Oh I'm in church," so she put them away again.

10:00 It was a very relaxed setup. But an interesting thing when we were at Lae there was Padre Gee there, he was a bald English padre, nice chap, came back to Warragul, he was a New South Wales bloke, he got sent to the local Church of England and we used to have a bit of a talk there occasionally. But it's strange that he should come to Warragul and that was straight after the war and he was with the 2/7th and he said he married several of those

10:30 2/7th girls.

There was also something about a dentist or a doctor, a doctor who delivered your daughter?

Oh yes when the war was over we were still at Jacquinot Bay and they sent up the 118th AGH, which was a West Australian unit and they were to go up to Rabual. But they couldn't go up there straight away they had to wait until it was suitable for them to go up. So they staged with us,

11:00 staged with the 2/8th and was oh quite a few girls and some officers and other fellows. And when your away from home and somebody new turns up, "Where do you come from?" Anyway a fellow in dispensary he was a mate of a friend of mine and he said, "Where do you come from?" and this fellow said, "Victoria," and this Johnny Goff had come from Victoria, "Oh what part of Victoria?"

11:30 "Gippsland." "What part of Gippsland?" "Warragul." And John Goff said, "Oh we've got the Warragul wonder here." And this Doc Smith, he was our doctor, he was Major Smith, he said, "What's his name?" and he said, "It's Jones, what's yours?" "Smith." And he was our family doctor, and so he came round to see me, I was on the switchboard and there he was. And when we came home after the war, he delivered my first child, so that was a bit of a coincidence. And

12:00 another one was, Burton's Stores have been around Warragul for years and years and I was up in the island and they said to me, "There's a red headed officer to see you," and I said, "I don't know any red headed officers." "Well go down and see." Well he was Ken Burton, he was the local grocer in Warragul, he said, "I thought you were still at school." He'd seen me, they'd put a regatta on, which is sort of water thing for us, and I was there with the other girls and he recognised

12:30 me and he said, "I thought that was you, but," he said, "I thought you were still at school." And there he was, he used to deliver our groceries and it was interesting to catch up with him.

Tell me about the regatta, who did that?

We hadn't been there that long, and of course we got welcomed by the folk there, the other services and they made their own boats up there, out of bits of wood and things, rafts

13:00 and all that sort of thing and they put this regatta on on the water and invited us down to see it. And that was where I was and they sailed and they swam and they did all sorts of things. And of course you went in as often as you could cause it was so hot. And that was where he was you see and so a few days later he came up and asked to see me, it was a bit of a surprise. And he's gone but his wife's still here in Warragul.

13:30 **So the boats were just made out of salvaged materials?**

Oh just bits and pieces, because further down the road there was a saw mill, cause they had to get material to make things. See when they built our hospital there was woodwork into the framework and that sort of thing and there was always bits of wood around. So that's what they must of done. I was quite new at Jackenhoe then and I sort of was, didn't take it all in, but it was very interesting

14:00 and that's what they did. They used to make it their business to entertain us girls cause that meant they could go out with the girls you see.

What about the girls did you do anything to entertain the men, any sort of?

Oh yes occasionally we'd invite, if a group came to us we'd return the compliment sort of thing. And we'd have the odd dance, we did have rough floors in our rec room, rough boards, very rough boards and we had a few cane lounges and things like that in it, and there was a piano

14:30 in the corner, so that was our recreation hut. And if you had a visitor you could entertain them there, sit and talk. But each unit had its own rec hut, there was the officers rec hut and ORs and us. So that was where we went to entertain people, though I didn't have much in the way of visitors but you could go and sit there if you wanted to.

So you had dances, did you have concerts?

15:00 Yes some of the fellows, they had chaps that could impersonate women, and it was a real giggle there they'd be going off like a lot of fools, they weren't gay but you didn't have them gay in those days, but they'd act like women. And one bloke he did it beautifully and he crossed his knees just like a girl and he went on like a girl. But he was one of the fellows in the unit. But they turned on entertainment, I suppose they turned it on for themselves to. But

15:30 yes we made our own fun, I'd like to show you the invitation thing I've got out there, I think it's in the book that our officer, our officer was Sheila Damon and she came from a well to do family in Melbourne, but she was beaut, she was just one of us. And I think she might have been younger than some of them but oh met up with her since and she's written a book and we swap Christmas cards. She was really the best officer we could have,

16:00 so she was good.

The other women in the unit there were they, what sort of talents did they have?

Well they came from all walks of life, I've just remembered the officer in charge at Lae, she was Mary Cave, Captain Mary Cave and she was in charge of the 2/7th girls and I think, yes she was Captain Cave and Sheila our officer, she was Lieutenant

16:30 Damon. So, and they worked in together, overseeing all us girls, I'd forgotten about her name but it comes back to me when I think hard enough. But no, oh some of them were quite talented, they could do this that and the other. I can't think what.

Singers, dancers?

Oh there could be some amongst the, but they came from all walks of life. Our hairdresser, podiatrists was the same women, but we'd had somebody

17:00 else who could cut hair much better than the one who was qualified to do it. They came from, oh I don't really know what a lot of them did but they had jobs here there. One girl with us she was an usherette in a theatre, one of the girls, the one that was sick,

17:30 her uncle was the Premier of New South Wales at one stage. They come from all over the place, we didn't talk much about our past unless you were sort of roomed with a person and they learned all about you. But they were, we were all young and sort of starting off in our lives really.

Did you write, I mean you wrote letters but did you keep a journal or write poetry?

Oh write a book Mum,

18:00 I said I could talk but as for writing it down. But Phil's jotted down things I've said, that's my eldest daughter, she's into family history, she's pretty good at that sort of stuff, and she'll write down occasionally and I started to write and then I forget and get on with something else. I used to correspond with quite a few but they've either died or we ring each other up. So I've got lots of unopened writing

18:30 compendiums around the place cause there's not that much writing done these days is there?

So what would you do, I mean you'd swim and relax in your time off, what else would you do?

Oh we'd sit and talk to each other or, we did a fair bit of sleeping because that climate was pretty wearing, you'd go and have a lie down and go to sleep sort of thing, you'd fill in a couple of hours that day. But we were never bored, oh you could,

19:00 I got into embroidery and they had a supply of it up there and I'd do a bit of embroidery, you know get your box together etc. And no nobody knitted it was too hot, some of them played cards a bit but not much. I don't know how we filled our time, we weren't bored but time went.

Also the hospital was that serving the local community

19:30 **as well?**

No, no it was purely a military hospital.

Both in Lae and New Britain?

Yes, I don't know what the air force and the navy did, I don't know, but I know Heidelberg was air force as well. But up there we were purely army. They'd have parades and things like that, we'd have to go and march, they kept us fit.

But did they take in patients from the local

20:00 **community?**

Not from the locals, no they took in patients from the war, you know the wounded and that sort of thing, the sick. But no they didn't take the local ones in, I don't know who treated them. Cause you just did as you were told, you didn't ask questions. We didn't know a lot about what was going on in the war because we had no means of finding it out. They put out Guinea Gold which was a little magazine about that big and

20:30 I think that came out once a week or something, got one occasionally anyway. And it just had headline news, there was lots of things we didn't know about, awful lot of things. We didn't know about the Cowra breakout, there were lots of other things we found out later what had happened. Because you just didn't hear it. And my mother used to write to me regularly, it was mostly family stuff cause she couldn't tell me much.

21:00 So, and I'd write to her and just told her what we were doing, but you couldn't mention any battles or anything like that cause it would get cut out, cause all your mail was censored. So they trusted us not to put those sort of things in, so that was it.

And you were on the switch the whole time weren't you?

Yes.

Yeah, so who was calling up the hospital?

Oh they were mostly internal calls

21:30 at the hospital. Yes that's what it was, it was internal calls because, unless another unit rang up for some reason or other. So that was what it was. We did have a lot of patients, a plane went down over an officer's mess and up there and they bought the patients to Lae and there was some very badly burnt patients there, at that time. But you see

22:00 things like that would happen and then something else would happen. And it was all sort of in a day's work.

So that would have been very much an emergency situation?

Oh definitely, very much an emergency, yes.

So what would that mean for you being on the switch, in a situation like that?

Nothing I didn't know about it till somebody told me.

But did you, so you didn't have more calls coming through, that you had to?

Don't know perhaps we did, don't know.

22:30 It was mostly internal phone calls once we got away. At Lae, not Jacquinot when they pulled the building down they put this tent up in a clearing but it had rained, and the sun came out, it was unbearable in the steamy tent. And it was just a little battery operated thing and I had one of those chairs, oh

23:00 you see them now seat and cross legs underneath and that's what we sat on, there was no fancy furniture or anything like that. And then when they built it we went back into the switch room. But it was, you roughed it but you just took it as it was.

And so the equipment that you were using I guess that would have been, that would have needed maintenance quite regularly?

Oh yes there was always, the Signals, the Sig Company

23:30 they maintained the communications, yes they kept things going. That was their job, lines of communication they called it, they kept things moving and the switchboard was one of the things they kept going.

Did it break down very much?

No as I said it gave you electric shocks, that little one. No we were never out of action

24:00 so it was, we didn't do night duty at Jacquinot. We had a chappie he did it, his brother was a big wig in the army, he should have been put out he was an alcoholic and there wasn't much doing at night so they

put him on the job, they should of sent him home but he was an alcoholic, but he was harmless. But he had a brother in high places so that was where he was.

24:30 It was, there was all sorts of people in there all together, so you just took it as it was. And oh they had a football team there at one stage, there they were in the heat playing football. I never saw anybody playing cricket though.

Now you were there at the end of the war?

Yes.

Hmm so how did you find out?

25:00 Oh we got told, must have been pretty straight away, don't know lines of communication, oh there was 'whoopee', we were really happy, it came in the evening and we stayed up all night and enjoyed ourselves and there were a few 'big heads' the next morning. And that's when we started to get the prisoners of war from Rabaul, they sent them down to us. And there was nuns, and there was little children and lots of Indians

25:30 in white outfits and they dropped like flies, they had TB [Tuberculosis]. One of my friends got TB from nursing the Indians and they used to say, "Don't sit on those outside seats, the Indians have been there," in case you pick up the TB. But each evening they'd be down on their knees praying to Allah in the gutter, on the side of the road, and they'd be there in the morning, praying to Allah again. And one of my friends was a dental nurse and they had this chappie come into

26:00 have his teeth fixed, and they said, "Will you sit down," so he squatted on the floor, they wanted him to get up and sit in the dental chair. But they sent them home, an Indian, not an Indian, an English hospital ship the HMS Dorsetshire came for them and they all went home that way, on this hospital ship.

So how did they come, did they come by road to you?

I don't know how, oh how were

26:30 they bought down, they might have been flown down, I suppose they were. But they appeared and the nuns had bright 'saxe' blue outfits on and I think they were German nuns, I think I remember hearing that, but they were nuns, and I think there was about half a dozen of them and a few children, they must have been born up there I think. I don't know because Rabaul was quite a town wasn't it at one stage and then they

27:00 shot all the people that were in there didn't they at one stage of the piece, so I read. So that was it hmm.

So what kind of health, what state of health were these people in?

They were thing but they were all right, it's just the Indians had this TB, which was very contagious, cause my friend, when she went to get out of the army and they checked you thoroughly they found she had TB.

27:30 What's that, oh somebody backing somewhere outside.

An alarm?

As long as it's not your car?

No I don't think it's the car?

Oh the Blind Institute have a…

Okay we're back on, so was this a lot, were there a lot of POWs that came down to you?

Not a lot,

28:00 there could be more that we didn't see, but the Indians used to be there, they were conspicuous in their white outfits. And no I would say there weren't a lot, I couldn't tell you how many in numbers, there might have been half a dozen children and about the same amount of nuns, and two or three mothers, might be more than that, don't know.

And Japanese POWs?

We had a POW compound but I never saw a Jap in it,

28:30 but at Lae there were.

So do you remember being told about the bomb being dropped, were you told that?

We did hear eventually, that a bomb had been dropped and that put an end to the war, but we didn't get any details until we got home, they just didn't tell you. So that,

29:00 we knew it was over, it seemed to end suddenly, so it did apparently. And we didn't come straight home

cause that was, when did it finish, August, we didn't get home till Christmas Eve. We stayed on cause we had the ones call in and we had to sort of finish up. And the men were still there, Les was one of the fellows that stayed a bit longer but we went back by plane,

29:30 I'd never been in a plane before and it was a Douglas Transport and there was no seating, nothing you just sat on the floor. But there were flowers on the floor because the plane on its trip up, it come from Lae had dropped flowers into a deep gulley further up the coast where a plane had crashed and they couldn't get the bodies out, so they dropped these flowers in. And here we were sitting amongst the bits and pieces of

30:00 frangipani and other tropical flowers. And we were on the return trip, but they only took half of us at a time, they wouldn't take the lot of us, half went one trip and the other half, I was in the second half. And they took us back to Lae where we worked for a couple of weeks, your going home you can hop in and work. So we cleaned up sisters' quarters and did general chores there, no switchboard there for a couple of weeks and then we came home on the hospital ship

30:30 Manunda. So that was on the way home and we struck a cyclone somewhere down the coast, no I wasn't seasick but all the green food and the apples and that sort of thing were lovely, cause we hadn't had any of those things, it was beaut to get some fresh fruit. And they didn't come in through the Heads for a while the sailors wanted to have Christmas at home and they could only be in for a certain time. So they dallied outside the Heads, and we were bobbing around in the sea,

31:00 and got in and the Sydney girls went home, they were given leave straight away but we Victorians we had to be officially welcomed. So we were stuck there for the best part of a week at Burwood and we were allowed to go out on a daily basis, as long as we came back. And that first night nothing stayed still, cause we'd been at sea for some days, can't remember, as soon as you sat down everything moved like

31:30 that, like the motion of the sea. And oh foods, we were allowed out so we went down the street and we got, had a meal and then we came back and they said, "Mess is on in so many minutes," all right so we lined up there and had another meal. And then my friend Elsie who lived in Burwood, that was her home her mother had cooked a big roast and we were invited around for tea. "Oh I don't think we can," "Oh look Mum will be so disappointed please come." So we had three

32:00 teas that first night. Anyway when we got officially welcomed they put us on a troop train and we came back to Spencer Street and there was me brother on the platform. I don't know how he knew but I was there and he was there and he was just back from Morotai. So we rang the family and, no we tried to get on the train, the Gippsland train, they said, "No it's booked out

32:30 you can't get in till after Christmas." And here we were on the platform, and so we rang my mother and she had a little Erskine car and she'd been saving up her petrol so she drove to Dandenong and we got into the local train and went to Dandenong. And Mum brought us home, so we were home for Christmas, got home Christmas Eve. And Les he flew down to Sydney on Christmas Eve, so he rang me on Christmas day and then he came down to Warragul. So

33:00 that was it, but we were very lucky to get home for Christmas.

Oh yeah it must have been?

Fancy getting that far and finding the train was booked out.

But this, what you said about, where did you arrive in Sydney, did you land in Sydney?

We came in on a boat, on the Manunda which was the hospital ship, I believe the Manunda bought prisoners of war back from Singapore, cause it was a big hospital ship.

And

33:30 **so there would have been patients on that ship when you were returning?**

I suppose there were, we didn't see them but we were, we didn't have anything to do on that ship. Oh yes we did I remember swabbing a deck, with a mop, I'd forgotten about that. They gave me a mop and a bucket of water but I didn't realise when the ship rolled like that, so did the bucket of water. But that's about all I can remember doing was moping a,

34:00 I don't know where it was but I mopped a deck. So it, and I wasn't seasick on the way home and I wasn't seasick going over to Jacquinot Bay, it was just going up on this little Taroona, which was only a small boat really when you see the size of the others that we were on.

But how did it feel to be on your way home?

Oh it was beaut, I missed it for a while, you know the companionship of the others, but the family

34:30 were jolly pleased to see me home and my brother was on leave to and Les came down and so there were the three of us and we had, I think we had about a months leave, I did anyway. And then I had to go back, it was a bit of a let down I wanted to go back on the switchboard but oh no Mrs Appleford, who was Major Appleford, she was in charge she was a First World War nurse and she was in charge and she said, "Oh no, but I'll make you a sergeant of you go to Bonegilla." I said, "I've been away long enough, I

want to be nearer a home."

35:00 So I had to settle for bed states, which is checking on how many patients are in the Heidelberg Hospital, and I was there from the end of January and I got about August I think. I had to nag me way out, she said, "Oh if your pregnant you can get out," and I said, "I want to get married before I get pregnant." So that was it, I was stuck there, but I could get leave and Les was home, at our place and

35:30 things were sort of a bit better. By a bit better I mean the war was over and everybody was sort of looking up. But a lot had happened while we were away, there were young girls in the services there and they told me they'd been conscripted to go into the army, they'd done that apparently to keep the numbers up. But their hearts weren't in it, they were just sort of eighteen year olds that were just wanting a good time rather than put in a good days work. But that was how I got in with

36:00 the girl who was puffing the cigarette, she was just a young thing. So that was it.

And what had happened in Warragul during that time you were away?

Oh not much I don't think, I mean everybody couldn't do much cause the war was on.

Was there many...?

Oh people were coming back, some were fitting in. One poor fellow from Warragul he'd been a prisoner of war and he got home and he went to Melbourne for some reason or rather and somebody bashed him up, which was

36:30 pretty poor thing to do for a fellow that had been right through it. So life went on.

Did many young men not come home?

A lot, lots of ones we knew didn't come home. Oh I tried to get my job back but no there was somebody else in it and my mother said, "Don't worry," because my brother was home and my husband, he wasn't me husband he was me boyfriend then, he was living at home, she said she could do with the help in the house. So I helped in the house until we got married,

37:00 in the meantime we were building this place and my Dad was a do it yourself bloke and I oiled one side of the weatherboards and I undercoated the other side of the weatherboards for the house, and there was lots to do here, so I wasn't idle. And we decided that the house would be finished when we wanted to get married so we got married and lived with Mum and Dad until it was habitable. There was plenty to do around the place,

37:30 every time I got pregnant we laid another linoleum, that sort of worked in together. The house wasn't finished when we moved in but it was habitable because we had a little baby by that time.

And where were you getting the materials from because it was just post war wasn't it?

Oh we had coupons, my mother made my dressing gown out of curtain material because there was less coupons for curtain material.

38:00 And I had a wedding dress, we bought a wedding dress and an interesting thing about that, we went to Mantons which was a big shop in Melbourne in those days and got the wedding outfit, Mum was a sewer but she said, "I'd rather you bought it," so we did. And came the wedding day there was a telegram read out, best wishes from Elizabeth Brooks, and everybody went, Elizabeth

38:30 Brooks was the same name as my late grandmother and she had been dead for years. But Elizabeth Brooks turned out to be the manageress at Manton's and she had the same name as my late grandmother. It was a bit of a coincidence wasn't it? None of Les's family could get to the wedding because they were all New South Wales and there was petrol ration and you were pretty lucky to be able to get on a plane or a train, and it was a long way for them to come because they were all spread out in New South Wales. So

39:00 he took me up and met the relies about six months later, so I caught up with them that way. So it was all my side of the family that were at the wedding, it wasn't a big wedding but it was a bit of coincidence about the Elizabeth Brooks, wasn't it?

Hmm. Now did Warragul have any kind of ceremony or welcome home for the service men and women?

They farewelled me but they didn't welcome me home but they did welcome Les to the district. So they must

39:30 of been glad to see the end of me, mustn't they.

How did they welcome Les to the district?

Oh certificate, a certificate. No there was no big ceremony, I think out in the country, the little country places they welcomed their members back, but we just sort of got back into stride.

Any memorial services for the men that didn't come home?

Oh they put their names on plaques around the Cenotaph, the ones who died, their names

40:00 are there. We've had various recognitions since then, I can't think how but different, I'm involved with the RSL quite a bit and my husband, brother and my Dad and I were all in the RSL at the same time until Dad, we got out of the army in 46 and Dad died in 1950. So for those four years there was the four of us in the Warragul RSL. And my husband was president one year, I'm

40:30 just one of the crowd, but they wanted, I used to, I belonged as soon as I got out but I never went to the meetings cause I reckon it was a boys club, the men you know they used to meet and that was it. But if they wanted the weight of a vote I'd go along and do it. And then recent years the chaps don't go out at night, they've all got old so they meet in the day time, would the girls come along. Cause now you can be any of the services but you don't have to have served overseas. And originally

41:00 it was just overseas people who were returned soldiers. So, oh there's quite a few girls go now, or women, old ladies I suppose we are, we enjoy it we've got a very good leader and it's fun, so that's it.

Tape 7

00:31 **Here they come thick and fast, get ready for it Bernice. Yeah it would be good to hear a little bit more about Les and what he was doing, what sort of work he was up to and a bit more about how you both met and the sort of the courtship, if you may?**

Well you want to know a bit about his past. Well he was in the permanent

01:00 army when war broke out and he enlisted in Darwin, with a result he had an army number of DX125, very small number. And he was up there before the bombing of Darwin, he was one of the first to go off with the 6th Division over to the Middle East. He went over on the Queen Mary, he was in Tobruk before the siege, he was in England training, he was 2/3rd Field Regiment, and this is all what's his told me because I didn't know him then.

01:30 And he came back and he was involved in Greece and Crete, with the evacuation and all that. And he had a pretty rough time over there, from reading books and things and what he's told me. And he wasn't taken, prisoner of war, but a lot of his mates were and he was evacuated to Jerusalem because the unit was split up and he was put into the 2/8th AGH at Jerusalem. And they came back to Australia and then they went up to the island and he was

02:00 involved in the fighting at, no he was in the 2/8th AGH by this time, he went to Buna where the action was pretty hot and then they went on up to Lae with the 2/8th, staging like I was with the 2/7th. And then he went over to New Britain, he could have been on the same ship as I was, I don't know, or he might of gone in the advance party I don't know. Anyway so that was where we met up, he was in the RAP, Regimental Aid Post.

02:30 Where they did, oh sort of like outpatients at the hospital, they just patched up the odd thing and that was where I met him.

So he was an orderly?

Yes he was an orderly at that stage, hmm. He was a private, he was a gunner when he was in the artillery but he was a private at Jacquinot Bay. So that was a quick one on his story, but he was in his 8th

03:00 year in the army when he got out, so he hadn't really had a career. His father had been a, he had a chaff cutting business in the Riverina and his sons, there were ten of them in the family, not ten boys but ten children in the family, he worked with his Dad. And his father was killed in an accident off a truck and the family sort of had to get out into the world on their own, the ones that were old enough. And Les was sixteen and he went and worked in the Riverina on a farm for a chappie

03:30 who used to be in the First World War. And then he, when he was old enough he enlisted in the permanent army and that was his story. So he didn't really have a career but when he came down to Warragul my father employed him, so that's him in a nut shell.

And can you tell us a bit more about the burgeoning friendship that the two of you had?

Oh we just had common interests, he was easy to get on with, very considerate

04:00 being one of ten, he was sort of good and I liked him a lot. He wanted to get engaged up there and I thought well common sense prevail, you just don't know, you know army romances some work some don't. So bought him down home and the family approved of him so we got engaged, Dad employed him and we got on with the business of buying a block of land for a hundred and eighty pound, a block of land for a hundred and eighty

04:30 pounds. And Dad was a do it yourself bloke so we got things, ordered the timber and all the things, you could only have so much, you couldn't put cement paths or anything like that, you did without, which we

did. And it took two years to make the place habitable and then by that time we'd got married and had a little girl and we moved in and life went on from there.

When one has a romance in the army

05:00 **especially when your overseas and it's a very military setup, is it important to try and keep those things, that relationship sort of a secret, or was that?**

Oh no we sort of paired off somehow or other, there was about four or five of us paired off with chaps. And we got on with our days work, there was no hanky panky we just sort of got on, they were friends of ours. And that was it.

05:30 **So there was no policy about fraternising, it was all?**

No they didn't stop you from fraternising with members of the staff, they didn't encourage officers to fraternise too much with the ORs. I've got a friend here in Warragul she said, "You've got lots of army mates." She said, "We had to stick with just the officers." So she said, "Going down to reunions," she said, "I really don't know many of them." So we really had the best of it didn't we?

Now just, we had the pleasure before of

06:00 **going through your photo album and there are a few photos there which inspired a few questions, like you said that you were doing the same sort of work, the switchboard operating up in New Guinea and New Britain. But can you tell us the sort of location where you worked, obviously you weren't in buildings any more were you?**

Oh we were in a building it was attached to the medical records, it was one building, a sack sack and walls around it, and we were at

06:30 the end of the building. We were out of the weather, but that photo of the tent that was when they were rebuilding and somebody took the photo. And when they rebuilt it it was exactly the same as before and we were back in the same spot.

And what about, you've told us a little bit about sort of recreational activities, I notice shots of the swimming pool, where was that?

That was at Lae, yes we went up in the Taroona and we couldn't swim so they did something about it.

07:00 **So they were just what swimming lessons?**

That was just basic swimming lessons to make sure we could swim. And I learnt to swim, I was no champion but I could keep afloat, I could save me self but I couldn't save anybody else.

Now when, do you remember actually hearing news that the, you might of said before that those bombs had been dropped and subsequently the Japanese had surrendered. Do you recall actually receiving that news?

We just remember

07:30 the war was over, it's over it's finished, they dropped a bomb, what bombs in Japan, that's all we knew. Whether they had any more details I don't know, we just knew it was all over and great sense of relief. So out came the beer bottles and things like that and the boys celebrated. So we, there wasn't much we could do, you couldn't ring up anybody and say anything,

08:00 we just had to be pleased with the fact that the war was over.

So between then September and, when was it that you finally left New Britain, Jacquinot Bay, you were there for?

End of November.

So you had a couple of months there?

We had from August till the end of November and then we flew across to Lae and then we had a couple of weeks there, maybe a bit

08:30 more and then the hospital ship Manunda came and we came down the coast to Sydney. But they didn't do a rush trip because the sailors wanted to have Christmas at home, so that was it. And we were there for some days, I can't remember how many but I know we got to Melbourne, Spencer Street on Christmas Eve. So you know you forget the actual dates and things like that. But I know we arrived on St Patrick's Day, at

09:00 Jacquinot.

Now towards the end of the war and after the war there were apparently a lot of Japanese POW's on, probably more in Rabaul I'm not sure but in New Britain, but was there any of those, that sort of, those encampments or those…?

Not near us, no.

What about in Lae?

Oh we had the, at the hospital we had this compound where they were, there was about half a dozen of them there,

09:30 little fellows with slit eyes. And there was a shed there, I think that was just for the day I don't know what they did for night, perhaps they had a bed in there I don't know. But we didn't like to stare at them but they were there. So whether they were treated for illness or not or don't know, but there they were, that's the Jap POW compound and there they were and we only saw about half a dozen of them.

Do you know if they were ever treated in the AGH?

I don't know, no, they could

10:00 of been, I just can't answer that one.

That's all right. So how was your time spent sort of September, October, November, was it just a continuation of that, the same sort of work?

We just got on with our jobs, we knew we'd be going home soon and we just got on with what we had to do. But things were closing up, I think the chaps, once we'd gone they did a bit more, because Les was,

10:30 oh he was pretty well a month behind us, so they must of done that. We just didn't talk about it, planning the further you didn't sort of, that was in the past.

So what was the system for working out who would go back in, we've heard about the point system that operated for the serviceman?

For getting out of the army?

Yeah for going back home, to getting back to Australia?

Well the ones who had family that were POWs

11:00 from Singapore etc they were released first. And the girls that had been to Buna they went first and the rest of us just came on. Some could get out of the army straight away, with various reasons, an ailing mother or about to get married, something like that. But I had bother getting out, cause like I said I wanted to get married first but we didn't want to get married straight away, we wanted

11:30 to build a house. And as I said to Catherine, if I'd have been pregnant I could of got out but I wanted to do it the right way round. So that was the way it was and I had a lot of bother getting out, she said, "Oh you're an essential position now," now they'd put me into 'bed states', I would have been quite happy to have got out after me leave, but I had to fit in with things because there was more pressing things. Everything was getting sort of rearranged

12:00 rehabilitation and all that.

So sorry the last few months it wasn't just the switchboard work was it?

No they put me onto what they called 'bed states' which was an office job working out how many patients were in Heidelberg Hospital each day, cause there was admissions and discharges and all that sort of thing. And so I was pen pushing for those last few months and I really wanted to get out

12:30 but I couldn't, I just had to be patient. I did nag a bit, I think that might of helped.

So that was based, that was back at Heidelberg, so this is like through to, you were what there another couple of months were you, February '46 that you?

I got out August '46, I think, July, August '46, I was in just under the four years, about a month under I think.

13:00 **So what, how had things changed at Heidelberg you were there a couple of years before?**

Oh it was different altogether, there were younger girls there and oh they were more flibertigibbet, we had a war to win you see and the war was over when we got back and the older ones were getting out without too much trouble and the younger ones were still there. They told me they were conscripted, you know they were put in to fill in spaces because people

13:30 were getting out.

And I guess a lot more Aussie POWs were coming back as well?

Yes, yes quite a few of the ones I knew from the first Heidelberg days they had boyfriends who were POWs and they were anxious to get out. It was only right that they got out to.

Did you meet any of those fellows who had come back from the camps?

Yes one of my friends who was on the switchboard

14:00 at Heidelberg her, oh two of them, they were sisters and their boyfriends were from Clayton and they'd both been POWs and I've met them.

And how were they so soon after?

Oh Harold I've got a page out of the paper on Harold, he came back he was, his eyes were bludging and he was definitely, you could see he'd been through the mill. But he came good, his one of those fighting spirited

14:30 sort of blokes. And I didn't know the other chap so well but he's still around, you know some wore it better than others. And there's a few, there's only two here in Warragul that have been POWs because we went up to Ballarat to that new wall they've got up there, and these two chappies they posed in front of them, they took their photos.

So sorry you'll have to explain what you were doing, in a bit more detail if you can with the bed

15:00 **states, yeah bed states?**

I can't tell you much about it, it's just that I had to be looking up cards and see if so and so was still in hospital or whether they'd died or what. And much writing attached to it, but I can't really remember what I did, it was a bit tedious I know that, heart wasn't in it.

Was it purely sort of internal or was it answering requests?

It was purely clerical work, yes it was just one

15:30 of those things you do 'day by day by day' sort of thing. But I can't remember exactly what I did but each time I enquired about getting out, "Oh it's an essential job you can't go," so there I was.

Do you remember your last day there?

Yeah that felt good, I had to go to Camp Pell again where I got out, signed a lot of form and they offered me a

16:00 badge, gave me a badge and they said, "Oh you can join the RSL, you're all right, and you'll get this and you'll get that sort of thing." And I find in my old age I am getting concessions that I wouldn't have got if I hadn't been overseas, I've got a gold card. And I got a card, years ago in my own right because I was a returned service women and it's been a great help, in me old age, just flash that gold card and it

16:30 helps a lot, especially medically. And I'm grateful for it but I feel I've earned it.

So obviously your plans to get married, to build a house, so you've obviously had a lot on your plate, but at the same time had you had a chance to sort of reflect on that experience, those four years you had?

You think back on it, and we were very close, I found that a couple who married, not up there but they got married from Brisbane

17:00 they were coming through they called in. They all seemed to call in, Princes Highway, there wasn't a freeway in those days and they'd call in a have a cuppa and go on their way, they'd be going interstate. But we looked each other up and cause I was on the way through, on the Princes Highway which goes way up north, doesn't it. And I had quite a few of me old army mates call in, I've still got one who lives at Moe and where in close contact, she married a chap up there but he wasn't in our unit he was a military policeman.

17:30 And I've still got, I think there only, no two in Melbourne, one won't go out cause she's got some sort of a phobia that she doesn't like going out. Another ones an outgoing sort but she's pretty crippled, so were all wearing out one way and another, but our numbers are really thinning out. One's you've known for year they've just dropped by the way side eventually. But we've all stayed close, very close.

So have you had, I mean

18:00 **formal ties, associations, have there been, or has it been more a sort of looser sort of arrangement with your girlfriends?**

Well we used to have an annual get together, quite a lot of us would turn up, there was the War Nurses' Memorial down St Kilda Road and then they pulled that down and we'd go here there and about. We went to St Nicholas Hall which is attached to Wesley Church. We ended up

18:30 at the Military and Naval Officers' Club up the top of whatever street and, Spring Street, somewhere up there, long way from Flinders Street anyway, and we would go there as a group. And then the ladies got, the ones who, the committee they got too old to organise it, so it folded. And then the 2/7th invited us to come with them

19:00 cause they were a big unit and they used to meet at Dalais Brooks Hall and they still do, yes I think they still do. I wasn't at the last one because I was in Sydney, but cause it was medical personnel they invited, army, navy and medical personnel, army, navy and air force, and there was lots of sisters and

officers and things like that and some of us girls. And we went regularly, I wouldn't miss it year after year cause I'd meet up with me old mates. Well I didn't go this year cause I

19:30 was away. And I decided now I'd prefer to go with somebody in case I tripped over or got lost, I get lost in the city, I'd prefer to have a guide. The one up at Moe she's older than me but she grew up in Melbourne and she knows her way round, so if she goes I'll go. But I've got to the stage where I don't like the city on me own, I'd rather have a bit of a back up. But that way we still

20:00 keep in touch and I belong to the Women's Branch of the Returned Servicewomen. I've been to that, not much, I just joined recently, last couple of years. And that's quite good but I get most kicks out of the local RSL, there's about seven or eight of us girls go and some of the fellows and we're all mates. And that's quite good, that's once a month, so I keep in touch.

What's the background of those

20:30 **seven or eight girls that you mentioned?**

Oh there AWAS and WAAFS and things like that, there's only Jean and this Edna Cropley who was an officer and myself, we were the only VAD AAMWS that are, that go. And Jean and I are the only returned couple, the others have been around but they haven't been far. So but we're all in it together, it was just good luck that we got away, but that's just

21:00 the way of it.

So when you meet up with the VAD AAMWS girls, what do you sort of normally talk about, old days or?

Well they've mostly got sticks these days, I reckon I've worn pretty well, I should have a stick I suppose. But no we talk about the good old days, I went down on a train, this was a few years ago and there was four of us in the carriage. And we got talking about army days and having a good old giggle and

21:30 there's a chap sitting in the corner and he didn't say anything and we went down to our reunion and we came back. And I walked down the bottom of the hill to get milk or something and this bloke pulled me up, he said, "Is your name Smith?" and I said, "No," and he said, "You don't know it but I was in that carriage with you." I said, "My name was Jones." "That's right," he said, "They called you Jonesie." Anyway so we got talking about it and he said, "Gee I had a good trip listening to you girls." And he was a serviceman and he had been to, down to the Peter

22:00 McCallum and I was going down to the Peter McCallum for a while and they wouldn't give him a permit to get transport provided. And the poor old bloke he had it in his mouth and it had got into his system, it just, they wouldn't give it to him and I said, "I had to go down," and the lady I saw down there she said, "I'll get you a permit." And each time I went down," which was for several years they'd provide me with a vehicle, it would come up here, pick me up,

22:30 take me down, I had me treatment and they'd bring me back, quite often they'd have other people on board, but all I had to do was ring up the 'Peter Mac' transport and they'd arrange it with Veteran Affairs. Anyway that poor man they just wouldn't give him a permit and I reckon that was wrong, he's died but he had a lot of suffering to put up with. And because he was mobile he had to drive himself to the station, go down on the train and then find his way to the Peter Mac, which I thought was a bit cruel.

23:00 But some, you win some and you lose some, so I'm very grateful for me gold card to.

What's the badge that you're wearing?

That's the RSL badge, very proud of that one, I've been in it nearly sixty years. Don't you know what a RSL badge looks like?

Oh if I look up close I'll spot it yeah?

Yeah lots of us have them, so hmm.

23:30 **So okay just going back to the early sort of post war years how was it just sort of re-establishing yourself, coming from that sort of very, that sort of disciplined army sort of life?**

Yes it was different, you sort of had to make a fresh start. It was good having Les around but you sort of missed the companionship. I couldn't go back to my job, so I was helping my mother and I liked gardening in those days so I did a bit

24:00 of digging for Mum. It was different but you settled in, you knew you had to settle in. I didn't have to go back for any reason or other I don't think, after I got out that was it, so you sort of severed ties but they'd been me family for four years you see and it's a different life altogether.

So what do you think, what do you think it provided you with, how, did it, what

24:30 **sort of impact did it have on you as a person?**

It made me grow up, I mean I was just a country girl and there I was out in the world on me own, I got

more confidence, I could stand up for me self, I was always a meek sort of person. I think that's about it that will do.

Yeah?

Yeah your confidence grows, when your right away from you've got to stand on your own two feet, but I had lots of friends, if I didn't know where I was going they were there to say, "You go here there or about," or take us.

25:00 And cause the army, you always had your unit to go back to, and you had to go back to your unit there was no messing around, I mean that was it, so it was sort of like family. But I wouldn't have missed those years for anything, you did without and you roughed it. But they were good, you could handle it in those days, but I vowed I'd never go and live in the tropics.

25:30 It took a lot out of you, you know it was very hot and wearing, no I'm quite happy living down here, good country down here.

So other than sort of socialising with other returned service men and women have you ever had much of an opportunity to share those experiences, I mean even with your family for example when you did?

Oh we get talking sometimes and I open up and tell them things. Now Les he didn't talk about it, but one day he did, he told us,

26:00 but he didn't, until he got with his mates and then they'd compare notes. But the average person didn't really understand. When they had Australia Remembers they got us to go and talk to the school, little school at out Nugea and my daughter's in the historical society so Jean and I had to go and tell our story there, but that was the year 'Australia Remembers'. And the local ladies, the women auxiliary got me to talk to them about war days.

26:30 But these days I'm involved with Legacy, Les had been gone a month or two and they said, "Oh you should join Legacy." And so I thought, 'Well you've got to go out and mix, there's no good sitting home mooching', so I went to a meeting and I thought, 'Oh this is all right'. And the next one was the annual one and they threw me in and I'm still there, eighteen years later. But it's good because you meet other ladies in the same boat

27:00 and you can help them and that's what it's all about. So yeah I like Legacy.

So what does that involve?

It's widows of men who've served overseas, not just anybody can join, their husbands have had to have served overseas where the action was. And there entitled to be war widows and Legacy raises money to help them. And when your husband dies they come and help you with your

27:30 problems, there's a lot of homework to do, you know Solicitors and all that sort of stuff and they help you with all that, and help you to get a pension. Now I had no bother getting my pension because I was entitled to it. But this war widow's pension that's an extra seventy five-dollars a week, which is quite nice thank you. So it took nine years before we got it, because the first lot I saw

28:00 they were very hard and they sort of knocked you back, you felt like a criminal asking for things. And then years later my daughter who's a bursar up at, was a bursar up at the high school, been there for years, this old chap came up to the high school and his father was the first headmaster of the high school way back in 1911. And Phil had the job of showing him around the school and he said he was a military man and Phil said her Dad had been a

28:30 military and he said, "Your mother's got the widow's pension?" and she said, "No," and he said, "Why?" and she said, "Oh she got knocked back years ago," and he said, "Oh I might be able to help her." Anyway we didn't realise he was Major General Sir William Refshauge and he sent his card and if Mum approved and Mum did approve and next thing I'm in Bruce Ruxton's office. And we had to go down, Phil came with me and

29:00 you had, if your husband smoked you had a better chance of getting, his death was war caused, but Les had to stop smoking, he did smoke during the war but he had to stop because he had asthma, and that rather knocked it back. Anyway lots of questions and lots of form filling in, Bruce said he'd help. So we filled these forms in and we sent them down and it went on for a few months and then we had to front up to the board and we got through without any trouble,

29:30 got a very sympathetic hearing and, younger men, and they put his death down to, although he had a clot through his heart it was his lungs that he got his disability pension on. Wartime stress cause he'd been right through Greece and Crete and a lot of stuff. And that's made a lot of difference to my life, instead of going down the drain, I can save up now. So that was good and he did help us, I'm very grateful for that.

30:00 But it was very interesting going down there, he had a cockatoo sitting on a perch in his office, in a little old house, a cottage in South Melbourne and they'd knocked one wall down and the passage was there and the walls were like that and that wall was missing. And it was real 'higgledy piggledy' but there was Bruce sitting up there, have you met him?

No.

He's quite, you've heard of him though?

Oh yeah?

Oh he's quite a character but he was a help and that was what we needed.

30:30 So that was it, that's enough.

Good stuff, now what about, do the VAD AAMWS regularly march on Anzac Day?

They're entitled to, I never did march in Melbourne, I wanted, the only time I could get a chance to march was when we came back from the islands and I was on these wretched bed states and I couldn't be relieved, so I had to stick with the bed states. But I do march, I don't any more because I can't keep

31:00 up with the band, but I have for years marched with the Warragul RSL and my husband Les he was the marshal that sent them on their way, he was there till he died. He kept saying each year, "I can't do it," his breath was short, "Can't do it another year," but he did and he did it for years and years. And I started marching when the kids got big enough to leave and I used to enjoy marching. Then I found I couldn't, I had something wrong with me, wegsaglania matosis [?], you've probably never heard of it.

31:30 **No.**

It could have killed me but it didn't and I found I couldn't keep up with the band. So now I go and I go and stand at the cenotaph when they march up. And this year I had the job of laying the wreath, but I'm still very interested in things, Legacy and RSL, so that's it.

What does Anzac Day mean to you?

Oh a lot because of the family being involved since my Dad, and my brother and my husband,

32:00 and lots of people that I know, you know it's quite important. I wouldn't miss it unless I really had to, we sit there out in the weather, sometimes it's cold and wet and windy, but it's well worth it and it's growing year after year, it get bigger and bigger. And this year we had a lady from the Cerberus, the navy and she bought about a dozen sailors with her and it was beaut, she spoke well

32:30 and it was very good. So yes that was Sunday.

And do you think the world, or we as a country have learnt anything since World War II, have we learnt the lessons of that era?

I think so and there's far more children at it these years, in later years, there's about half a dozen schools they laid wreaths, they had their teachers with them. And one little girl about that big she was there laying a wreath too.

33:00 And they do lots more in their schools about it, because they seemed to drop history at one stage of the piece didn't they in schools, but now they're sort of taking it up. No I think it's a good thing.

Well Bernice we've only got a few minutes left on the tape so is there anything else you would like to say before we finish up, is there anything that you think we might of skimmed over?

I don't think so, I've done a lot of talking haven't I?

33:30 **You have done a fair bit.**

And I thank you for coming here.

It's been a pleasure.

The girls seem to think that I should do it, my conscience said I should anyway, I mean for future, I hope you edit it quite well, cut out a lot.

I don't think too much needs to be cut out, the main thing is it's there as you say for future generations, that that story is recorded and will be remembered.

Yes, I've been to the Canberra Cenotaph, we

34:00 went there one trip, we went with the garden club to the Floriade and we went and saw the Cenotaph and that, very impressive. Anyway somebody took me photo standing with Simpson and his donkey. So no, if I hadn't had that, I'd have left a big hole in me life, I'd feel I hadn't done me bit. Because we used to be very, still patriotic but the way it was, we were very patriotic.

34:30 **Do you think it was a different kind of patriotism, was it more intense?**

Oh we really meant it in those days, whether they do these days, they've cut out lots of things that we took for granted, saluting the flag and all that sort of thing. At school we used to, we'd have an assembly on a Monday morning and we'd recite the, whatever we had, I can't remember now, 'I love God, honour my country' and all that sort of stuff.

35:00 But I don’t think they do that now, no, so that’s it.

Okay shall we finish it up now?

Yes please.

Okay.

INTERVIEW ENDS