Australians at War Film Archive

Patricia Penrose - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 20th May 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/199

Tape 1

00:38 **Well, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to interview you. This is the first time I am interviewing an AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] and hopefully I'll be able to get a totally different picture to what I have already received. I'd like to begin with focussing on just, if you could start with where you were born and where you grew up?**

01:00 Sure. Well I was born in Portland, Victoria which was the first settlement, Portland, and my father was a bank manager and when I was a baby he moved up to Gardenvale, which is not far from Brighton and I grew up there and I went to school in Brighton, at the Church of England Girls Grammar School, and after I left there I became

01:30 a clothes designer and I worked at a very exclusive place in Collins Street. When I was there it was a very interesting because the war had broken out and General MacArthur came down from the Philippines and he bought his wife and his little son and she came into

02:00 our place, which was the leading place in Melbourne. She came into our place every day for a week till she got outfitted, and the car was outside, with the big, you know the flag flying on the front and everything and the chauffeur. And all our workrooms were turned into, everything was working for Mrs MacArthur, because she couldn't be received at Government House or anywhere until she was satisfied that she was all already to go and meet people.

02:30 So the little boy, little Arthur, he had his native "Ah Ma" I think they call them, the women, and he was already going down to feed the swans, the Botanical Gardens, and MacArthur himself stayed in the best hotel in Melbourne, Menzies. And he decided he'd have a grand piano played, so he had the staff carry a

03:00 grand piano right up the staircase cause it wouldn't fit in the elevator, so he could play and he was waiting to make his move up to take the Philippines back and we had a lot of Americans there. A lot of Americans were in Sydney, and here and Brisbane, right down the coastline. They were waiting to go into action. They bought a

03:30 few problems with them, because you know, the girls thought "They were getting a bit" and remembering that our soldiers, and my brother and most of the young men that I knew had joined up as soon as the war started, 1939. And so the women had been without really whole men on the continent for a long time, and these great big guys came in

04:00 and they had wonderful uniforms, they all looked like officers, they had money, they had everything, and there was a lot of dancing, a lot of fun went on, one way or another. So when they left, of course, all this went with them, but the women did enjoy themselves. But when they went we knew a lot of those men would probably go up and lose their lives,

04:30 we wouldn't see them again. And they built a camp in Fawkner Park, which is opposite the Alfred Hospital, and that was for the marines, 700 hundred Marines, and they refused to live there. They said "It was too dark, too dank, too foggy and unfortified", and it was all those things. But they moved into the comforts of the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where they had

05:00 hot and cold running water, and cover to sleep and so they moved 700 AWASs in there, 7 hundred of us women in the Australian Women's Army Service. We moved in where the marines were.

How big was the AWAS?

700, well,

Was that the whole distinction?

No, no, there were only 700 of us in there, but I wouldn't know, I would have to look up a book to know how many served. They were serving in every state

05:30 but there wasn't much going on down the West Coast of Australia, so we had a lot of our camp come from Western Australia. But they had a big camp in Sydney and there were more girls in Brisbane, but signals were always situated in Melbourne because it had the best atmospherics for getting signals from overseas.

Now Patricia, just before we proceed, I want to come back to that, but just, I want to go back towards your pre-war life.

06:00 I'm sorry.

No, no, that's ok, that's fine. You were talking about your father coming here, you didn't mention anything about your mother or your siblings.

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. My mother came from Ballarat. Her father owned and edited a newspaper in Ballarat, and she'd been educated at Ballarat Grammar School, she was one of a family and she met my father because he was a bank ma [manager], he was in the bank in Ballarat.

Was he also Grammar

06:30 **School educated?**

Yes he was, but he was educated in, his father was headmaster of a school, he was educated at a place outside of Ballarat, it escapes at the moment, I'll remember. And so he used to when she came from the Ballarat School of Mines, he'd carry her paintings and things down for her, that was how they met. And then he came down here to a bank,

07:00 and she married him and came down here to be with him. And then he was in very many different banks, Bendigo, Clunes, Ararat and so on and that was how I came to be born in Portland, because that was one of his banks.

I see

And we were there

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Yes, I had two brothers, and my elder brother, Wallace, and then I had a sister Alice, and then my next brother Rupert, and my sister

07:30 Sheila, they were all older than I was.

Now OK.

I was the youngest of the five. Yes.

Ok. So you went to a Grammar School in Melbourne?

Yes, I did.

You grew up in Brighton?

In Brighton, Firbank. Yes. Church of England Girls Grammar School.

Oh I see. What was the school like at the time of the Depression? This was during the Depression, I understand? 1930s?

I wasn't aware of

08:00 the Depression myself, personally, because it didn't affect our family but my father was very aware of it because he was a bank manager, and very many of the people in Gardenvale, where his bank was, were paying off their homes. And my father was a most wonderful man because he was so kind and he was always thinking of other people and how things affected them and

08:30 he was affected because he thought "Some of the people who had been given bank loans may not be able to pay their houses off", and the Depression, it had its effect on you, even though it wasn't affecting my family, and there were a lot of people out of work, and there was a lot and my sister next to me, my sister Sheila, who always had plenty

09:00 to say about everything, we would be sitting around the table at night, and my father would be saying, you know, "About the people not been able to keep up their payments or something" and she kept saying, "It's their fault, they all have too many children, too many children all of them, so they shouldn't be doing that", but they put a lot of the people to work on the road to Lorne,

09:30 **The Great Ocean Road**

The Great Ocean Road, a lot of those people were put to work there, but my mother always worked for the Women's Hospital. She made bibs, and she crocheted things, made things for the babies there and the mothers and she did that voluntarily. My eldest brother was a builder and then Alice didn't, well she did charity work.

10:00 But my father didn't believe in women working, so that he thought that "He would keep them always, until they married a man who was prepared to keep them, that they shouldn't go out to work". So that neither my two elder sisters or I did. They didn't, I did. I went to work.

Did you ever come across, you said the Depression didn't affect you family.

No.

Did you ever come across people that were

10:30 **on, were sustenance workers in your area?**

No.

Never? So you never saw anything about the Depression that concerned you?

No. I wasn't aware of it very much.

What was Brighton like at the time?

Brighton is one of the oldest suburbs, definitely because it was called after Brighton in England. It was settled by an Englishman, the whole place was settled, the man had a lot of money and people around here have always had money,

11:00 stables, yachts, boats, whatever, they've always had money in Brighton. It's always been. But where we were in the bank in Gardenvale, which is only one station along, well that had a lot of new homes built there, and things like that, bank homes. That's where my father came to be concerned about the people trying to pay them off, but we had a lot of people came to the back door, selling

11:30 things. Men came and they had trays round their necks and they tried to sell combs, or ladies hairnets, or something like that that you might use, pencils. They had to come to the back door, they weren't allowed to go in the front door and your mother would go and answer and it would be nothing to have four or five people a day coming to your door, and I used to

12:00 be at her skirts, before I went to school, so I know my mother, one man came, and of course you know the men in the First World War were called "Diggers", you know why they were called Diggers, and she said to him, "Oh, I've just bought something from a Digger", and he said, "We can't all be bloody Diggers", and I got such a shock, you know, hanging onto her frock, because I hadn't heard anybody swear like that in front of me. I realised he was

12:30 being a bit violent, but anyway, that I was aware of the Depression only through those things, but not in my home.

Did you have any relatives who fought in the First World War? Or parents?

Yes, yes I did. I had. I was going to say that my father went to enlist for the Boer War.

Your father did?

He went to enlist for the Boer War, and they were questioning him when he went to enlist and

13:00 they said, "You can go away again, Mr Rattray, we don't want people with four children. We want people who are single", so he didn't. Just as well, I mightn't have been here otherwise and then the Boer War didn't come, the Boer War wasn't very long after that, the 14-18 War started with Germany and of course, we didn't have, there were a lot of things we didn't have at that stage.

13:30 They didn't have wireless, they didn't have photography and all the things that came. But three uncles of mine fought in World War I and I had three uncles at the landing of Gallipoli, and I forget, I had a little statue, here it is. This is my uncle's medal who fought in World War I.

14:00 I've had it mounted, and his name was Frederick Norman Rattray, and he was one of them who landed on Gallipoli, but unfortunately he died. He died at a place called, he was killed at Mokay Farm and he is buried in Villiers-Bretonneux

That's a pretty bloody area.

Villiers-Bretonneux. Yes, August 1916.

14:30 So, so. My father couldn't ever go because he had a right knee, which he'd had an injury with a horse when he was younger and that had put his right knee out of order, so they wouldn't accept him, he couldn't go, he couldn't go to fight. He did what he could for everybody else because I'm not very far from the Anzac Hostel here and

15:00 that was set up after World War I and he, I think, too because he felt that his brother had died, he went up there every Friday afternoon, and he went up sometime on the weekend, because he advised their wives on how to manage on their money and what to do with their books, because they didn't get very much from Repatriation, and he was constantly doing those things.

15:30 And then later on when they got a bit older, he'd go up and play, Friday afternoon, after that bank closed, he'd go up and play cards with them. When they got to the Anzac Hostel, it was the point of no return. They would never get better, they would never go back to hospital, that was it once they were there. I remember at Firbank we used to go,

16:00 the girls from different classes would go on a Sunday afternoon and serve the men afternoon tea and that was part of learning to be with the Red Cross, which I was a member of, the junior Red Cross. And that was pretty scary because the men were, as I say, at a point of no return. They were alive, they could eat, they could move,

16:30 they could play cards but that was all they could do. I was there one Sunday, and there was a man came along and I thought "Grotesque", and he was like this, and he was heavy, big, and the feet, and I had the cup of tea and the scone, and whatever it was, and I was really frightened. So I moved away and I got round the back of him

17:00 and put things down and then I sort of ran back a bit and I went and told my mother that "I was frightened of him" and she told me that "He was sick and I wasn't to be frightened and it was only because he was sick that he was shaking. That he wasn't really meaning to hurt me and what I had to do then was

17:30 to carry out what I had set out to do, and put things very quietly near his locker or his bed, wherever, and just keep out of his way and go out again." And I think that's been a wonderful lesson to me in life, because sometimes something I haven't wanted to do, or hasn't been nice and I think if my mother was here, she'd send me back and say, "You've got to do it, you find a way around it, but you have to do it because this what you have to do."

18:00 And I thought "What a wise lady she was".

When you said these people were at the point of no return?

Well, I meant they were, they would be passed out of Heidelberg Hospital and they had to live out their lives, but they had to do so with nurses and people to massage them. Even the man that massaged them,

18:30 Elmer Glue, he didn't have any eyesight, but he was trained as a masseur and he massaged them, and some of them were in chairs, or some of them just walked around the grounds, but they were past hospitalisation, there was nothing more could be done for them. It was really that they lived the rest of their lives there.

Did they have also mental illnesses?

No, no, no.

No war neurosis?

They were all mentally capable. Well, apart

19:00 **from this man that was "Shell Shocked" as they called it. They called it "Shell Shock". But that didn't stop them playing cards or reading a book or something like that.**

So did these people, are we talking about fairly horrific injuries as well?

No, I think it was mostly, well if they had these physical injuries that was sort of fixed as far as they could, as far as Heidelberg could do.

19:30 Whatever walking difficulties they had or anything like that, they might have been in wheelchairs, or something like that, but they were still able to shave and dress themselves and speak, the main thing was they could have a meal together and speak together and things.

So it wasn't as bad as some of the other institutions?

Well, it just depended on what was wrong with you, I mean, if they were mentally quite ok

20:00 and one of them only had one hand, so they had a thing set for him to have his cards in, and Dad would play cards with him, and things like that, and they could read. I know the Prince of Wales, as he was then, he came and visited them. But they weren't well enough to go home, they weren't well enough for a woman to be looking after them.

Did you recall if there was a sad atmosphere

20:30 **there?**

Well I was, you know, when you are little and you see people that look to you grotesque, without taking into account that you mustn't stare at them, it's a little bit frightening. I wasn't frightened of them, just that I'd always met whole people before. I was sorry for them but I'd always met. All my brothers and sisters played

21:00 golf and tennis and my brother drove racing cars and so I went out of one environment into another but

as I say, it did me good, because my mother made me realise how I could help people and that was good.

So when you, this experience tarnished your image of war altogether?

Well, I was too young to know about it.

As you grew up?

21:30 Well no, no I must admit I didn't think very much more about it. I went to school and it wasn't very long between the wars. It wasn't very long from 1918.

How long were you visiting the hospital for?

I used to go every fourth week, my class went every fourth Sunday.

For how long? For how many years?

For a couple of years.

A couple of years.

22:00 **So what did Empire mean to you at the time?**

Empire?

Up until the war?

Oh, Empire. Oh yes, we were part of the British Empire. That was wonderful. Queen Victoria and the Kings and we were connected with South Africa, and India and Ceylon and we were all part of the British Empire. It was wonderful to be part of the British Empire.

Why was that?

Well because it was something no one else had, I guess.

22:30 We had the only Empire and we were part of it, I suppose, well I mean we knew that, but come to think of it, there was probably an Austrian Empire, and all sorts of other things, but we only knew about the British Empire, which was very far flung, India, Ceylon and the Islands and all those places and we were part of it. And in my mother's case they'd all been kept a part of it with Queen Victoria

23:00 because she'd stayed on the throne so long.

So what did Anzac mean to you?

Ah well, well the Anzac Hostel was what I knew, the Anzac Hostel, but I didn't really know until I was older what the word Anzac meant. I just knew it was Anzac Cove but I didn't ever know it was because of Australian New Zealand Army Corps, that was sometime before I learnt that. It was

23:30 just a word to me, it meant Anzacs.

When did it have some meaning to you?

Oh, much later, much later.

Before or after the Second World War?

No, I realised something, well I knew about my uncles and everything, but, we had to go through a period where you were educated and of course, as you say,

24:00 people went through a Depression, which even if you weren't short of money you realised that a lot of people around you that were out of work. Or as my father used to be worried about people that couldn't pay their houses off and things like that, so you were aware of a lot of people coming to the door wanting to sell things, at your back door. They weren't allowed to come to your front door.

Why was that? Why back door?

24:30 The trespass.. Hawkers, hawkers always had to go to the back door. There were notes on everybody's gates. "This is the front gate. Hawkers go…" Hawkers and canvassers go to the back door, they don't come to the front door. Only visitors go to the front door.

Did you have a big house?

Oh the bank. I was up in the double storied bank, I lived.

I suppose it's a bit interesting you say they can come around the back door

25:00 **because these days everyone knocks on your front door.**

I know, but the houses were much bigger and even if you had a suburban house you had a side entrance and hawkers or canvassers went down the side entrance and came to the back door.

So who were the people that generally came down the front. Anyone else?

Oh visitors and friends, but that was the way it was.

25:30 We realised that there were a lot of people out of work and we, it must have been pretty awful for these men to go around with these things around their necks selling combs and ladies' hair nets or something that might be useful or that.

Your father, how did it impact on him, that he would have to repossess properties?

Oh he didn't, but he was aware if the people were

26:00 unable to pay off their homes and things. He was a man of great kindness, a gentle, gentle man. And he, without wanting to encroach on us, but he was very concerned about the fact, and he went down and tried to help them with their money. And actually when the men from the Anzac Hostel, they had wheels on their beds, and wheels

26:30 they could go round on. They'd line up outside the bank, and my father would go out personally, with a pen and the withdrawal form, or whatever, and discuss and get their bank book, and he would do it on the pavement and then take it back into the bank and bring it back to them. That was personally. I saw that as a child. They were all lined up and Dad would go and look after them. He was the manager but he still looked after them.

27:00 I think he always thought of his brother who was dead and buried and remembering that, and he thought "It could be his brother". But he was very kind to their wives and everything. When he died, the Anzac Hostel, all the people there, put a notice in the paper about him, because he was more or less a tradition up there, you know. He gave his time to that.

What was your religious background?

27:30 Church of England.

Church of England. Both your parents?

My father's father, of course, was a strong Presbyterian. He was a Scot. Rattray was my maiden name.

How do you spell that?

R A T T R A Y. There's a clan. Clan Rattray. And he was a Scot. He was tall, had a moustache and wore a hat

28:00 a little cap, a smokers cap. We went to see him. He was headmaster of a school, he was headmaster of that very big school, you probably came past it today. On the corner of, near the MCC [Melbourne Cricket Club], that huge school there. He grew to be the headmaster of that, which covered the Burnley, Richmond area, but when you went to visit him he always sat in a big chair like that, with his smokers hat on

28:30 and his beard. Because they only went outside to smoke. If they wanted to smoke they had to go into the back garden. But he was really gruesome. Six feet two and very stern. I think he probably dished out the strap quite a bit, I should think. His father was a schoolmistress, that's how she met, that's how she met my grandfather.

29:00 So he was the child of, both of them were school teachers.

Were your parents religious?

I digressed from what I was saying. One father was Presbyterian and the other side were Church of England. No, I don't remember my father particularly going to church. I'm sure my grandfather did.

29:30 **What about your mum?**

Mother was Church of England and she came with us, she helped the church, with bazaars and all those things.

So how would you comment on your religious upbringing?

Because we all got it at school. My father had his own way, because he sent my brother Rupert to Scotch College, so that

30:00 was the Presbyterian and the Church of England thing. I can't say we were very laidback about it. My brother, Rupert, had his own racing car, a Bugetti, a little silver one, and he drove that, and he did all those things. And we surfed and we had houses at Torquay and we went down there for week after week.

You surfed?

30:30 Yes. I was a surfer. Torquay was wonderful.

How old were you when you actually finished school at the Grammar?

When I finished school? I don't know. I was about fourteen or fifteen, or something like that.

And what took place after that?

Nothing. My father, well as far as my father was concerned he did not believe

31:00 that girls should work.

He was very strong on that?

Yes.

How would he enforce that? How would he talk to you about that?

Well, it wasn't hard to accept, was it? If your father keeping you and you were managing to play tennis out at Kooyong, or play golf, or do something like that, it wasn't a great battle, was it? We were having a ball and Dad was paying for it.

He was quite happy to do that?

Oh yes.

31:30 He thought "It was his duty to keep his daughters, until a man came along that would marry them and would keep them". So my eldest sister played a lot of tennis and my other sister got her handicap down to about 4. She had a ball. She also played tennis at Kooyong and we surfed.

How did you learn to surf? It's interesting that women played…I suppose you're from a middle class background, so you had more

32:00 **time to do all these things? The financial backing?**

Yes, we had surf boards.

Did a lot of women take part in sport at that time from school?

If you had a certain amount of money, you would only, you wouldn't. I belonged to Kingston Heath, which is the championship club, and my name was put down for that when I was at Firbank, because I wanted to play golf, and all the championship courses are out there, near Kingston Heath,

32:30 and Sheila played tennis at Kooyong and Alice, of course, came up from Portland. In the country areas they were all. My mother played croquet. Dad had played golf but he had developed a stiff leg, so couldn't play golf anymore. But he couldn't manage to get down to play bowls either. They were all about six foot two, the menfolk in our family.

33:00 But sport was very big with us, especially the surfing and the swimming.

So from fourteen onwards, from you leaving the Grammar School?

Oh, I didn't leave school until I was about fifteen or so.

Right fifteen, was it? So what took place after that? You were just…?

Oh well. I wasn't supposed to be working or doing anything and then my eldest brother

33:30 prevailed upon my father to let me do, he was still of the opinion that he should keep me until a man came along to marry me, and they didn't really believe, but Wallace persuaded him that he thought that "I was alone" and he thought that "I should learn to do something", and so I went to the Emily McPherson College

34:00 and I studied fashion and design and from there I went into Insleigh's in Collins Street, into this very, very, individual and exclusive place where they design clothes and things. That was how I came to meet Mrs Douglas MacArthur.

Now this would have been what year?

34:30 Oh it would have been about. The war broke out in thirty nine, didn't it? Yes. I was still there when the war was on. Because the car used to come with the American flag flying on the front of it. He'd landed over here. And I was still there then, but then after that, the war was getting very close to us and they started the Australian Women's Army Service. There had never been one before and they were putting

35:00 ads in the paper and saying "Join up" and everything. And so I said to… "Dad, well they've got notices up outside the Melbourne Town Hall", and so he said, "Well, we'll go in and I'll see the man, see all about it." So he took me in and he had his bowler hat on, sit up starched collar, and he's hearing all these things, and so the man said to him.

35:30 He said to me, "What was your best subject at school?" And my father, being the bank manager, said, "Mathematics" as quick as… He had his bowler hat on and everything. "Mathematics." And the man said, "Oh well, you would be in cipher, if you came into the Women's Army, you would be in cipher, because that's all mathematical." So when I told my mother at home,

36:00 she said, “I don’t think you’d like it all. You never liked being amongst a whole lot of girls and women, and as for that I couldn’t even get you to join the Girl Guides.” So I said, “No Mum, I didn’t like the hats.” Anyhow.

Was that the only reason?

Probably. They were navy blue and thick stockings.

One thing before you do proceed on joining the AWAS, was that

36:30 **you didn’t tell me exactly where you were when the war started and what happened actually in thirty nine? Because this was before you joined. You joined after.**

Oh I joined up. Yes.

What year did you join up? Forty one?

Forty Two. As soon as the Women’s Army Service started.

Ok. That was when it started?

Yes.

So you were in the first batch of people?

Well, I was in School Six I think. School Five or Six.

So when war was declared in 1939…?

There was nothing open for women to do except be a nurse.

37:00 **What was going through your mind? Where were you that day?**

I don’t know. But it was, it was, I do, I used to sing in the church choir, the Church of England choir, and this was Sunday night, and the chap that brought me home, played the organ, so he brought me home to my place in Brighton and when we got there, Dad and Mum were looking very glum.

37:30 And I brought him in and asked him “If he’d like some supper”, and they said, they said, “War has been declared.” And we said, “Oh yes”, and they looked at us and said, “You don’t know what this means, you just don’t know what this means.” They were terribly distressed. And that was it. From then on, boys

38:00 I knew, that had been at school joined up, they were young men by this time. They joined up. People just vanished off the scene. Chaps just went. Everybody who was well, went and did something. And of course, if there was anybody that was older or who couldn’t fight, they went off to make munitions or do something like that. Everybody went their

38:30 different ways. Everybody was trying to do something. You couldn’t do enough to try and win the war. Of course, we didn’t have television in those days and wireless wasn’t very strong, at getting messages through. We had to rely on the newspapers a lot.

Newspaper and wireless basically. So the people who had wireless, were they generally people who had a bit of money?

Yes, if you had a radio. It was funny in those days because you’d sit round the radio

39:00 you know, we sit and look at television now, but people would sit around the radio, it was a sort of gathering thing and you’d listen to the radio together, whether it was music or whatever it was.

Tape 2

00:34 **So you were telling about your first, when war was declared**

Well it was very well, my parents were so serious about it, and everything, but you knew that war had been declared, but you couldn’t have foreseen that, suddenly all the young men you knew

01:00 went out of your life. I don’t mean that in a selfish way but you weren’t dancing. You weren’t going dancing at the Palais every Friday night. All this fell by the wayside, it was trivial compared to. And they were very serious young men, they’d come and say “Goodbye” to you. They’d say, “Well Mr and Mrs Rattray”, you know, and “Pat,

01:30 I’ve joined, I’ve joined the army and I’m getting six days’ leave”, or whatever it is, and “I’ll be on the ship and I’m going”, and this would happen and with one chap this happened, and about a fortnight after, I read in the paper where he’d been wounded and killed in Egypt and that to me was absolutely indescribable because he’d

02:00 come and shaken hands with. It was wonderful that the young boys did that. They came and shook hands with your parents and said goodbye and said, “We’ll come and see you when we’re on leave”, and it was all serious business that they said “Goodbye” to you. They just didn’t vanish but when you saw a face and a photo in the paper and this person was killed or missing or,

02:30 so that was hard to believe that some great big strong chap that you’d been dancing with or played golf with or something, suddenly vanished out of your life and was dead. You couldn’t believe that this strapping big man that you’d said goodbye to, I don’t mean hefty, I mean just, you know

03:00 was suddenly gone. He’d said “Goodbye” and he’d gone to serve Australia and was never seen again. It was the same if they were taken prisoner, you didn’t know. It was listening to the wireless or picking up a newspaper, it was dreadfully worrying. Very worrying.

You knew how many people that went personally?

Oh yes, I did.

A lot of people.

03:30 I cut pictures out of them and stuck them in a book.

So their photos would appear in the newspaper?

Yes

Once they died?

Yes, they would. They’d get onto their parents and they’d have a loan of a photograph and put in, even from Ballarat and everywhere, and that was, we wrote letters but we really didn’t know exactly where they were. They’d just say “Somewhere in Egypt or somewhere in France” or something like that. You see the

04:00 difference was this time to World War I, they had to rely on telephones and everything like that from France, but the Second World War of course, everything was stepped up because you had wirelesses, you had radios and things like that, so that meant you learnt a lot quicker about what was going on.

04:30 **So**

It was very quick.

So with all this departure of young men to the front, what was going through your mind about military service?

You felt desperate, you just wanted to do something. They were having us learn how to make camouflage nets, well, you’d go and learn that. So you’d knit socks.

05:00 You’d knit socks and sent them to the Comforts Fund. You’d make cakes in tins and send them off to soldiers or anybody that you knew, addressed to the Middle East, and they were all sewn into calico and sent off. You did everything like that, that you could possibly think of, for anybody. Work for the Red Cross, knit, whatever you could do. That was it, I mean all dancing stopped, all fun stopped,

05:30 everything, because you were patriotic, and you put yourself behind the war effort. But you felt so helpless, because when you’re young, and you’re virile, surely to god better things you can be doing than just sitting back knitting socks. It wasn’t enough, we had to do more, we were young.

06:00 It was alright for older people to be doing those things, but when you’re young and virile, you feel you can do a lot more than that. We didn’t feel we were pulling our weight. We wanted to help the men.

So you did these sort of thing which helped you to feel you were part of the effort?

Yes, yes

But it still wasn’t enough, was it?

No, no, no, it wasn’t enough. That’s why I’m very glad they started the Women’s Services, because then we really felt

06:30 we were in there doing what we could within the service to help the men.

So when the WAAAF [Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force] was started, I think, in 42, how was that seen among women?

Oh well, the girls differentiated between the army, the navy and the air force, and the girls that joined the WAAAF very often had a family or brothers, or something, were akin to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force].

07:00 To the air force.

So like sisters or something like that?

They would have been. But I would never have wanted to join that, because I wasn't air force minded, but when the army was started, then definitely.

Why do you say you weren't air force minded? Why did that matter?

I mean, people were, families were air force minded if they had people in the air force, ok, they'd want to join the WAAAF

07:30 but, I mean everyone I knew was in the army, so I wanted to join the army. This WAAAF business didn't go down with me. When I asked the WAAAFs "What they did?", they were "Cleaning planes, polishing them and doing them up" and all this sort of thing when the plane came into land. That wasn't exactly my scene. But when it was so that we could take a man's place

08:00 and really relieve a man who was fit and well to go to war, then that was definitely something we wanted to do. We could learn to do that.

Okay you're saying that, for instance, what about the other services, was there some sort of nepotism in the recruitment there?

No, no,

08:30 what your background was, had a lot to do with it. Because the air force was a new service, it had only come up after World War I. So that if you were army orientated that was what you felt.

Would you say the WAAAF was generally middle class girls?

No, I think they came from every class. It depended what you did. If you only had a limited background or education or something,

09:00 well you would maybe end up polishing the planes or cleaning them or doing the things like that, but it depended. They had steps and stairs as to what they were doing. They had a signal corps and they would be sending those things. I don't think they rode motorbikes but they did everything they possibly could like that. But because an aeroplane's such a big thing there weren't any women pilots

09:30 because that took a long time to learn, but in the army we could go up and up and up according to what we were doing.

So you're saying that WAAAF had less promotional prospects?

Oh I would think it would to appeal to fewer people, because of the planes, the cleaning them, doing the jazz. If you were air force minded that's fine, but it wasn't my scene.

10:00 **So tell me also, did you actually have a boyfriend at the time?**

Oh, I had lots of boyfriends. I was a good dancer. We never settled for one boy in those days, we went out with all different types of boys that you knew. But you knew their background or you knew their parents and you went dancing. Yes you were a good dancer. I used to average about three or four dances a week

10:30 or ball. When the balls came on that was great. Had different clothes to go to every one, different clothes.

So you were very active?

The difference between good and naughty girls was the fact that you didn't stop dancing. If you were well behaved like I was, you kept dancing. There were girls who vanished out into cars, then came back dancing. It wasn't me. Wasn't my scene.

11:00 But dancing was wonderful. That was something I missed very much when the war, it was something I missed very much.

How did your parents react towards you having boyfriends?

My father would say, "This young man has asked you to go to something, now which school does he go to?" "He goes to Caulfield Grammar." "How old is he?"

11:30 "Well, I finish the bank at such and such a time, you ask him to come down after school and see me, and I'll have a talk to him." So they'd go into the dining room and I wouldn't be there or anything. Then he'd talk to them and then he'd say to me, "Yes, I think you can go out with him, but I'll come and pick you up from the party in the car." He had a car.

12:00 Which was unusual, and he.

Your father had a car?

A big car, a big Dodge.

That's right, they were unusual at the time.

They used to say, “We don’t mind how many people else are in the car, but you’ll be in the car, and I’ll drop some of the others off, but you’ll always be there.” So they kept a pretty tight rein. They wanted to know what school they went too,

12:30 what subjects they were learning, what their father did, and so on, as well as interviewing them.

It’s a pretty strict process, isn’t it?

Yes I know. That’s why it was a bit shattering for me when the war came, you know. All these nice fellows that I knew were sort of getting bumped off or becoming prisoners of war, or something, or vanishing. It was a big drop, a big drop in what you’re doing.

13:00 **So with, so ok, you basically developed, what was the main reason you said, all you told me that you wanted to contribute more to the war effort?**

Oh definitely.

But what was running through your mind, any particular examples?

I couldn’t imagine how I was going to, because I hadn’t been a driver. My sister was a good driver, which was unusual for a woman to have a licence in those days. She was a

13:30 good driver. I hadn’t driven a car, I had no desire to be a driver. I had no desire to do lots of things. Anything I wanted to do, I wanted to be fairly lady-like. But then they had this advertisement outside the Melbourne Town Hall and they were advertising for people to go in the Corps of Signals, well I didn’t know what that was, but I said to Dad and Mum,

14:00 so father said, “Well I’ll take you in, I’ll come in with you, in the evening.” He had his bowler hat on and his stiff, stiff collar. We sat down and the man talked to me about this. They wanted people for the Corps of Signals, so he said to me, “What was your best subject at school?” and before I could open my mouth, my father said, “Mathematics.”

14:30 “Well”, he said, “You’ll be in cipher.”

So what was your best subject?

It was. My father knew. Mathematics. He said straight away. “Well”, he said, “You’ll be in cipher.” So we found out, he said, “I want you to go and get three references from prominent people.”

15:00 Before they’d let me into cipher, cause it was a secret thing. I didn’t know how many prominent people I knew exactly, but still, my father knew one of the heads of the Melbourne City Council and civil city engineer, and then I knew a women in Brighton whose daughter went to school with me, and she was a dame.

15:30 So she gave me a reference, and I can never forget her because she had this bun at the back of her head, and she was sitting up like this, very erect. “Here’s your reference, don’t forget, if you say a word out of place, you’ll let your country down, you’ll let yourself down, and you’ll let

16:00 me down.” She had this bun at the back. So I had those. I went back with those three references and I was in cipher and from then on that was all secret. From then on. I got my uniform and everything like that and I then went to Albert Park. All the other people there learning were men.

16:30 And I was one of the early people then and I had to learn all about. Just as well I was good at maths because it was all subtracting, it’s all subtracting numbers. It’s like having a dictionary, one word’s got a certain number, a group to it. You look that up. You don’t put that down, you subtract it from another book,

17:00 and that what’s goes in the signals. So that’s why you had to be good at maths.

So you’re one of the luckier people that had your parents support in… ?

Yes, they were only hesitating because they knew I liked all the best things in life and they knew I had to have shoes that matched every dress, that I had to have a hat that matched every dress, and my mother was just wondering “How I was going to go through

17:30 life wearing the one outfit all the time?” She thought “I’d be mad about the fashion bit”, but all that went by the board. You were just proud to wear the buttons with the King on them, because you’d joined to serve the King and you were very, very proud to wear the buttons

18:00 and to wear the Rising Sun like your brothers did and all the men you knew who served, and somehow you just had to let your personality come through. You had to have all your hair cut short, of course, which was a bit of a thing. Mine was very short, I had it clipped very short. So it was a sort of time where you had to develop your own personality because the uniform or anything you were wearing didn’t do

18:30 any good for you, as far as men were concerned, but you didn’t know what to talk about anyway if you went. If anyone came back on leave, it was very hard to know what to talk about. Because you can’t talk

about sport, you don't want to talk about the war. He won't tell you what he's doing, very difficult. Very, very difficult to keep up a conversation.

19:00 **So when you joined AWAS, did you get a chance to socialise with ex-servicemen? A lot of Americans were here, I understand?**

I didn't have anything to do with them.

With the Americans? Why was that?

I wouldn't have anything to do with the Americans.

You didn't like them?

No, all my family were in the Australian Army, not the American Army. Anyway, goodness me, they were flash guys.

What do you mean by that?

Well, they all looked like officers. See our men wore,

19:30 if they were privates, they wore something buttoned up to there but all the Yanks came out with wonderfully tailored suits, beautiful ties, lovely shirts, dress caps, they had to be. There was a certain type of women in Australia who went out with the Americans

20:00 and I think that very many of them were married. I think that this is the first time Australia had lost so many men taken out of their continent to fight and the women had been without men for a long time, and the Americans came into their lives. They had money, they had everything. They got cars, they hired cars, they did anything. Nothing was any object.

20:30 Sent you a box of orchids, whatever. And I tell you, it broke a few homes, broke up quite a few homes because no war before had ever had men here at the time when the other men were away fighting.

So who would you look at as for responsible for that?

21:00 I was not a married woman, I was not used to sex or any of these things. None of this fazed me. I was very true always in my thoughts to all the boys that I knew I'd danced with or been surfing at Torquay with, or something like that, and I was very interested in what they were doing always. I was very aware of the Americans, but they had girls and they had women

21:30 of a certain type, and the Hotel Australia, it's a wonder they don't put a memorial there to the Americans because they were all flashing themselves around there like crazy. They…you know what they said, "Over paid, over dressed, over sexed and over here." So they were very exciting and I don't know how many homes got broken up completely over that

22:00 because they used to book into the Hotel Victoria of an afternoon, four o'clock in the afternoon. The hotels knew what was going on, so did the Australia, I think, but if you went out with an ordinary guy who was on leave, you mightn't get a seat at the table for dinner, but the Americans always got them,

22:30 because out came the five pound note, out came the roll of notes, they had everybody (UNCLEAR) … they had all the tables, they had everything.

So they got basically first of everything?

Yes, because they had the money.

I understand they also gave nylon stockings?

Oh I think they did. I don't know how they got hold of those, but they did give them nylons and silk stockings. The military police were very hard on the Americans.

23:00 You know you would see them.

The American Military Police?

Yes, they had police vans going along Collins Street and it might only be half past six at night, or something, and they'd speak to a guy and I don't know, if he didn't give the right answer, they'd hit them on the head with a truncheon, and when they'd lay on the ground, they'd gather him up and put him in the back of the van. I don't know whether

23:30 he went off, somewhere they had him, they had a big camp in Royal Park.

What was at Royal Park? An army camp?

They had a big… The American's had a big camp there.

Military Police or something?

The men were in camp there.

What reasons were they hitting them on the head?

Because if they didn't give the right answers, they might have thought "They were drunk" or, "What are you doing here?" or whatever it was. And the next thing you know, or if they thought they were slightly (UNCLEAR)

24:00 or whatever they were doing, they didn't take any backchat from them, they just hit them on the head, and plonked in the back of the divvy van.

And you saw this a few times?

I tried to keep out of Melbourne at twilight, at a certain time, it was the time when shop doorways went up inside and the door wasn't right on the street,

24:30 and what was going on in those doors at night time was nobody's business. You'd try and walk down the street and this was all happening, you know, so we got leave from camp at a different time. We worked shifts from eight o'clock in the morning until five, that's six days, the next week it was five till midnight, and the next week it was midnight till eight in the morning. Well, when you got leave it was according to

25:00 your time when you weren't working, so that you might be in town, you might be there of an afternoon, or something like that, and you'd see these things going on and it'd be afternoon and that. I tried not. If I wanted to go to the pictures, Gone With The Wind came in at that time. If I wanted to go to the pictures, I tried not to go when it was the twilight time because it wasn't, you know. We were not frightened of the Americans, I just didn't want to get mixed up

25:30 with divvy [divisional] vans and people being hit on the head and things, you know. But they were all, you know, you know it came to a pitched fight, did you know, in Brisbane?

Yes, in Brisbane there were big fights.

Yes, big fights. Our own Australian Diggers came back and the Americans were up there by that time. They'd been in Sydney a lot of them and they were up there, and I believe it all took part over the river.

26:00 They were actually firing on each other, cause I think apart from a few chaps who came in and caught their wives, there were some Australians that came in and actually caught their wives flagrant delicto in their own homes. So that you can imagine, the rest of them got the message, so when this fight took place it really was on.

26:30 **A few people died, didn't they?**

Yes.

Pretty serious gunfights that broke out.

Yes, yes. Our chaps, I think people had been writing back letters and things about things. I never said anything to my brothers or anything about it but I think the married ones, the young married ones, you know, they were pretty…

Pretty keen?

Oh well, yes, they didn't like to think of that happening. The first time it had happened you see, but anyway

27:00 they, a lot of them, I suppose, lost their lives fighting back in the Philippines.

So what about Melbourne? How was, were there any fights in Melbourne? I've heard stories from other people that there were rather big, huge brawls here and there?

Well, there might have been. As I say, Douglas MacArthur was here, the general. Well he came, they had to flee from the Philippines,

27:30 so his wife came down, Mrs MacArthur, and she only had a dress and a jacket and a scarf on her head, tied round and they had the little Indian lady, the Ah Ma, that looked after the little boy, Douglas, and she came into where I was working and her husband said "She was not to accept any", he said "She could not accept any invitations to Government House

28:00 or anywhere, to the mayor, anywhere, until she was fully outfitted". So our place turned out, the whole week, all the work rooms were turned in favour of her. Hats, the dresses, everything.

Just her?

It had to be for her so she could get to meet all these people. The little boy, the coloured lady who looked after him, she took him down to the Botanical Gardens to feed the swans.

28:30 He came in too, with Mrs MacArthur, and she never carried anything. The major, his car, the general's car would be out there, with the flag flying and the chauffeur, their chauffeur, and the man would come in and he would carry everything out like that, and put them in the car and then she got in. So that went on. Everything turned, everything turned for that.

29:00 Just so she could go and meet people. So he really was ruling, he was a very demanding man, he had the best hotel, it was the top floor. He wanted a grand piano to play. So of course, it can't go in a lift, can it? It had to be carried all the way up the stairs. The grand piano had to be carried all the way up the stairs and put in his suite.

At the top floor?

Yes, yes

That sounds like General MacArthur.

29:30 That's right, that was. It was.

Did you actually get a chance to speak to his wife?

Oh yes, yes.

What was she like?

Well, I said to my mother, "I think she's got a touch of the tar brush", meaning you know. She, she said, "Next time she writes something, have a look at her fingernails and that will tell you." So it was only that she looked as if she, you know, a little bit of

30:00 Hawaiian or something in her. But she was very attractive and very nice.

Was she pompous?

No.

Not at all?

No. I think he ruled everything, you know, my husband.

So she was very polite?

Oh very nice and polite, very nice. Charming woman. But anyway, that was him, and of course, he went on

30:30 and Truman sacked him. Do you remember?

Yeah, that was in Korea though.

I mean that was years after, but he was so determined to get back the Philippines. He had to, because he thought, he took that as a personal insult that he lost them, you know, so then he went back. But he was a man who was determined to go ahead and always fight and always be in everything, you know. So

31:00 it was rather a turn up, I thought, when Truman really pulled the thing from under him and said, " Well, you know, that's it".

So how was MacArthur seen amongst Australians?

Oh well.

Was he a hero to them or what?

I mean we were very glad to see them. We accepted the fact that he was in charge of the Americans, which was a very big thing from our point of view, because they were defending Australia when our own men weren't there

31:30 but they didn't know, they didn't know all this that we've known since, as to what kind of, he really was a professional soldier all the way.

So in your view the Americans were, you said they were oversexed

overpaid and over here.

and over here, right.

That was what they said.

So amongst the

32:00 **men here, in Melbourne, was there a lot tension?**

Oh I don't think so. Because you have to remember any of the chaps we worked with were Class B 2. I mean I began to wonder "If I'd ever see a whole man again". Working in the cipher office, the thing was your brain was alright, didn't necessarily even mean your age, long as your brain was good. So that we had one man on our shift that

32:30 dragged his leg along the floor, there was one man I was doing the signal with him one night and he rubbed his eye like that, and the next thing I knew he was down on the floor. I said, "What are you

looking for?" He said, "My glass eye, it's gone under the table." This was the atmosphere we were in. There was, all the men around us, you know, were overweight or ill or, nothing wrong with their brain, nothing wrong with their brain. They could do

33:00 their signals and things like that, but we didn't see that many men that were whole, that were hearty, that were young enough. But…I didn't think about anything like that, you just wanted to win the war. You just couldn't do enough to win the war and I never thought "I'd be living in a camp with 700 women, sleeping in a tent"

33:30 and we worked from eight in the morning, for six days we worked from eight in the morning till five, the next six days we worked from five till midnight, the next six days we worked from midnight till the next morning, six nights, so that our sleeping pattern altered. We'd have a couple of days off, not out of camp, but off

34:00 and to recoup and then we'd start the next cycle of the shifts. And speaking to the girls now, you know, we can't remember what we ever talked about, cause there wasn't anything to talk about. We didn't talk about the war, we weren't allowed to discuss our work. I think it got a big thing if someone came on leave, like your brother, or someone had a fiancée, that was a big thing.

34:30 But you couldn't say anything about the war at all. You couldn't say anything about your work, ask them something and they'd say, "Oh well, we had a heavy night", which means they were busy, you know, that's all. But you might meet someone, someone would come on leave, that would be exciting, a friend or fiancée came on leave you'd hear about that, but you're being tapped

35:00 now.

That's ok.

But your work had to take precedence. Cause it was very exciting if someone you knew in the air force or something came and asked you out. He had leave and if you could get your leave at the same time, you might be able to come and have tea or afternoon tea or go to a show or something.

Were there incidents where men who didn't go, young men, were given

35:30 **white feathers? Was that still common in World War II?**

No.

Do you recall anything?

Never knew a thing like that.

Never?

I think it might have, I think it happened in World War I.

You haven't heard anything about that?

No, no way.

How would you look at a man at the time, walk us through sort of the period you were in at the time,

Yes

the way you thought, how would you look at a young chap, say in his early to mid-twenties, who didn't want to fight?

36:00 **There were such incidents.**

Well, they had to go into munitions, they had to go into munitions. I knew a chap, that was actually about thirty, and that was old to be, and he had to go and work making things, you know, engineering things. They all got called up for something like that to do. They had to do that. That came first.

Well, there was a conscription put in.

36:30 Well, I think there had to be, they had to be in a service. They had to work where it was, you know, part of the war effort.

That's right.

Whether it was making whatever.

So everyone had to be involved?

Yes, that's right. Yes.

So if you weren't in the militia, you'd have to be involved in one of the industries?

Yes, if you weren't in the army, or the navy or the air force you'd have to be involved in making

something. And apart from that, even we had some guys that had been

37:00 in the First [World] War, older men who helped with certain things. They weren't as quick on the cipher books, and everything, but they helped. They'd been in cipher, they'd been in signals. But then we'd get a guy that had been in the islands and he'd be suffering, you know, with those things they catch and he would be all yellow or something like that and he would be… And we had two chaps

37:30 that had been commandos and they had made bad landings as far as their feet were concerned, but they were then working with us in the cipher because nothing wrong with their heads. As long as that was ok.

Commandos where – in the Middle East or?

Oh the commandos were in the islands.

In the islands?

Yes, yes.

Tape 3

00:32 **We left off before on your training. I think we were talking about as well, just your experiences with some of the men who worked with AWAS.**

Oh my training, what I had, from when I enlisted.

We were talking about invalided men.

Oh yes.

About the glass eyes.

Invalided, oh yes, yes. Well yes, they were

01:00 you know, they were just physically not capable of doing, but mentally as long as they could, I mean we even had older men, as long as they were quick with figures, as long as they could do that, that was all that was necessary. They weren't our despatch riders or anything like that, but they were doing all the cipher work, so we had some guys, who had been, you know, in the islands and different things like that.

01:30 And a little bit of Atebrin they'd go brown, very brown-yellow, but as long as their brains weren't affected that was ok, they could do the work, cipher work.

Now I understand your sister joined up as well?

Yes. She became a driver.

She joined up with you at the same time?

About…not very much longer after. Cause she had a licence, being older she had a licence, car licence, so she was very good, a very good instructor.

02:00 And to be a driver in the army, you had to be able to take your car to pieces.

Oh, I see.

She had to learn to take a car to pieces and put every piece back again where it went. She had to know that thoroughly, so it could be done. And then part of the training was, they'd take her up the, you know like, a hill like Punt Road, or somewhere like that,

02:30 and stop the car and then they'd put something under the back wheel,

I see

and she had to start it again without rolling back on the wheel.

What do you think the impression this had on men in the services? Having women doing all these tasks, new units?

What men? What men? We didn't have any men around, the dear old things with crutches and things. I mean.

03:00 **Did you hear about it though when the Australian soldiers had leave and they came back?**

Oh yes, yes.

From New Guinea or whatever? What were their views about women in the services?

Oh nothing was said like that. They came back, they wanted to see their wives, they wanted if they had

any children, they wanted to see their homes, they wanted to talk about, they wanted to reminisce, they wanted to be with their wives. There was nothing

03:30 [?] or their families. There was nothing heavy going. They were glad to get home cooked food. They were bed and all those things, and that was enough for them. They weren't looking for anything more than that. It was great for them to be home and see people. But I mean the people that went to the Middle East and Tobruk and that, they never got back on leave because when my brother finished fighting in the desert,

04:00 a strange thing. It was a tie up with my work, but I was on shift one night as a cipher operator and an officer came up to me and he said, "Sergeant Rattray, do you have anyone with your name in the services?" And I said, "Yes Sir, I do, my brother."

04:30 And he said, "Well come along with me." I'd never seen the officer before and he showed me a message and it had in it where my brother was being sent back by General Blamey to start a special school and so

05:00 I was, I said, "Oh." He said he that "he was to start the Infantry Training Battalion, Australian Infantry Training Battalion. My brother was to be in charge of", and to, and to get on, you know, and he said "He would be leaving", so I was thrilled about this, but then as time went on I couldn't,

05:30 I got worried. I didn't know how he was going to come back, on the troop ship. Because if he came down one part, they were in danger. "He might go around the north of America", I thought, on the ship. I didn't know how he was going to get back. But it was a constant worry. I used to go home on leave and Mum would be baking a cake

06:00 and she'd put it in a tin. They were in tins for the soldiers, and they'd settle down and you'd sew white calico over them and address them. And I had to do all that and I couldn't say a word. I couldn't say a word about my brother. His name was Rupert. So he

06:30 was to start the Infantry Training Battalion, which he started at Cowra.

Oh that was Cowra, was it?

Yes, and they said "They weren't enough, there wasn't, there were not enough men trained here" and he had so much experience and he also had a lot of charisma, my brother. Got on very well with everybody. So he sent home, he was coming home and I

07:00 had to live with this for several weeks. I didn't know how or when or what and I kept on seeing my mother pack up cakes, sew the calico round them, post them on, and she'd say, I'd say, "Oh yes, Rupert would be glad to have that", you know. Anyway, it wasn't long, much after that, and I got called. I was permitted to take a phone call in camp

07:30 and I was sent for to go to the orderly room, because I was wanted. And I went down and my mother was on the phone and she said, she said, "Rupert's back in Australia. He rang me from the west." and I said, "Yes mother, I know," and she said, "You knew and you …. you didn't tell me and I'm his mother", you know.

08:00 She was going off. And anyway, she was quite distressed and she got off the phone and by the time I'd gone home on leave, my father had explained to her exactly why I couldn't say anything. But she was bitterly disappointed that she was his mother and she didn't know he was coming back but he explained it to her and she appreciated the fact that I hadn't said anything. So I

08:30 was very glad and he came back and he started the Infantry Training Battalion as General Blamey wanted and that was started at Cowra and that was so, that was good because then we could train infantry men, other than that, we didn't have a training camp. It was just as well as it turned out, with the Japs and everything, that we needed this training camp, didn't we? It was the second factor in the war.

09:00 **What was your relationship like with your brother?**

Oh wonderful, idolised him. Who wouldn't idolise a brother who takes you on his motorbike around the hard sand at Torquay and you're hanging onto his waist, you know, and he's saying to me, "Now when I go round a corner, you've got to go the same way as me, don't, don't…" See I sort of automatically, you know, tried to. "No, you

09:30 must go the same way." So the wind would be blowing through my hair, we'd be going along the hard sand, wonderful. Oh I loved him very much. He had a charisma about him, everybody loved him. But he was always good and kind. I never saw him as a soldier, but he must have been a good soldier, of course. His men were very proud of him.

Which unit was he affiliated with?

2/23rd.

10:00 Mud and bloods.

The 2/23rd?

Yes.

Oh I see.

“The mud and bloods” they were called. That was their colour patch. 2/23rd. So he started that at Cowra and that was another thing altogether that happened.

So he served in the Pacific as well?

No, he didn’t because Blamey bought him back, you see.

He remained in Australia for the rest of the war?

Well, he had to bring him back

10:30 because how could he train other soldiers to go up anywhere if you didn’t have someone that was training them, and there were about 700 men or something in that camp that he was training. If you haven’t trained infantry men, they can’t fight, in the islands or anywhere.

He came back it would have been after the Tobruk siege?

See because he’d been through Scotch College cadets, he’d always be attached, he’d always been connected with the army.

So your brother went to Scotch College?

Yes.

11:00 He boarded there. When my parents were at Portland in the bank, he boarded there. So he’d always been in the cadets. So he had a tradition going back there, but the younger men coming, of course, leaving school, and coming on when, they were not training anything at all, so that was why they had to be trained, and taught.

11:30 **So tell us about your experiences in the AWAS with operations?**

Oh with what I did in cipher. Well I was in the cipher in the mainstream of where signals come through from all over the world, but then I was asked to, I was called in and told that I was going to work at Z Special Unit.

12:00 And I didn’t know what Z Special Unit was, but I found out it was a very big, old, double storied home on the corner of Punt Road and Domain Road called “Airlie”. A I R L I E. And I reported in there. I was told “I was never allowed to walk the same way from camp

12:30 to get there any day or night. I always had to take a different route in case I was followed.” So I went and knocked on, it was a big old home, I knocked on the door and a major came out, an old gentleman, older, and he said, “Sergeant, I know that you’re on oath because you’ve been

13:00 a cipher operator but I’m going to give you a bible now and I want you to swear on oath again that you will never mention anything that you have seen or heard or know in this building, any message, you will never say a word about it and I want you to swear on the bible.” So I had to do that and he said, “Well, I’m

13:30 telling you if you say one word, one word out of place, you’ll be shot.” So I was taken up to meet the staff. The head of, the head of our unit, the head of where the cipher people were was an Englishman called Colonel E Edgerton-Mott,

14:00 who had been educated at Eton and Sandhurst, and he always wore a sand brown belt, and he was very pucker-saab. He’d escaped from Singapore. Who but he would have escaped carrying a safe full of cipher books. And he’d got them here safely.

14:30 Well he was English, there was another part where the Dutch were, and they were always having uproarious times because their Queen, or whoever it was, kept on having girls instead of boys, and they had their part, so that we had the Dutch in this area, the Dutch, the English and the Australians, serving together

15:00 and the Americans. There was only one American, his name was Joe Smith. You always wanted to stand with your bottom against a wall when you were near him. He was a good pincer. And so we were in our different sections of rooms and signals came in for Z Section Unit about this particular part of the war. It didn’t involve Germany at all. It was all the Islands. And we

15:30 dropped men, we dropped men on different islands, in civilian clothes, with only a battery, a radio battery to work, and they were sending us back signals of troop movements or aeroplanes flying over, or anything that they saw and we had to do the signals. We worked right round the clock.

16:00 And when you were alone at night, you were on your own, you were on your own completely in the… You had the door locked, but you were on your own completely with the telephone. And you had to

decide what signals had a priority. They all had a priority. “Urgent”,

16:30 “Immediate”, “Most Immediate”, “Important”, so on. You had, well without knowing all that was going on in the war, we had to make a decision if one came in during the night, as to whether we would disturb the colonel. And so we, only once someone didn’t make the right decision and the next day he came and said “Oh damn me, I should have been told about this

17:00 last night”. So we never made that mistake again. If it ever came in with anything, we closed everything up and got, a man came, a driver, with a car, took me down with all my hat and gloves and everything on, to deliver it, with it. I had to have a signed receipt and he would stand, he stood at the door, he always had parties going on, he stood at the door reading it and if I had to take an answer back,

17:30 he’d give it to me and I’d reverse the whole thing. Go back in the car, undo the locks, undo the safe, and everything again. Lock myself in till the next morning.

Really.

Yes.

What time would you have to work too? From what time to what time?

Well, we went on at midnight and we’d come off in the morning, and then we went on the day shift was from midnight till five and the other one

18:00 was from five till midnight. But at night time you were on your own. Just pull a little thing, a little hatch and the dispatch rider would force a thing through, folded up and locked, and you had the key to the lock, and then he’d roar off again. And that meant that he would send you a message in or you would send anything back to go to Victoria Barracks.

18:30 But you see, in cipher, all letters start “Dear Sir” or whatever it is and you give your address and so on, now obviously if you’re a cryptographer, in other words, you’re someone who wants to break a cipher, you would see repetition, in other words, you’d be looking for something like “Dear Sir” or “Dear Bob” or “Headquarters Melbourne”

19:00 or whatever it was. Now if you see that repeated enough, it’s only a matter of time before you break the whole thing, so therefore you had to disguise it. You had to say something about the message. Well say, say like you had “Mary had a little lamb” and at the bottom it had “its fleece was white as snow”. That meant start and bottom. When you reached those that was the start and that was the bottom. But somewhere in between you had to disguise

19:30 who it was from and who and who it was to. And that would be picked up out from the middle of your message, as to whether you were sending troops in or whatever you were doing. And then suddenly you’d get a word - “To Melbourne from DarForce”. From Darwin Force or whatever. So obviously you couldn’t keep on saying “Mary had a little lamb” because that was a dead giveaway. You never used the same thing twice.

20:00 And one day, it must have been around the time of the Melbourne Cup, I think because, yes it was. We had some men in the field, and they sent us a message, something about the Melbourne Cup and we realised they must have been having a sweep, we reckoned they were having a sweep. Wherever they were, they were in a cave, wherever they were

20:30 we reckoned they were having a sweep, so bit by bit we sent them all the horses. Well, he came into the office and he said, “Sergeant, I want you to take this message out”, meaning he wanted me to decipher it. So I thought “I would strike you”. He’s standing there, six foot two, you know, the back of me, and I’m writing all these things out. And it was all horses’ names.

21:00 And he picked it up. He said, “What is that?” I said. “Sir, those are the horses in the Melbourne Cup”, and he said, “I’ll have you know Sergeant, we’re running a cipher office here, not a sporting newspaper”. But you see that was just something a cryptographer, anyone trying to break a cipher

21:30 would never know those words. This was what was so wonderful. It was cast iron what we were doing. He couldn’t see that of course. Considering he got out of Singapore with a safe and everything, he didn’t know, he didn’t realise that if you kept repeating a thing often enough in cipher, that it gets worked out what it is. No matter how many figures there are.

22:00 It’s good mathematicians who eventually work out what things are. That’s what they did in MI5 [Security Service] in England.

So were you aware of Ultra? The Ultra code breaking system they’d devised?

No. No. No.

That they could read into Japanese codes.

Oh well that would be a code, that’s a low grade cipher, a code. Well if they did that, that would be a separate thing altogether

22:30 from us, in Japanese, yes. Yes, that would be a separate group altogether doing that, because it would only be codes.

So what sort of intelligence was coming in from these, you said they'd be spotting and keeping troop movements?

Well, these men would be put down in islands and they'd have to pretend they were one of the group of people that were around there. Have you seen "South Pacific" – the play?

23:00 **I don't believe so.**

Well, the islands and those places had a lot of people, like South Pacific, who had left their own country, because they'd committed a crime. They were there living, very happily but away from their own country. So therefore there were a certain number of people that passed through these areas and our guys just, just wore ordinary clothes, just shirts, nothing like khaki

23:30 or anything like that. Just trying to look like the locals and things, but they had a bit of a radio with them, which they had to know about. And they'd put when they, when there was no one about or anything, they'd put a bit of a wire up, and they'd transmit a message back. I mean it was always a worry. I had, I knew that at nine o'clock one night a submarine

24:00 was coming to pick up some of our men off a certain beach and you know, I knew very well it wasn't nine o'clock, because nine o'clock over there wasn't the same as here, but when nine o'clock came I found myself wondering "If the submarine had landed? If the men had got on without the Japs?, and if this, and if that", and if what had happened. You never, it was a constant worry.

24:30 It was a constant worry. We had one chap sent a message and he said, "Maintain radio silence, Japs all around the mouth of the cave." Well, we did maintain radio silence but we never heard from them again, obviously. The Japanese found them, and finished them all off, the whole party.

How many men?

Could be six or seven in a party.

25:00 **So these, were you working under Special Operations Australia?**

Well, I don't know, I don't know. I just knew we did what we had to.

All you knew was that you were working for…?

Z Special Unit

That's all you were aware of?

Yes, yes, so we, as I say, the Brits were in it to a certain extent, but not as much as they were in the German war,

25:30 so there were the Dutch and the colonel. The colonel found a very good way he thought, he had this safe that he'd brought and his favourite pastime was to get us out of where we were doing our work and pack all the books in a certain way, and then lock the safe, and then he would blow a whistle and we were all to run down

26:00 two flights of stairs to the basement where they used to keep the vats, you know, in these old homes. And we had to sit there till he blew another whistle. And when he blew the other whistle, we had to run all the way up the stairs, and undo it and get all the books out of the safe again. It was his idea of fire precautions or something, you know. But no always, I was glad when he got recalled to England

26:30 quite frankly. I think somebody. We were only sergeants, we didn't have, we were being badly treated but we didn't say anything about it, but he was recalled and they sent out another colonel, who was much more genial. Not so much of the Sandhurst and Eton. And when I go to the Special Forces Club now in London, I see his photo up there

27:00 you know, E Edgerton-Mott and also the one, Chapman-Walker who followed him. But he was much more amiable, you know, he was able to get on with the Americans, and the Dutch, and everybody. But we were powerless. Someone must have told them from above, you know, what he was like.

So what about the Dutch? What about your interaction with the Dutch soldiers or Dutch service personnel?

Oh,

27:30 they were alright. They had their own special part, but they were always were delightful, but they were always disappointed because their Queen, or whoever it was, kept on having little girls, instead of having boys. But they had plenty of nice drinks going on down there and everything, the Dutch. They were, because they were on the islands, they were very much involved in the islands, the Dutch. A lot of the

28:00 Dutch and did you see “South Pacific?” You didn’t see “South Pacific?”

No.

No. That was the story about a man who committed a murder and then went out to the Pacific to live. But as I say, there were the Poms and the Australians and the Americans were not very much into, they were not very much into Z at all. And you know the late President Kennedy

28:30 always said “He had a back problem from a boat”, well he was in some sort of an action like that. He always had to have a special seat, no matter where he lived, a special chair, or a rocker or something, because of something. But that was what was said. “That he had been in one of these operations and it had happened when he was tipped out of his boat”. But they were not very, not very minded that way, even though they,

29:00 even though they were in the vicinity.

So did you liaise with the ABDAC Command? The Australian, British, Dutch, American Command in Java. You know about the Dutch East Indies?

But I don’t think they had that in World War II, did they?

Well they had a command area called ABDA [American British Dutch and Australian Command].

ABDA. Well, we didn’t know anything about that.

I see.

Because we were with Z Special Unit.

Were there any Dutch men with Z Special Unit?

Oh yes, yes, yes.

There were? Were they Dutch soldiers?

We had Dutch, we had a whole

29:30 area. They had a very big part of the place, and they get on being disappointed because their Queen, or whoever it was, kept on having girls instead of boys, but they were always, oh they had plenty of, they liked their Dutch, what is it they drink? Boules [?] or something, but they liked that. They were all that. Yes, I had to take a message to one of the Dutchmen one night. I went down and knocked on the door and he had a waiter or

30:00 someone there and he opened the door, and anyway I said to him “Here’s a”, and he got very embarrassed because he didn’t realise I was a woman. I didn’t speak. He knew there was a message and they’d had the light put on, and he was in his pale green, you know, pyjama pants or something he was wearing. He said,

30:30 “I’m very sorry, I didn’t know there were women cipher operators, or women”, you know. They were quite a bright bunch, really. Very bright. They liked their drop of the doings. There were a lot of Dutch through the islands, a lot of the Dutch through the islands, a lot of them. As I say America wasn’t so involved with that, cause it didn’t, stretching it out a bit for them

31:00 **So you liked the Dutch? You had pleasant experiences with the Dutch?**

Yes, yes, not many people I don’t like.

Where there any aspects of them you disliked?

No, no, no.

Were they arrogant?

They could be terribly, yes, yes.

In what way?

Well, looking down their noses at things, you know, but only some of them are like that,

31:30 not all of them, not all of them, just some of them. They were above everything, you know. Yes, you know, you get used to taking that.

And how big was your section with regard to women working in cipher?

Oh well, there about six of us involved in this particular thing at Z. Because, I said the shift

32:00 we worked, but after I went back to Grosvenor, and two other girls came on there and they were always more on the day shift, two at a time and the other one was at night. But they had breakdowns, they had breakdowns to such an extent, I only found this out recently, that they were unfit to serve anywhere in

the army, whatsoever.

32:30 They had to be discharged.

Oh right.

Well it was a great mental strain apart from anything else. I mean, probably not, you had to, it was a great deal of responsibility on you. You were alone there at night, and you were working, and you'd get these signals and you don't understand what all these commands are about, people landing and all

33:00 that sort of thing. You've got to work it all out and you're on your own, and you're in a big building, the rats are all running around at night, it's lonely, it's dark. It didn't worry me. I'd been born in a bank, I mean, I lived in a bank, all these big places. But I think keeping the secrets got the girls, I think that's what must have got them, I think they must have worried about the people

33:30 that they did the signals about. I think that must have worried them terribly that they had such dreadful breakdowns, because for me to hear that two of them, at different times, had been cashiered, put right out of the army altogether, unfit for service, of any kind, meant that they must have dwelt on what they heard, instead of putting it out the back of their mind. You got some gruesome details.

34:00 I got one very upsetting, very upsetting message sent to me and it was where the Japanese had raided some sort of a Roman Catholic mission where they had girls and that, and it was horrible the things the Japanese had done with knives, cut off, and things like that. It was absolutely horrible. And

34:30 of course, the people sending the message did not know we were women. I think they would have sent the message to guys, but they didn't know we were women doing this, well, it's pretty, it's pretty off putting. Pretty upsetting, but you had to be able to throw it off. You can't worry about these things all the time. If

35:00 you did you'd be ineffective.

What did you think about the Japanese? I mean do you, do you

Oh I thought "They were dreadful". I only knew what I

What you?

Yes, I only knew what I'd read and what I…

But what about before that? Before you were put into such a position of receiving such?

Well, we didn't think much about the Japanese at all. We were all keyed on the Germans and everything. We had no idea Japanese would be coming down to try and get us.

What about when they bombed Darwin and?

35:30 Oh that was dreadful.

Did you hold a hatred for the Japanese?

No.

Never?

I don't hate anyone, I don't hate anyone. It's, I didn't hate the Germans. I thought what they did was dreadful in the concentration camps and things, but, you know, I don't particularly hate. I go back there and I meet Japanese, and that, but I don't,

36:00 I don't particularly hate them for what other people did. See the Japanese had quite a different idea of life, and everything to what we do, don't they? So to put them on the same standard is quite, quite different to what they're used to.

Do you think that dropping the atomic bomb on the Japanese was justifiable?

Oh yes.

You do?

It

36:30 finished the war. And I don't know how many more lives and everything would have been killed and how many more things would have happened if we hadn't done that. Because the Japanese would never have given in. But you know, everybody had it. By the time that bomb was dropped, everybody, absolutely had it. Everybody was strung out, so many people had been in two wars.

37:00 **What, just war weary?**

Oh yes. And incapacitated them. You know, the people, the people worried about it too. Don't forget a lot of people back went home, you know, loopy-loo with all this worry and everything, even though we weren't, we only got it I think, partly, only parts went in the newspapers. But people were very worried

about the Japanese because they go so far south.

37:30 And they were right down into Darwin. This is where I always say I praised General MacArthur because he was so mad keen to get them back in the Philippines. You know while we were living in the camp with all these women, we had no fortifications. We didn't have any locks on the gates. We didn't have any guards. We slept four to a tent, with the sides rolled up if it was hot weather

38:00 and it was absolutely amazing, because there was a guy in Melbourne who ended up killing six women.

Who?

He was a nut. He wasn't looking for our type of women because we were sort of puerile and doing things. It was somebody that he'd met, he'd met in a hotel or had a drink with or some whiskeys with or something.

Was this Leonski by any chance?

38:30 **Yes, I thought so. The Brown(UNCLEAR) Murders.**

And there we are, you know. We're all lying there in our tents and everything. But anyway, yes. That was Leonski. He was… As I say, we had no fortifications or anything, but I don't know. We weren't very frightened about him. He seemed to kill people that he'd met up with, you know, had a

39:00 drink with, and that was a different thing altogether.

I realise that Leonski was actually hung in Pentridge?

He wasn't hung in Pentridge.

Where was he hung?

MacArthur had him hung on an island. When he was, when he said "He was going to be hung", hanging wasn't in. We weren't allowed to hang people here, hanging, hanging was out.

39:30 And MacArthur took him off to an island, some island in the Pacific, and he had the thing erected and he had him hung.

But he was in custody in Pentridge, wasn't he?

He might have been in custody. I don't know. He may have been there but I doubt it, because once MacArthur said something, he said it, and he said, "I will not." I don't think, he would be, he brought his own downfall

40:00 down, actually. The sixth time that he killed, because he got clothes stuck in where it went down what would have been an air raid shelter, and it was a serviceman that was with him and saw him washing out his uniform, that realised, he realised that it was clay off the same thing they were looking for, and it was he who put him in. He'd had

40:30 his suspicions, but when he saw him doing that, he realised it was the same man, and so he said, "Hanging wasn't in". We had a Labor or whatever Government was in, where hanging wasn't allowed. He took him to one of the islands, and he had him, had it all erected and had him hung.

Do you think he did the right thing? With Leonski?

Yes. I do. And I think he wanted to show all his men

41:00 that they were to behave properly in someone else's country.

So the Australian public was very happy that that action was taken swiftly?

Yes, yes. I'm always sorry for the guy that found the lady down the corner of Acland Street in St Kilda there, you know, the milkman. He went to put the, he went to put the milk down and there was this woman stark naked, propped up against the wall. He just dropped the milk

41:30 and everything, and went for his life. Yes they were all over the place.

Leonski's victims.

Yes, he was some sort a nutter, you know, must have been. They were all over the place. But as I say when I think of us in there, and we weren't very fortified, but we had a commanding officer who knew judo, and she, she used to get her sneakers and slacks on at night time and she got hold of someone trying to steal the irons and the ironing blanket one night.

42:00 Two chaps, threw one on the floor, put her foot on his chest.

Tape 4

00:32 **Ok, I'd like to take off from when you first went to rookies training at Glenmorgan. I'd like to sort of talk about that in a bit more detail.**

At Glenmorgan.

At Glenmorgan.

Yes, yes. At Toorak.

Could you tell me what the actual space was like there?

Actually they'd taken over what had been the Geelong Grammar Boys. The young boys had a school there,

01:00 so they, they had taken that up. So we had an oval, and we had an air raid shelter dug into the ground, and we were using to sleep, were using their rooms where the boarders had been. So we were able to use their dining rooms and everything. Otherwise there wouldn't have been enough space to have accommodated all of us. But that was very early rookies, and, of course, later they got much bigger and they had to have much more room for them, than what they had there.

01:30 **Now how many were in your intake?**

Oh, I don't know. I suppose there'd be about fifty, something like that. Wasn't very big.

Ok. Did you know any other women who joined?

No, I didn't. No, I didn't. I was quite horrified because when I, we had to pass through a male soldier, and because we had to swear an oath you see, and he said, "Married or single?"

02:00 And I said, "Single," and he said, "Have you any children?" and I nearly smacked his face. I was so insulted, and I just looked at him, and I thought "Oh dear", and that was my first experience of the army treating everybody, you know, as sort of even, right through.

He what, what did he do?

Well he said to me first, "Are you married or single?" and I said "Single", then he said, "Have you any children?" And I thought that was awful, so

02:30 anyway that was a male, who was, you know, signing everybody in. So anyhow, we got sent to where the boarders had been sleeping, and we had a locker and we had our beds, and we were taught how to make the beds, and we had to make our own beds, and tuck the envelope of the bed and all the blankets in the right way, things like that, then we all, more or less, ate together at long tables, and passed the food along.

03:00 **What was the food like?**

Oh well, that was alright. That was bacon and eggs, but, you know. It was good if when it got to the end, there was something on for the person, and toast and things. I think it was getting to know the other girls and things like that and… I had this girl next to me who was slightly irritating because she said to me, "I know all about the beds. I've been in the Girl Guides and I know how you tuck them in and everything", you know so... I was only a learner but she knew all about it

03:30 you know. But everyone got on very well.

Did you share a room with people?

Oh yes, we were in sort of dormitories, because these had been the boys rooms where they slept.

How many women per dorm?

Oh, I wouldn't know. But there'd be about eight each side of the... Whatever the boys had, we just went. We had room for that and a locker, and a place to hang our clothes. We were told "To bring old clothes", meaning we would just

04:00 all be in civvies. I wasn't very happy about that old bit, because when it came to Sundays and we went to church, up at the big church in Toorak, you know, we had these things on, and I was ploughing along and marching along. The funny part was the little boys on tricycles followed you, you know, they liked to follow you. And then there were dogs that followed you. There were also dogs that ran in and out your ranks, you know

04:30 while you were trying to. Cause the sergeant major would be calling out, "Left, right" in a loud voice, you know. And then going to St John's, Toorak, you know, where I knew quite a lot of people from that area, I felt very strange. I just rushed off doing the things and told "To fall in". I hadn't done my hair. We just went in as we were. I don't really think anybody noticed but I was aware of it. I'd never gone to church like that before. With the little dogs and boys on trikes following

05:00 me.

I believe you enjoyed…? Tell me about when you were first given your uniform and put on your uniform?

Oh, that was wonderful. We didn't always get them as soon as we wanted because they were making a lot of things for the soldiers, you know. We were new, which meant that we had to have a different outfit, because we had busts and

05:30 we had skirts, we weren't wearing slacks. We had khaki skirts and the same jacket but it buttoned a different way. Still had the king's buttons and everything on, and so on. It had AWAS, the Australian Women's Army Service, on our shoulders.

What colours? That was khaki?

Khaki, oh, yes, it was all khaki.

And skirt? Did you have stockings?

Yes, we had khaki coloured stockings, and brown shoes.

And brown shoes. Did you receive your uniform the first day

06:00 **you arrived there?**

And khaki hat. No, we didn't, we sort of. I was actually out doing work when I got mine, bit by bit. And every day I'd rush up to the Victoria Barracks, where I knew there was a uniform, the Q [Quartermaster] store as we called them, and that meant the quartering, and I say, "Have you got something, have you got anything that's my size?" And I was thrilled when I got a great

06:30 coat. At least I had a great coat. And bit by bit it came. Of course it meant, a big intake of girls, it meant that they had to make different things, because, suddenly the coats were doing up on the other side, and, you know, it was a different thing altogether. So, I was so pleased when I got that. I could least wear the coat and wear something underneath. At least I had the coat.

How did it make you feel?

Oh great, great, yes I really, well the other way, I was half in and half out, you know. I now felt that I was beginning

07:00 to be part of the service, which was good. We were all glad.

Tell me about the trainers, the people who trained you at rookies?

Oh well. We had different women lecturers who, speakers who were talking to us about subjects that they knew. Not necessarily army. But about behaviour and not smoking in uniform,

07:30 and being, and your private health and looking after yourself and things like that, and mixing and they were not… They were just women, who were single women but they had probably been in the girl guides or had something to do like that with, with young people. And they were very good. We had to write down our notes, all of what we were, you know.

08:00 When you're in uniform, you don't smoke a cigarette. If you're walking along with a man, you don't take his arm. He doesn't take your arm. You're in uniform. Things like that, I wouldn't have thought about. But of course, eventually we had to remember it. And polish your shoes every day. We took pride in polishing underneath, as well, while we were doing it. It was something to do while you talked.

Did you have army women come and talk to you too?

Well this,

08:30 these women were the first women that were to be in the women's army.

Ok. So they were in uniform?

Oh yes. Colonel Irving was asked to, she set up the AWAS in 1942, early 1942. It had gone through Cabinet, and she had been asked "To do it the year before", because she had been, she was a high, born at Victoria Barracks, and her father was a military man, so she was chosen, selected

09:00 and she was very good. She was head of the girl guides, and she was the perfect lady. Very, very good for the job. Very good. Not at all masculine in any way, feminine, but still aware of being in uniform. And that was the point they kept trying to make. You're still a woman, you're feminine, but you wear your uniform, no one has to be uniform and that sort of thing. So we had talks about things like

09:30 that and getting along with other people and anything that we had to know that was a rule. About your shoes, and the length of your hems and things like that.

How did you find being all of a sudden thrown into a situation where you had to take orders?

Well it didn't. I don't think that worried me completely. I was the youngest of five children, so I got used to. If I was an only child [?] bucked about that.

10:00 But I'd sort of got used to fact that you had to fit in with that, with your surroundings and everything. We would have done anything they'd asked, just to be wearing the same uniform as what our soldiers were. That was very proud to us, because we felt for the first time that we were able to help our men, our airmen, our soldiers, sailors. They were away and at last

10:30 we could do something because we were all too young to be just knitting socks and working out, you know, camouflage nets, and learning the Red Cross. It wasn't enough. We had to be doing something full time. And that was very rewarding. We were jumping into it, we were so anxious to please and do the right thing, you know.

Was physical training a part of the rookie's course?

Oh well, we had to do exercises and bend over

11:00 and do things like that. You're drilling was very important, that was.

How often did you have to drill?

Oh every day, every day.

Early in the morning?

We'd sometimes go right up to the Botanical Gardens and back. You'd drill, drill, drill. The point about drill is, that it teaches you to obey an order straight away, and you do it without thinking. You go, you would walk off the edge of a cliff if nobody said "About

11:30 turn, or halt". You could just walk off the edge of that cliff.

Keep going?

And disappear, as long as you obeyed the law.

So it's about discipline?

The rules. That's right.

And who would lead the drill?

Oh well, very often it was the sergeant major, who'd got barking at men's heels, but they soon learnt they didn't need to be like that, but they would have been, you know, saying to the men "Left, right, lift it up, stop, throw your arms", you know, do this and

12:00 that. But they had to curb themselves a little with us, we weren't into that slanging match.

You didn't respond so well to that?

Well we did, but it wasn't necessary. It wasn't necessary. So by the time I went to NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] School, they had women right throughout who were competent in all those drills and everything, you know.

I believe that, I mean, how were you treated by your superiors?

12:30 **I believe a word that you used in the research was "Brutal".**

Oh

Would you call it brutal?

By our superiors?

By your superiors.

No, not really.

No, was it hard?

Well, they, they took to us because they were glad to get relief. They were. When I went into Grosvenor they were employing an older man there who'd been in World War I. And

13:00 none of the ciphers then. But was not. He was helping. There were all these odd people coming in to help because there was a war on, but it wasn't what they really wanted. They really wanted someone that could be whole part of the team, and that was what they got when they got us, and they made us part of their team.

So the treatment wasn't tough?

No, no, but you, but well, you obeyed your orders and it wasn't tough. Anyone that went into trying to think "They were going to buck the system", they wouldn't

13:30 but we all enlisted voluntarily, and therefore we were prepared to go along, with whatever we were told.

Did you encounter any young, any women who were a bit rebellious?

No, I didn't, I didn't. Everybody was so conscientious. Someone, two women who took a part that I'd had, when I moved back to another part, they were

14:00 very conscientious and they both had breakdowns, at different times, physical and mental breakdowns. And they were out for a while, you know, having treatment and things. But in the end they were invalided right out of the army, not fit for any service, any work, at any time.

I remember you spoke about them yesterday. They were also cipher operators.

They were, yes, they were.

I was going to ask you about that

14:30 **actually. What caused their breakdown, do you think?**

Oh they would worry, they would worry about what came in the signals, and you learnt that you couldn't do that. It did worry, it did worry you, but you had to throw it off, because you just ceased to be effective if you were going to keep worrying about what happened the day before, you know, because the Japanese

15:00 raiding this Roman Catholic convent, monastery, with girls that they were, I don't know whether they were orphans, but the nuns were bringing them up and everything. Well, when I did the signal about what the Japanese did to those nuns and everything, I was horrified, absolutely. I'd never, never read anything like that in my life. I didn't believe anybody could behave like that. And the fact

15:30 that they were doing it to nuns who were, Roman Catholic nuns who were out there, you know, taking people in, and helping them, and educating them and that, it really did shake me very much.

Did you burst into tears?

No, I didn't. I was just so shaken. I was all the more determined to get on with winning the war and getting rid of the enemy.

And it must been equally difficult that you couldn't talk to anyone about it?

No, you couldn't. That was the thing

16:00 **You couldn't debrief.**

If you hadn't been on shift with the same girl doing it. But you didn't talk about it because, well it wasn't good to shift what you were worrying about, and share what you were worrying about with someone else. No you didn't talk about it.

With that rule of not talking about anything, did that apply to other women within the cipher operation? Could you talk to each other about it?

Well we did, but we didn't talk about, we didn't talk about messages.

16:30 **You weren't allowed to?**

If we got good messages, we would. We were allowed to but didn't have time to, and nor would we bother because unless it was something outstanding or something, you had to keep yourself fit and well for the next lot of stuff.

You could share some stories with each other?

Yes, if we wanted to, but no-one really wanted to because it was like pushing some part of your burden onto someone else, and they were probably worried about something, anyway.

17:00 Because, you see, the hard part about it, a lot of these women, not only had husbands or brothers who were serving, but they, they had that worry too, and they had a worry that was ongoing with a member of their own family or their husband, or their fiancée. They didn't take women with husbands till very much later. So you don't share your worries with

17:30 someone, you know, the most you would do, you would realise and you would sort of try to buck them up or bring them a cup of coffee, or something like that. Do something like that, but not try and make them open up.

How did you personally deal with that sadness, those stories that were so sad and so stressful?

Well it was dreadful, that's what I said about the nuns and that, and I couldn't. It just made me all the more determined

18:00 that this enemy had to be, people that would behave ghastly like that, it just meant I had to work all the harder.

It made you angry?

Yes, it made me upset and angry, because I couldn't believe that people would do those things, and that just made me all the more incensed - that I had to win over these people that were doing this, and win the war, help win the war.

When you went home, I know you mentioned yesterday,

Oh, you couldn't say anything.

you'd still have to,

18:30 **you'd still be thinking about things that were happening?**

No, no, you got very tired. We got very tired with these shifts, and you could get a much better rest when you had leave if you went home, and my mother used to put a note on the gate, you know, "Please do not bang the gate, shift worker sleeping." She had Dad do that, and because, when as soon as I'd

19:00 get home and I'd dump my kit bag. Mum got, Mum got the shirts, you know, and everything like that. Mum was good, she was doing that while I'm trying to get some sleep. And I'd wake up and she'd have everything around the fire or where the sun was you know, airing, and ready for me to take back in my kit bag to camp. So of course, the girls who were in camp and lived in Perth, or somewhere else, they had to do their own washing. You could take your things to a Chinese laundry nearby.

19:30 You know, you got your collars polished and things like that. But we, we now, when we, I still run dinners for my women and we have said that we don't [?] what we talked about, because you couldn't talk about, you couldn't talk about that, and then you had to be very careful if you knew someone's brother was a POW [Prisoner of War] or something like this, and so we made up all sorts of silly rhymes

20:00 and songs and things. It was strange. I remember we used to say, "Have a piece of cheese, more binding than a wedding ring." You know, this kind of thing, and it was just being absolutely silly and, but it was just sort of broke the ice a bit, you know.

Cause you needed some humorous relief, I suppose?

That's right, we did, we did. We used to make a bit of humour out of everything.

So there must have been quite a strong camaraderie?

20:30 Very strong, very strong. Yes you, we had an RAP, which means a Regimental Aid Post, which had a VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment], or a woman, a medic, we had a doctor that visited.

Now this is at rookies, is it?

No, this was when we were at Fawkner Park.

This is at Fawkner Park?

I'm sorry. We would have had that same, we would have an RAP at, everywhere you went had an RAP. Regimental Aid Post

21:00 it means. You get bandaids, or you know, or whatever. And so you'd go and report to somewhere there you had a headache or a tummy ache or something like that, and they'd look after you there. But if it got worse then they'd refer you to, section of the hospital set aside for women.

This is at South Yarra, you're talking about?

Yes, yes.

Special Z?

Yes, but well I mean anywhere that we were, there was one place in Melbourne that girls could go if they had an appendicitis or something like that.

21:30 **Was there any chance of, was there anyone you could go for counselling at all?**

No, no, we never thought of being counselled. That's a word that only come into, into being recently in our lives. I don't think. I think there must have been girls lonely and we realised they were lonely, but three quarters of our camp came from Western Australia,

22:00 so that was a lot of fun. We had that fun with the Western Australians. Because you see there was nothing happening in the west. Everything was happening on our side. And it went straight up from Tasmania, we had girls, and we went right up. Sydney had big camps like we had, then went to Brisbane and then you got right up near the, right up near Darwin, where the action was, so there was nothing happening on the other side at all,

22:30 so that's why the girls were all brought over.

All brought over?

Cause there was lots of rivalry, you know.

Was there? Interstate?

Yes, yes. “We don’t have it like that you know.” “Perth would do this, and Perth would do that”, and so on, you know. I think the one that beat the lot was the girl that said to me one day, “Anyway, you know the boards run the wrong way in the Melbourne Town Hall. In Perth they run across. In Melbourne they run from, they run from the

23:00 orchestra pit right up to the back, and that’s quite different to what we have in Perth.” So we’re getting right to the pits by that time. Nothing was like Perth, you know, but they got over it. I felt a bit sorry for them, you know. That was a long train trip for them to come over.

It’s a long way.

And when they had leave, they’d come right over on those trains and they were, you know, choo-choos, not like the good trains we’ve got now, and they’d set up, they had to set up in the desert

23:30 or wherever it was, cauldrons, you know, to boil water and make tea, and things like that. And some of them, there wasn’t much room in their carriages, so they were sleeping along the luggage racks. Yes.

Wow. Very tough.

Yes, just with your great coats on and things like that.

Were there Western Australian girls in rookies training then?

Well not with us, there weren’t, but they came over to Ivanhoe Grammar School.

24:00 Ivanhoe Grammar, I always think this is funny. Ivanhoe Grammar School evacuated the whole school because of the Japanese, and they went from Ivanhoe to Croydon. They evacuated. Now days with all the cars and things we’ve got, that’s a very little distance.

What difference is it going to make?

So there were about five hundred signal women went into Ivanhoe Grammar School in July, and

24:30 they went in, and the boys went. But it was wonderful because, you see, they had all the sleeping arrangements and they had the classrooms. Because in signals there’s a lot of things you have to learn, so they were able to send, actually men were starting to come back from the 6th Division who were invalided home or not well enough to fight, and they were set to tell their friends “They were teaching the ladies what to do?. And they were teaching about the Morse code

25:00 and all the different things. Cipher was never in that, cipher was always taken privately. It was never in that. The men were very good and I believe the 6th Division men got very proud of the girls, you know. They marched around Ivanhoe. The dogs were always following you, or running between your legs. And the people in Ivanhoe were very good. Of a Sunday, which was a stand down usually. A stand down, it just means you didn’t go

25:30 anywhere, but you were standing down. And they invited them over there for afternoon tea, and different things like that. The people of Ivanhoe really took them in. It was great.

Great. Look, I’m just interested to touch, to go back to the women who had the break…I just want to ask you about the women with the breakdowns again. I’d just like a couple of more questions relating to that. Do you recall seeing them go through that process of breaking down?

No, no. No, I didn’t.

26:00 **No. So they weren’t showing signs of?**

No, we didn’t see any signs of that at all.

Ok.

I mean I was in a camp with seven hundred women and I didn’t know any really women who that, that really broke down. What they did was, in the last year of the war, I think they realised that we were getting extraordinary pressurised and tired. They probably knew we were tired, and they, and

26:30 there was a camp that came vacant at Portsea, a bit of a camp, that the officers had had down there, and they were able to send some of us down, just for five days or something.

Bit of R and R [Rest and Recreation]?

Yes, yes. And so that meant we could get around Portsea and have a swim or just not wear, not wear our uniforms particularly and get up when we wanted to and things like that. So that was a bit of a break. That came in the last year

27:00 but it was just as well it did, because I think people were really at…

Did you ever feel yourself that you might not, you know, at one point a bit beside yourself at all?

No, no.

Kept it together well?

Well I tried to. But I mean, the mere fact of the signals we were doing being so serious, it kept us on track, if you know what I mean, because we knew we had to keep going.

27:30 There were all these men that were suffering and things were happening to them and people just went off. The 8th Division, I mean, people were being. Singapore had fallen, Hong Kong, I had a brother fighting in Tobruk, I mean, you couldn't let yourself go, because it just wasn't you. You had to keep in there plodding along, you had to.

Did you ever go home and shed a bit of a tear or?

Oh no, no, no, no. I was

28:00 glad to see my bedroom, get into some nice clean white sheets. I laughed at Mum with, you know, with the… But something happened, which was unusual, I think. Are we being serious now? My brother, Rupert, he was a Major in Tobruk. He got the Military Cross, and we were very worried about him because everybody who served, they were short of food,

28:30 they were short of water, and we knew by photos coming back, their clothes were dropping off them. They'd have just their shorts with a great big belt round, pulling them in, because they were just on a certain amount of water a day and food, and that was very, very bad when you've got a brother whose six foot two, and a great big strong man. We were very proud of him, of course, and

29:00 we just kept writing and I, I was knitting socks and things like that. Anyhow, I was sitting on a shift one night and an officer came along, whom I'd never seen before and he said to me, "Sergeant, is there anybody of your name serving overseas?",

29:30 and I said, "Yes sir, my brother," and he said, "Come with me", all very mysterious. And I went up and he, he opened up a signal, and he said, and it said "That my brother". It was from General Blamey saying that "My brother was to come back from the Middle East and he was to start an Infantry Training Battalion", because

30:00 obviously with the Japanese in the war, the men in Australia had to be taught how to fight. And this had been the experience. They had to be trained infantrymen, so I said, I read it and I said, "Oh thank you", and went back and sat down. From then on I worried, I worried. He was getting on a troop ship. How were they going to get him back?

30:30 If he went a certain way the enemy would be there, unless he came back, I thought, across the north of America, that might be a safe way. And I worried. I'd go home, you know, and I'd see my mother pack up a cake in a tin, you know, and we'd sew the stuff around it and put… And all these things. Letters were going off to Rupert and everything and I couldn't say a word.

That must have been very hard?

31:00 It was about six weeks I had that and I couldn't say anything to any of the girls either. I couldn't say "I was relieved or happy" or whatever. I couldn't say anything.

It was top secret?

Oh well, I mean, you just didn't talk about it. Your brother's life was at stake, so was other people's. So my mother rang up Fawkner Park, and she got permission from the officer in charge to speak to me.

31:30 So there was an announcement made down, and I went down to the phone, and she said to me, "Rupert's back, he's just rung me from the West", and I said, "Yes Mother, I know", and she said "You knew and you…" Really, I've never heard my mother. "You didn't tell me and I'm his mother, and you knew…" And, anyway.

32:00 **That was a hard**

I had to finish that conversation, and by the time I got home my father had explained to her that "I couldn't say anything". His life was at risk, other people's life was at risk. But the first feelings of a mother was why should I know, when it was her was son who was coming back, first to the West.

I have another question for you about LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre]. Are you aware of LMF?

32:30 **Soldiers who were sent home for lack of moral fibre.**

No.

You heard of that expression?

No, I didn't know anything about that. No.

I'm just interested to know what your view is on that? What, how you feel about servicemen who were sent home?

Was that in World War II?

In World War II, yes.

I didn't know anything about that.

Didn't you?

No, I didn't know anything about that, because I went right through till the men went to New Guinea, so it must have been

33:00 certain sections, or certain battalions, or something, but everyone I knew in my brother's battalion, they were all fighting, fighting, you know. Because they then got working up in the islands. They were sent on, up through the jungle, so they

Could you understand men going "Troppo" or losing the plot?

Well, I would think that would depend on their background. I would think it would depend on their background completely.

33:30 And they wouldn't have the moral fibre to stand it the same as other people would.

So you didn't know of any men?

No, I never, and what's more I never did any signals about them either, because we did in cipher, we learnt a lot about the people being sent home, or whatever, like, you know, Blamey had my brother sent home. There were things like that. We read so and so was coming back, but that was to do with a specific job, or else

34:00 well, we would get told. See they might have come back on a hospital ship.

Yes. I think men who were sent home for emotional reasons were sent through the medical system.

Well, that would be right. So we would only be having signals about a ship, not necessarily about the people.

34:30 **Ok, I've got another question about the rookies training. Can you possibly be a bit more specific about what sort of things you learnt there? Like at the rookies training.**

Well, we had to learn, we had, we had to learn about, of course we had to learn about the army, about the rules and we had to learn particularly about feminine things, because we were the first feminine

35:00 ones in, so you didn't smoke, you didn't put you hands in your pocket, you didn't take the arm of a man if you were with him, you were always a soldier.

What did you learn about the army specifically?

Oh well, we had to learn about, yes there was the infantry, and so on, and we had to learn the various units and the battalions, and everything like that. And how many men made up a battalion and what was part of it, the medical officers

35:30 and the training officers and the headman and so on. We had to learn everything like that.

Did you ever visit places like Puckapunyal and…?

No, because, well. There was a big camp at Darlie [Darling], outside Ballarat, and that was the biggest one I was in and that was when I did my NCO training.

I'd like to move onto there actually.

Yes

So how long was rookies training? How long were you there?

36:00 Oh, that was three weeks.

Only three weeks?

Yes, as far as I can remember.

And you lived there at that time?

Yes, we lived there. Cause it had been a boys boarding school.

And then you went onto?

Then I went to Grosvenor, where I went into cipher, and that was the first time, of course, that I had to then swear again on the bible. That was when, you know, I was told, "I would be shot if I said one word

36:30 out of place". Well there was another lass from there, who I never saw again, but she was there. And

there were American soldiers learning our ciphers, and we had a man who had been a cipher nut, you know. He'd studied all these things and he sort of came into being. He was an expert suddenly. When war broke out he was an expert on all those things. So we met

37:00 some of the Americans.

I believe some of them couldn't spell? Is that right?

Well our spelling was different. They have their own method of spelling.

Sorry, so with the camp, the actual camp at Ballarat, just out side Ballarat

Outside of Ballarat, Darling.

Was that part of rookie training?

No, no that was when I went to be an NCO.

Oh that's different again?

Yes, yes.

Well, we'll stick to Grosvenor first.

A non-commissioned officer learns different things.

37:30 **So with Grosvenor that was the cipher training specifically?**

That was where we had some cipher, there was only another woman there. That was the beginning of all the signals thing that I did, because it was some time before they got a lot more room to go.

Did you move into cipher with any of your friends? Had you formed any friendships at that stage?

No, no, no I didn't.

38:00 No well, see first of all we were home, living at home and I used to get taken. You see in cipher you work shifts. Because when it's daylight here it's night time somewhere else. So you have a very busy time with the people sending messages from the Middle East or anywhere over there, because it comes here at night time, so we had to work shifts. And we worked from eight in the morning till five at night,

38:30 from five at night till midnight, and from midnight till eight in the morning, and they were six day stints.

Tell me what sort of training you did at cipher training?

Oh well, we had to learn the different books because you would look up a dictionary, you want to know a certain word, a dictionary, and it would have a number against it,

39:00 well that number had to be subtracted from another number that was in a book and the result of that was put in the message.

So the messages were like code?

Yes, well it was a cipher and now the person receiving that, they had to know what the original date was. The date would come, and they had to know what the original date was so that they knew that was the book

39:30 that was being used for that day.

Very complex, very complex.

Yes, yes.

How did you find that? Did you find it hard to learn?

Oh no, well I realised it had to be, but we just, you worked out what your figure was and then you subtracted it without carrying any, it was just like you'd say six from twelve – six, but then you didn't have ten the next one. You just made out it wasn't there. So then you wrote that down and that's what you

40:00 wrote down, so. First of all I was at that school and the Americans were learning there too. They were learning our ciphers because they were going to be in the south-west Pacific area. I don't think they did very much of it, but they had to know a certain amount, because they were in different things together like that. And then I got sent to Grosvenor, well there was only one other woman there at the time. But eventually there

40:30 were old men, I mean really old men who were bent, and I think they'd been in the First [World] War, or something, and they knew, and they were doing things very slowly but precisely. But they were only to happy to have them working there until they got an influx of people and

Tape 5

00:31 **I'd like to ask you Patricia, what was the attitude of men towards women working in these areas?**

Well, we didn't work with many men. All the men we worked with, were either old or from the First [World] War. We didn't work with many men at all, because they weren't there.

Just generally though, like cause you would have been walking around the streets in your uniform

01:00 **and all that thing.**

But there weren't Australian men about.

So you never copped any flak from any men?

No, no, they weren't, we weren't. Because they were all old or in wheelchairs or something. There was nobody of any age that would have, you know. And when the 6th Division came back, they were the first division to come back, and they came back to Fawkner Park where they was 700 women, and I think this is rather funny.

01:30 But anyway, they came back, and they didn't really know the men at the front, that women had come into the army. It wasn't big on their list of things.

I remember you said yesterday they were quite supportive.

Yes, yes.

And they were too busy worrying about their families

That's right. I think they were, just appreciated we were doing something. Oh ok. I was on duty, the orderly sergeant, and there were a whole lot of dogs running into our camp at Fawkner Park

02:00 cause it was only barbed wire around it, and they'd run in one side, and you'd chase them out, cause they were looking for crumbs, or whatever, and they'd all run out the other side. Fawkner Park being a big park, you'd have Pomeranians, there'd be Alsatians, all these big and little dogs. So my orderly officer, she rang up at South Melbourne, which was where the signalmen were, and she said, "Could some men come over please?" because

02:30 we needed some help in the camp, and they came up, and they drew up in this car, and much to my amazement they were wearing ribbons. They'd been in the 6th Division. They'd returned from the 6th Division and they were asked "To come over to this camp and help a lady chase the dogs out". I was absolutely bowled because I recognised the colours, and I said, "We've got a problem,

03:00 we can't, their running around the tents, they're running in and out everywhere." Girls were trying to sleep, girls were trying to march. So they came and they were going. Little Pomeranians, and big ones. Oh dear, it was a non-ending thing. As fast as we got them, they went again. But I thought the chaps took it very well really. That was my first experience that. I, as a Sergeant, should be asking someone in the 6th Division

03:30 "To chase dogs around", you know. No, they were quite good.

Another thing I wanted to ask, did you mix with other AWAS in other areas? Or was it pretty much just in the cipher area?

No, no. It was signals. We were all signals, we were all signals together. But it isn't that we wouldn't have mixed with them, but we didn't meet them to mix with them.

What about other women

04:00 **from other services?**

Well, the WAAAFS had their own, they were down at Point Cook, or somewhere like that, with the planes, and the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] were down at Point Lonsdale with the ships or something, so if we met them, that was fine, but we didn't have occasion to meet them. Where did you go anyway?

You didn't see them at social occasions or?

We didn't have any social occasions. The most thing we could do if we were on an afternoon shift, or something, was go to the flicks, if you had leave, you could go. I went to see Gone With The Wind.

04:30 I remember seeing that and that took a long time, but because that was all you could do. If you had enough money we always wanted to see if we could buy a rump steak, or have a steak, have a meat meal, wonderful.

Meat was in short supply then?

Oh well yes, we never saw any really red meat, you know, just slivers of stuff. So that was really something you could spend your money on, having a good feed.

05:00 **Did you earn much money?**

No, no. I've seen my pay book and I think I got seven and sixpence a day, or something like that. We didn't get the same pay as what the men got, even though we were doing the same work. But that wasn't important, it was just that we didn't have it.

Was your mother earning money at this stage?

Oh my mother never worked except for bringing up five children.

Your father was earning?

Oh, my father was a bank manager.

Oh that's right.

05:30 He was very high in the bank, they were raising children,

That was enough, that was enough work.

and making clothes for us and taking us through school and everything was enough.

I wanted to also ask you how do you think the war affected the status of women, given that during the war women did start to take on very responsible positions?

I think it altered the whole status of women, I think but for the war

06:00 a lot of them would have been in the same area that they thought. You see because even if they didn't enlist they were called up to join in the munitions. So there were women making munitions and then of course they send girls to take men's place in the army, they volunteered to be in the land army, so wherever there had been men

06:30 who were of age that they could serve they were relieved by women. And I don't think anybody ever took any notice of that. They never took any notice. I asked these 6th [Division] guys to do this and they didn't take any notice. I suppose if I'd said, "Come to attention, come and do this and that", it wouldn't have been good, but I simply said, "We've got a problem here", you know, as if we were

07:00 all the same, and that was it.

So you certainly think that it freed a lot of women, do you think?

Oh yes, it did. It gave them. They knew then they really could do things without keeping on serving meals.

A lot of women, a couple of women I've spoken to who were also in the war, I think a WAAAF woman was saying, that she felt that the

07:30 **involvement of women in the services during World War II, really almost, you could say, was the beginning of the women's movement, as far as the liberation…**

Definitely. It was, as it happened. But we were not working for that, we were working for the war. But the way it evolved it didn't come for some time, because you see, when these women's husbands came back, or when they got married or whatever happened, and a lot of them didn't get married. A lot of them remained spinsters because the men never came back.

08:00 Well, they were concentrating then on a marriage and raising children. But the whole thing had been enlightened. It had all been enlightened by then. Everybody knew what women could do, what they'd been trained to do, the same as a man. It didn't come up. The question didn't come up. It just evolved.

And do you think that's a positive, very positive thing?

Oh yes, I do, I do. Because look at the difference women have made. Not only in our country, but in every

08:30 country.

So how did it personally affect you? Your work that you did in the war?

I got terribly tired, we were exhausted. I'd been in there over three and a half years doing that work. And we really were exhausted because we weren't getting proper sleep. We were not getting food we would have got at home.

09:00 We were working extraordinary hours and there was the worry. There was always a worry about your signals cause we knew things that other people didn't know. You had that, as well as some of your friends being killed, and members of your family being away, so you had a lot of worry. We really had a lot of worry. We never went round saying "We were worried".

09:30 **Did you lose weight?**

Oh yes. But I mean you never went around saying that because you made the most of everything. You were in camp and you had to be bright and you had to be thoughtful to each other, but you were never conscious of that, but we were absolutely exhausted by the time the war ended. It was a great relief.

How did it effect you though, I guess what I'm interested to know is, how did it, did it make you feel more confident

10:00 **and more powerful as a woman having gone through that experience?**

Well, I never sort of thought of that. Most of us just wanted to get married and have children. I don't think anybody ever thought of having a career after it, or anything. But our commanding officer went, she was very, very oriented and regimented, and she went on to become, you know, very high in the police force in Victoria.

10:30 She'd run a camp with over 500 women in it.

Did you have, you didn't have any career aspirations?

No, because I'd been a designer of clothes, and things like that, which was far removed from what I was doing. No, I remember having, moving out of camp, having, you know, been discharged and everything, and I thought one of the things, I looked up at the sky

11:00 and I thought, "No, in future I'll have to decide what I'm going to wear", because the first thing in the morning, six o'clock when the alarm would go all over the camp, they would sort of say, "Wakey, wakey, rise and shine, show a leg, show a leg", then they would tell you what to wear.

So it was all decided for you?

"Shirts and skirts will be worn, jackets may be carried".

11:30 You would be told.

So this was when you were at what camp was this?

Fawkner Park

So you were actually staying there, camping out there?

Three and a half years I was sleeping in a tent.

So you lived there?

Yes.

Oh really. Fawkner Park?

It was built for the Americans, dear.

How come you couldn't stay home of a night?

No, no. It was built for the Americans and they refused to stay there. The Marines. It was too dark, too dank, too foggy and lacking fortifications

12:00 and they moved to the Melbourne Cricket Ground, and 700 hundred of us were moved into Fawkner Park.

700?

It was all they said. We never had any fortifications around it. We, never any guards. We slept in their tents, four to a tent, and that's not funny in the summer.

Was it cold?

We had boards on the floor, which we had to sweep. The point was, in the summer, when you'd been working nightshift

12:30 it was very hard to sleep in the daytime, because the flies crawled on you. I used to put cold cream on, and the flies would be doing a waltz around my forehead. You'd wake up and the flies would. It was very hard to sleep, it was very hard to get your sleep back.

Especially in the middle of the day the sun would have been high.

Your day session was nothing - that was eight to five. The one five to midnight, that was not good, because you still came home late.

13:00 But the one that was all nighter, the midnight to eight, that was the killer, and that happened every three weeks. You'd have a couple of days' stand down in between everything. I worked six days.

How far was work from your quarters?

Oh, we marched there, and I would march a squad of girls over Commercial Road, past the… I thought "It was marvellous, holding up all the traffic, the girls

13:30 marching across", then they had to go across St. Kilda Road to Grosvenor, in Queens Road.

How many women would you be marching in one go?

I suppose there'd be about thirty or so. They'd be all the girls going on the night shift or the evening shift.

And you'd be in front marching them?

You know, I was only saying to someone the other day, "We were very modest". I was saying, "I came out of Grosvenor one day", and I saluted a, we were mad on saluting, I saluted a male officer

14:00 who was, and I had a sixpenny piece in my suspender, because we couldn't get any rubber. Because of the Japanese and the rubber. We were using threepenny or sixpenny pieces to keep our stockings up, and this fell on the ground, and the officer said, "Oh sergeant, is that your sixpence?" And I said, "No sir, no sir, I never saw it before in my life", and I walked along hanging onto my stocking.

14:30 But I was silly, I didn't want to be immodest and say "It was my sixpence". I might have to explain it.

So did you have any really good mates there? Do you recall any women in particular that you were very good friends with?

Oh yes. There were a couple particularly that we were. As I say, I never heard an argument.

15:00 I never heard an argument.

Were they the same rank of you?

Well, you had to be a sergeant to do the work we were doing, so I was in the sergeants' mess and I was the president of that.

Who were your room mates? Who were you bunked down with?

Oh at the camp, they were girls doing similar work. There'd be a hut of girls and they'd all be doing, perhaps, the machines, you know, they might be doing the teleprinter machines, where it comes out the other end

15:30 but they'd put the girls who did the same sort of work together. But every day when we went, we had to leave our tent just so. There used to be a man came over from Queens Road, which was the headquarters of the Signals, and this man used to go around our camp with the CO [Commanding Officer] every day, and inspect all the huts, and this one guy had

16:00 a cheek, he had a piece of chalk, he'd write notes on the front of your tent, you know

If they weren't tidy?

Had a locker, and we were only allowed to put two things on the locker, and one was my brother's photo. You might have a few flowers. And you had to hang your face washer on a piece of string underneath your bed. Couldn't put it away wet. Everything before you went on shift, everything

16:30 had to be exactly right, your blankets turned in the right way and everything. That was inspected everyday.

And you had to be very neat and tidy?

Always, always.

So you were very much living in an army environment?

Definitely, yes.

Similar to the men's?

Yes, I was lucky to have Mum to do my shirts and things like that. Some of the girls took their collars up to a Chinese laundry in Prahran

17:00 and they got all their collars shone up, you know, like that. We did have evenings when we could invite people over, like men from South Melbourne barracks, or men from Point Cook or from Lonsdale, you know the navy. We would invite them. They'd have to be out of camp at eleven o'clock but we'd have supper and we'd dance

17:30 and things like that. We were allowed to do that.

Did any of the women and men pair up or?

No, not really. It was all very fleeting. It was nice to have a dance with them and it was nice to be with them and have them in your camp but then the time came to go, their bus came and they had to all

leave the camp together. I don't think anybody ever. I was down at Point Cook and I went down to the Lonsdale and that. Point Cook had three hundred

18:00 sergeants, the equivalent of a sergeant, in their mess. It was very big, non-commissioned officer mess, very big, very, very big. You'd just meet them, have a drink, have a talk, have a bit of a dance and you'd never connect up again. It'd be just like ships passed in the night, you know. You'd have a nice dance with them and that, but that was it.

18:30 Everything in war time was fleeting like that because you didn't know when they were going to be on a course, or go overseas, or what they were doing. You didn't talk about work, anyway. I think that, I suppose in those circumstances, probably all I talked about was my brother Rupert. As a matter of fact, the men on shift used to call me "My brother Rupert" behind my back.

Because you'd talk about him all the time?

Yes, yes

19:00 **So with the recreational activities, and with the other women you were working with, did you ever have time to go out together or go to the pictures?**

If we wanted to, we would go to the pictures with another girl.

When you had sort of time off?

Some of them, you'd go and try and find a place where they had a nice big steak. You know, I used to go up to the "Florentino",

19:30 up the top end of Collins Street, and I just loved to have a nice big steak there, you know, or a bowl of spaghetti or something. But mostly the steaks. Mad about the meat, you know, because we didn't get anything like that.

What was the food like?

We used to get. Well, what we didn't like was when we got a cold fish put on our plate, like an orange coloured fish, you know, complete with the tail and the eye looking at you. That was your breakfast, you know.

20:00 **Orange roughy?**

Yes.

And that was it?

Yes, you had to have it, toast or a piece of bread. Eggs were rationed and bacon was rationed, so you didn't really have much in the way of that. Sometimes you'd have a bit of spaghetti or you might get what they called scrambled eggs, which would have a lot of milk in it, they'd be very paled down, you know.

Did you know of any women who,

20:30 **lesbian women, who formed relationships with each other in the AWAS?**

No, never.

You weren't aware that may have happened?

No, it wouldn't have happened because we would have known, and if it did happen they would have been put straight out.

Really?

But it never happened, and as I say, we were living in close proximity. If you're sleeping three or four women to a tent

21:00 I still see those girls now, they come to my annual luncheon. But you all kept to your own area. I think I heard of this happening to someone in the WAAAF, but they were both discharged.

So in other words that rule applied to the women as well as the men?

Yes, they were both discharged. I know that happened in the WAAAF.

Could you understand

21:30 **that could happen with women?**

No, no, not with us. We were too geared that our menfolk were away, do you know what I mean? When I come to think of it, we all wore the same clothes, we weren't wearing pretty things and everything like that. But still in, all in all we had a femininity about ourselves. We were not butch. Any of us.

But some women in the services were I think, weren't they?

Yes, I think so, yes.

22:00 Depended what job you did, you see. I suppose if you were in the WAAAF, and you were polishing engines, you know, cleaning things and doing all these things, it might apply, but we were doing brain work and things like that, and the girls were working machines, and that, so it wouldn't have applied. It wouldn't have happened. No.

Nevertheless, I suppose, the camaraderie and the friendship that you had with your friends there must have been very important?

Well it still, you see we're still

22:30 friends, and I'm still running luncheons. I had sixty five at my luncheon last Anzac Day. Now that's a lot this long after the war.

Fantastic.

And they get dressed up just to, you know.

Do you still talk, do you talk about your times back then?

Look, there's about seven sections of dining I have to have. There are cipher operators, there are despatch riders, there is teleprinter operators. We go through the lot, and they like to sit with the same

23:00 girls that did the same work, and.

Do you reminisce a lot?

They did, they do, they do that day. They do that day. Because that's the only time they can.

That's fantastic.

But they still like to sit with the girls they did similar work with. The despatch riders have funny stories about, you know. Because they were the ones that had to take the messages away, and they'd always been men before, on motorbikes with two bags at the side. You've probably seen them

23:30 but of course they weren't allowed. Colonel Irving didn't want the girls to be putting their leg over a motorbike, so they got over that by getting them small cars. But later on they were allowed to be issued with slacks.

Did any of those? I guess some of those messages, obviously, are going to be very sad messages about.

24:00 **Who actually delivered messages to family about men who had died?**

That wouldn't be up to us. Once our signal was done, that was delivered to the person it was meant to go to. Say it was Victoria Barracks and the man was the head padre or whatever it was like that, that was his decision. Because it would revert to the man, the man or woman that was in that,

24:30 and it would be news about a man. Well it would revert to that man's battalion and where that came from, they would be the one's that had to tell them, not us. They would probably tell a padre.

The padre attached to the battalion or?

Well, it could be. It could be. Or they.

Or the local padre?

Or they could send a telegram.

I'm always curious to know how people found out.

Well I understand from my mother, that in the First World War, it

25:00 was always the ministers and padres that had to tell you. After the war they rather objected to that, because they said, "It more or less gave a thing afterwards, that they felt they were always the purveyors of bad news", if you know what I mean. I'm not sure that, perhaps in the case of Roman Catholics that might have applied with the priest. I think it would all depend on where people lived. If they were in the country, or what they were doing

25:30 or if you had. See I used to sing in the Church of England choir but everything gets split up. Even the choirmaster, and the person who played the organ, we all went different ways. It would just depend. See if anything had happened to my brother, the man who was in charge, Bernard Evans, then I was working on an auxiliary with his wife,

26:00 I mean it would come to my mother in a most [?], same with the other men. We were all attached with working for the battalion, so that it would come in a kindly way, but it wouldn't be by telegram. I think that's fair enough, I don't think you should read that in a telegram. I think a padre or someone should come and tell your mother or your father, your next of kin, your wife.

26:30 **For sure. Much better to hear it in person than via a piece of paper.**

Oh yes, it would be terrible because you wouldn't know any of the facts about it or anything.

Did you know of many young men who didn't make it in the war?

Oh yes, I lost about, oh well before I joined up I'd lost several. The young men were very nice. They used to come and they'd say, "We're on long, we've got, we going

27:00 overseas and we've only got so many days, and we've come to say goodbye because this is our last days." And they'd go around to all their friends or relatives or people they'd been associated with and say "Goodbye" and shake hands. I've got one in my album there who was only away a matter of weeks, and I read in the paper where he was dead, shot dead. He hadn't been long in the Middle East. Hadn't said "Goodbye" to us

27:30 very long. It was amazing. I had a cousin went down in the [HMAS] Perth. He was only seventeen. Educated at Scotch College.

Seventeen?

Yes. In the navy. And the Perth was shot down in the Sunda Straits. And people on board, up top, had a chance of getting away, but I think he must have been down in the other part of it. But you see nobody

28:00 knew. Nobody knew if you were taken prisoner. Nobody knew what happened to any of those men. You just knew the ship was sunk. And the parents of all those people on board suddenly got in touch with each other, and connected, and they listened into broadcasts and to see if there was any news. Tell each other "If they heard anything about it". It was a wonderfully knit circle they had from the

28:30 Perth, I know particularly.

What about the [HMAS] Sydney? That was earlier too, wasn't it?

That was earlier, that was over the other side.

More Western Australia?

Yes, that's right. Not much happening in the west except that. That's why we had all the girls come backwards and forwards to us, you see. They came over. It was all coming up here, through Sydney and then up. But strangely enough, I've been doing this with the

29:00 history, the girls in signals in Sydney went into a camp, much the same way, you know. Then of course, Melbourne was the best atmospherics for sending signals because of Croydon. There was a very big thing at Croydon.

What do you mean by the best atmospherics?

I don't know. It's a big tower or something that emits and collects information. A big wireless thing.

29:30 There were girls that went up and working in Brisbane and some of them worked in Townsville, but not very many, because, you see, most signals come into the capitals.

Did any go to Darwin, any women, AWAS women?

No, I don't think there were any in Darwin, because I don't think…

I believe some WAAAF went to Darwin.

They may have, in the air force, yes, well the air force was a different thing all together, because they be flying out of Darwin. But if we didn't have a lot of men posted there, or something like that,

30:00 we wouldn't be in it.

What did you know, or hear about the war generally while you were working, while you were at Fawkner Park?

Well, we knew what we had in our signals and of course we all knew when a ship went down, or something like that happened, but we didn't know that very much about the other services, as services.

30:30 We didn't know where they were particularly or what they were doing. Obviously, when the Japanese came into the war, we knew people would be going up into the jungle, well we knew that. But it was mainly what we had in signals that we knew, and that was more than the average person ever knew.

As you said you could actually share your signal news with other women you were working with?

Yes certainly.

And that would give you a general idea of what was happening, like…?

31:00 Yes, yes.

Battles going on over there?

Once it was out, once it was passed to the officer then it was you know, unless it was “Nodeco”. Nodeco meant no decode. Once you read that, you had to go and pass it to an officer, cause he read it. It must have something very serious or something.

No decode?

31:30 Nodeco. N O D E. No deco. When that came in the first group in your cipher, you just packed it in and took the message to an officer because it meant “Officers only”.

How did the messages literally come in? On paper form?

Yes on paper form, yes

So it’s like a fax machine almost?

Yes, like that. They’d come off there and they’d have all the numbers on it.

And your job was to decode the numbers?

Yes, decipher, decode a code and decipher a cipher.

32:00 **Did you write them down? Did you just longhand write them down?**

Well, you had a book with numbers in it and those numbers related to what you were doing. But they didn’t run in order, they could have been any sort of order.

It must have taken a long time to decode messages?

Yes it did, it did. So you had a message, and you folded that over, and you had the other book, at the same time that would have had the number and you

32:30 subtracted those four figures and you put them down on there.

Say, if you had a message like three sentences long, how long would that take to do?

Oh you’d have a long message, a very long message. But it would only be concerning what the message was about, you didn’t go into lengthy details, you know. Then you’d have stop,

33:00 a full stop.

And most of the messages were being, once you decoded them, where did you hand them, who did you give them to?

Once, we deciphered them we took them up to a part there where the officer dealt with them, because he would decide who they had to go to. Which particular section of the army, the navy, or the air force that signal had to go to.

So it wasn’t just for the army?

33:30 No, no, well we would take messages from a ship or whoever sent us a message. They might want to send the army a message here or they might be in the air force. But to whoever it was addressed to, it would then go off and it would then go off and it would be sent to Victoria Barracks with a dispatch rider, who had a locked thing with a padlock on it. And that would go on his motorbike with him He’d take it up to Victoria Barracks or wherever

34:00 and the officer in charge would decide what to do about all those messages. It wasn’t up to the signals people to decide.

Would messages come through, cause I know yesterday you talked about General MacArthur being in Melbourne, would messages come through for him?

Well, not for him necessarily. The Americans would have dealt with that. It all depends.

They would have had their own message system, would they?

Yes, some of them were doing the cipher thing when I was doing it. But it just depend where they were posted

34:30 because you only sent messages to places where there were people going to receive them, and they had to be on the wavelength to receive them. So therefore, if someone wanted to get in touch with some Americans that weren’t in that particular vicinity, they would get it to you in Melbourne

And you’d pass it on?

and then from the barracks it would go to them.

It was called Cipher Headquarters,

35:00 **was it?**

Cipher It was just called Cipher Section. We were all cipher operators.

Cipher operators, ok. And the actual place you worked in was called?

We were all in signals.

Signals Department?

Yes. Because there were girls working teleprinters, and there were the dispatch riders, and there were the typists and there other

35:30 people doing hand signals.

Signals in general.

General Simpson was the head of it.

Did you have much contact with him?

No, we were aware that he was.

That he presided over it?

Well, he'd been in the First [World] War and he was a friend of Blamey's. We knew the two of them were friends from the First [World] War. It wasn't very much difference in the First [World] War and the Second [World War].

36:00 Only seventeen years or something. They were both big men, very big men. They liked the grog. But they were big anyway, and they were very close. Very, very close through the war. They used to go out fishing, this was their way of speaking together. They'd go down to

36:30 a dam and a lake and they'd have a rowboat. And they'd go out on the rowboat and they take something out with them to eat and drink, I suppose, and throw a few lines in. But the strange part was, we had to send a cipher operator and a teleprinter operator. They had to take their machines, get on the rowboats, and they had to be on another part of the lake

37:00 to where Simpson.

To where the Generals were?

Blamey. And they'd be sitting there. I don't know whether they had fishing rods. I daresay they were talking about something to do with the war. There were two things. They had a flag and the others had a flag. When they wanted to signal to the cipher operators to come over, they'd have to wave their flag, and the men would

37:30 row over and get the message and go back. It was the same in reverse. If they wanted to approach the two Generals who were discussing things, they had to. Well I don't know whether they had a sound thing or what. They did have a teleprinter thing on their boat, but they would signal to them and make them. And when it was the ok, they go up.

Like they were conferencing?

Yes and they'd camp down there for several days while the Generals were there.

38:00 And when they came back together, they came back to their ordinary jobs.

Did you ever get to do that?

No, I wouldn't be out in the lake, no. Wouldn't ask a woman to do that.

Interesting workplace. Oh that was men who did that.

Oh yes, yes.

Tape 6

00:33 **Patricia, I'm interested to talk to you a little bit about when you had time off, what recreational activities did you, were you able to take part in during the war?**

Usually, I went home. Because that was where I could have a good sleep in my bed, so that was probably, that took best part of a

01:00 day, probably. Because mother used to put a note on the gate "Please do not bang the gate, shift worker sleeping", you know. Anyhow, that was good to be back with your family. Have home cooking and things

like that. All the simple things in life were very important to you.

How often would you get leave?

Oh about every eight days.

And for how much time?

01:30 Oh just about a day and a half, or maybe only a day. Depended which shift it was, where it was. Then you were interested in the people in the street because everybody around you in the street, they either had a son in the air force or the navy or something like this, and you'd be saying, "How's Roger?" or "How's so and so?" You know.

So you'd catch up with people?

That's what made it so hard for me when Rupert, my brother, was coming back, because a woman opposite her, her son was a private in

02:00 my brother's battalion, and it wouldn't have done any good at all if anybody had ever known, because these two. Well, it's a big drop between a major and a private, but still, they're still the same battalion so. So I would do that, but if I only had a certain amount, see I liked to go and see Gone With The Wind or... What I used to like to do was go and have lovely big steaks. The "Florentino"

02:30 at the top of Collins Street. Real steak, you know.

Lovely. Now what about surfing, because you mentioned yesterday?

Oh, I loved surfing.

Did you do much surfing during the war?

No, no surfing at all.

That was earlier?

No swimming. The war just closed everything. When that stopped off we had a house at Torquay and we had people coming

03:00 and we'd be going surfing and we'd be going over to see our friends in Port Lonsdale or wherever, Anglesea, but it just stopped, stopped altogether, because my brother-in-law had been at the war, and his little boy was only about five and a half years old, and he was made a boarder at Brighton Grammar, because my sister became a driver. So he had both a mother and a father serving.

So your sister, your older sister?

03:30 She became a driver.

She became a driver in AWAS?

Yes, yes.

Did she join around the same time as you?

No, she joined after. That came after.

So just with the surfing, cause not many women surfed in those days, that would have been quite exciting.

Yes, yes it was, but we spend all the school holidays down there at the house, and we just loved it. Christmas dinner to us was people, rushing, playing

04:00 tennis or golf and rushing in and having Christmas dinner and your mother saying "You must sit on the beach now, make sure you're dinners gone down before you can go in", you know.

So did you have a real love of the sea then?

Yes, always. I spent all the school holidays down there, always. Dad was a bank manager and he'd have a month off, then he'd come backwards and forwards to us in the car. Because we had a car in the very early days.

So you'd go along Geelong Road?

Oh yes and down.

04:30 It's a terrible road it was. Down to Torquay. It was great. And that all stopped with the war, unfortunately.

Did you know any people who did stand-up surfing in those days?

I didn't know any women that did. I don't think I ever saw a man do it either, no.

That many not have come in till a bit later.

It was the very early stages, yes.

Were you aware of surfing that started in Sydney in, I think it was 1919,

05:00 It would be after World War I

There was a man called Duke, I can't remember his name, he was from Hawaii, who introduced

I wouldn't have been aware of that

Didn't know about that?

No, I wouldn't have been aware. I wouldn't say we had great contract with the other states. Radios came in and wireless came in, and that was good, but other than that, you weren't in close contact

05:30 because TV, we're getting so much news now.

What about the surf life saving club, wasn't up and running then?

Oh yes, but not at Torquay. No. Down at North Road, Brighton it was.

Was it?

Yes, my brother was very... They were all good swimmers. My father said. Because he was bought up on the land, he said, "My children are not going to die

06:00 drowning, or being shot." And he was very, very particular about what you did with your gun. That you unloaded it, where you stood it, the way you carried it and everything. And it was the same with swimming. He said, "They're going to learn to swim. I don't care if it's in a dam. I will teach them to swim, but they're never going to drown. None of my children I want to drown." So he was very…

06:30 He was a passive man. A very nice bank manager who wore a bowler hat, but he was determined about that, because he'd seen enough of it, you know, so we had to learn that. But that was all fun, surfing, and everything, and collecting mushrooms, or picking flowers or walking. Walking around the beach. My brother used to take me on a motorbike.

Fantastic.

Yes, he had a wonderful motorbike, and my little hands would go around. And he'd say to me, "When I go, you must turn the way I

07:00 do, because normally, you'd see, I would sort of go this way and he'd say, "No, you mustn't do that, dear. If I go to the right, you must hang onto me and go to the right with me." We'd go right round the hard sand, the back beach at Torquay. Oh, they were great days till the war came.

It sounds like you had quite an adventurous spirit?

I did.

As a young woman.

Oh yes.

And you still do?

Oh thank you.

And that may have had a role

07:30 **I'm sure, in you joining the Women's Services, do you think?**

I suppose so, yes. We were all taught not to be frightened of things. To be careful, but not to be frightened.

So do you think you were a fairly independent young woman?

I suppose, maybe, yes. I think for those times I would have been considered that, because when you're the youngest of five children and you grow up, and you are the youngest, well you learn to stand up for yourself.

08:00 They look after you, but you learn to be older than what, you know, what you would have been, if you'd been in a little family.

Can I ask you, with regards to letter writing, who did you write to overseas?

I wrote to whoever gave me their service number and their address. I'd have their number before they came to say "Goodbye" to me, but until they let me know what ship they were on or they may not have named the ship,

08:30 they may just have given me an address for the navy. Probably the navy would have passed it on. I would never have known where they were. The same as my brother's battalion. I would just put that, and you'd just put "Middle East", even if you were baking a cake and sending it in a tin. You'd just put "Middle East". That was up to the authorities to say where they were.

Did your brother receive many of your letters?

Oh yes.

09:00 Yes, we wrote letters frequently.

Sorry, what rank was he?

He was a Major.

Major

And he was bought back to. This is interesting I think. He was bought back to start the Infantry Training Battalion at Cowra. You know what happened at Cowra?

The Cowra Breakout. Was that just after Cowra he was there?

He was there.

During the breakout? Was he?

Yes, yes.

09:30 **Did he talk about it?**

The thing was Blamey wanted a man who'd seen action and he wanted a man that could train these boys. Because these boys were young and untrained in warfare and everything like that. And my brother was rather loathsome to leave his battalion that he'd fought with, but still. They went on to fight in New Guinea, but as I told you, I got word that he was coming back. So he started

10:00 the Infantry Training Battalion, and of course they were young men.

Where's Cowra?

Cowra is up in NSW.

So he was here, did he come to Melbourne?

He was bought back from where he was to be. That's what I said about the signal. They were all, of course, very green, compared with what my brother

10:30 had been used to, the men who had been through Tobruk and everything. So, yes they did break out, and I don't think it's known, a lot of the Japanese committed suicide.

Really? POWs?

Yes. They broke out and of course, they had, the fence was wired.

11:00 My brother said afterwards "They seemed to have some idea they were near the sea, and if they could get to a boat, they'd get back to Japan", or something. But what they did was, the Japanese couldn't get over the wire fence, so they got hold of a brick or a box, or something, and they stood on it and they put their head over the barbwire, till it cut off their

11:30 circulation. And when they were dead, the man in the back of the queue would take them down, lay them and he'd take the place next. And they were queuing up to do this. Because it was a disgrace to them to be a prisoner. And they were committing hari-kari. They didn't have any implements or any weapons and that was how they took their lives and they were queuing up to do it.

That's terrible.

As one

12:00 died, the other one stepped forward, took him down, laid him down and did the same.

How did you find out about this?

Well, I didn't find out about it till the war was over. Till he told me what had happened. And I asked him about it and he said "That's what they did". Because they were locked in, they were being cosseted and they committed suicide. There wasn't any fight, they did it themselves. They were not

12:30 killed, they were not shot.

What was your view of Japanese during the war?

Oh we thought "They were terrible". We thought "They were terrible, the things they were doing to people". I mean, we didn't dislike the Germans. You knew that the Germans had fought in World War I.

They were you're enemy, sort of, because they. You can't say that anybody

13:00 would have liked Hitler and what he was doing to the Jews was appalling. And we were young to be thinking about this, if you can understand. Now people are exposed to this, but this was new to us, that people would be doing this sort of thing to Jewish people. But in a way we respected the German soldiers. They did observe the Red

13:30 Cross and everything like that. If a man was taken prisoner by the Germans, he had good rations, he had good. Everything from the Red Cross got to them.

The Geneva Convention.

Yes, but the Japanese were very dicey. Very nasty and very dicey. Different altogether.

What do you think of the Japanese now?

Well I don't know very much about them, really. I've been to Japan, but only to see

14:00 their gardens and things like that. I try not to hold a dislike for anybody. The war's over a long time and that was a different regime. But I think what they did was dreadful. I'm appalled by some of the things they did, in the signals that I saw. It just made me quite sick to think they were doing that. But that was a different

14:30 era to what it was now.

With the Germans and their treatment of the Jews, when did you hear about that?

Well, we did know Hitler was doing this to the Jews, but the thing about concentration camps and things like that, we did not know the full facts of that till after the war. We didn't know how many

15:00 had been killed. And when I've been into concentration camps and seen them, over in Europe, that are opened, Dachau and those places, and one thing disturbs me is that they took children. I never realised that they were not taking adults, they took little children. And they made them take their shoes off and boots, because they didn't burn.

15:30 They made them take the leather off, and everything. To see these little kids' shoes there, and to think they had someone by the hand that was taking them into that, you know, that's terribly distressing. And I just think it was absolutely unforgivable. Hitler was a dreadful man, and to think he could only die once, and he killed so many people.

16:00 He'd been decorated in World War I. He developed a hatred. I think, perhaps, he was refused a loan or something like this. He developed a hatred towards the Jewish fraternity and it took over. It took over completely. Sorry to say a lot of people followed him.

16:30 **What drove him to do it, do you think?**

Well I think that, I don't know. He got into a power, didn't he? Got into a position of power and I think suddenly decided to take it out on the Jews, somehow, and it took over him. But it was amazing he could get so many people involved in it. There were some people, there were some

17:00 high ranking officers that tried to, you know, tried to bomb him actually. He moved away from a part of the table, but it was very hard to get through to him, because he had so many people guarding him.

Did you know any Jewish people in Melbourne, who'd escaped the Nazis?

Yes, I did. They had their number tattooed on their hand, on their arm, the women.

Who'd been in camps?

Yes, yes. And one of them,

17:30 her fiancée, they were both put in camp together, from Czechoslovakia, and her fiancée was, he was in the wire opposite. He came to say "Goodbye" to her at the wire and say "This was where he was being taken off too".

Terrible.

She was with her mother. They had a little, twelve year old children there

18:00 and it wasn't very nice. Where they had the women they didn't always have clothes on them, and if they did, they made the women squat and they'd go back and poke them with their bayonets at the back, you know, for fun. Run round them all, and poke them and see if they knock them over, you know. It was bestial,

18:30 the whole thing. Beastly, dreadful. I mean to speak to women that were put through that sort of... It was unbelievable, and then for someone to watch their twelve year old son go off into the... It was just unbelievable.

It is unbelievable, isn't it?

Yes, I admire those women who've been able to come out here and get on with their lives. Without ever forgetting that, but make a new life.

19:00 **Do you know any women, have you heard that there was a similar project that we're doing, where Jewish survivors were being interviewed? Do you know anyone who was involved with that?**

No, I haven't heard anybody.

It's very similar.

Is it?

I think it was quite a cathartic experience for the Jewish survivors.

Well I'm sure they've been welcomed out here anyway. I'm always glad to see them. They're hard working, fine people.

19:30 **Is that a side of war, the side of war that's about death, what do you think is the worst side of war for you, as far as you're concerned?**

Well I think, you know, it all goes hand in hand, doesn't it? People are killed and people lose part of their country, or people lose their freedom. It's unbelievable the way it just all

20:00 goes on, from one to the other. And to think that a man like Hitler, who was in the 19, the war before [1914-1918], could just develop. Apparently, he asked somebody for a loan. It must have been a Jew, and he couldn't get it, and he developed a hatred for the Jews, you know, for some reason, and it took off, and from there it was just amazing

20:30 because I mean, because when it came to the end and he swallowed a pill [actually shot himself], he only had one life to lose. But all the damage that he'd been done. When you go through Europe and you see these places, it's shocking really. You just wonder how many people could be sucked in by him.

So the injustices of war you're very much aware of?

Oh yes. Terribly. See because we've

21:00 been in wars because we're part of the British Empire, or we were. It doesn't necessarily mean that we were being attacked. When we went and helped in the Boer War, which was really between England and the Boers, and the 14–18 War didn't really affect Australia, but we were part and parcel of the Empire, so we offered our help, the same as the Canadians and those people. But then, you know

21:30 the last time it got that we were sort of became involved in it too. That was much nearer to home.

Do you think, despite all that, do you think war is a necessary thing?

No, I think it's shocking, but I don't know that you'll ever stop it. Because I think there's always somebody out there, who's powerful or greedy, or wants something that doesn't belong to them. Whether it's land or money or whatever

22:00 and they're always going to want to take it. There are other people I suppose, that join up with them because they're easily led. But I don't know that you can stamp it all out altogether. I don't think you can because there are some very low types about. And strangely enough, I think some of them have a bit of charisma about them. They seem to get some people behind them, some music and march off.

22:30 Right through history, how can we stop war?

Do you think if there were more women in powerful positions around the world, that things might be a bit different?

Well yes, they would. I can't see it happening because the woman's role is always divided between her being a woman, marrying and having children and, you know, if she's not

23:00 in that, she's accused of being a lesbian, so I mean, who are you going to give the power to? Just think of the effect that Queen Victoria had. How long she was on the throne before she died? And that was one particular queen in England. Went on for years and years and years. And there was just harmony. I'm not suggesting it was her but there wasn't any great

23:30 world trouble at that time. I don't know. People want power, or they want more money, or they want better land, I don't know.

It's a complex issue really, isn't it?

It is so.

24:00 **What did you miss most about your brother and other male friends being away at war? What did you miss most about them being away?**

I think it was constant worry, constant anxiety. Cause you'd have,

24:30 you know, one cousin, as I say, went down on a ship. You never knew, especially when there were two enemies, you didn't know if your friend in the Middle East, how they were. You didn't know how they were in the navy. You didn't know what was going on. I had three friends that were POWs at Changi. It was always the unknown. You didn't know where your friends were. You knew if they were dead,

25:00 you didn't know if you were going to see the others again, or how they'd be. So in the meantime, you had sort of mothers who were desperately unhappy, sisters and other people of the family. And they'd say, "I don't know that the letters are getting through." The Japanese didn't let, I know the Germans were very good to their prisoners of war. All the letters got there and their food got

25:30 there. If they were sent things or stocks, but with the Japanese you didn't know if you were sending anything to them, that they wouldn't eat it or use it themselves. So I think it was a constant worry for people.

How often did you hear from your brother via letter?

He would write every ten days or whenever. It just depended when the ship came in, because they wouldn't fly them. You'd get a letter and it wouldn't

26:00 only have his signature. It wouldn't have a date, or it might have "At sea" or what, or it wouldn't have an address on it.

And of course, the letters were censored so, so what sort of??

Well, he would have been censoring them as a Major.

What sort of detail would be in the letters?

Well he said, "Dear Mum and Dad, Pat," whatever it is, "Glad to know you are well, thanks for the cake", you know, whatever it is. All very light and flimsy, it was nothing much.

26:30 **And of course he couldn't tell you where he was or?**

No, no. It was nice to see his handwriting and to know he got whatever I was knitting for him, his socks or something, you know.

So really, letters were really more just about reassurance that he was still alive?

They were. They reassured us, to see their signature. To know that they were alive and well and quite bright and they were still about.

Was there anyone that you were

27:00 **particularly close too who died? Any of those young men that you were particularly close too?**

No, not particularly. Because I think in those days, unlike the girls now, we didn't necessarily cotton onto one person, unless you were going to become engaged to them. So I had friends I played badminton with, three of them ended up as POWs of the Japanese,

27:30 and I had other friends that I knew from church and they sort of had gone into the German side of it. So it wasn't that I was, sort of attached to any one of them in particular. They were friends I played golf with, or played badminton with, or went to church with or sang in the choir. They were friends I knew.

So there was no romantic involvement?

No, no, no.

28:00 I was a bit young for that.

The boys that you knew who were in POW, Japanese POWs, did they all survive?

Two of them did, and we didn't find this out until the war was over, and I said, "What happened to Jack?" And they said, "Oh well, when the Japanese came", they said, "You know they didn't have enough rifles to give us". And they said,

28:30 "Jack was one of the ones that didn't have a rifle and he was killed." And this was appalling to hear this long after the war was over, that most of the men in that battalion were trying to fight the Japanese and they didn't have fire arms. They said, "So he just got killed."

He didn't have a firearm?

No, he didn't have a gun.

Why?

Well, I suppose they didn't have them to give him.

29:00 **So he had nothing to defend himself with?**

No. That's what happened.

Before they were in the camp, you mean?

The other two were taken into Changi. Yes.

The other two were taken in. So the ones in Changi survived?

Yes, but John was shot in the battle at the…

Do you know whereabouts? Was it Singapore?

Well, it would be not very far away from, because if they were put into Changi.

Must have been Singapore.

Must have been. With all that fall of Singapore

29:30 and all that thing, you know. I told you I worked with Z Special Unit, didn't I?

Yes.

I told you about Edgerton-Mott? Our Colonel?

You might have. Yes. Tell us again if you like?

I was fascinated by that, because he never realised what security was in cipher. You always had to disguise your name and address because if you kept saying

30:00 you know, "Mrs Penrose", so and so, the cryptographer would very quickly work out what it was, so it had to be disguised always, and you were supposed to put something top and bottom of your message, so the person knew when it started and when it finished. So you would write something like "Mary had a little lamb" and at the bottom you would put "Whose fleece was white as snow".

Yes, I remember you mentioning this yesterday.

Yes, yes.

Security aspect.

30:30 Yes, so he didn't understand that this English Colonel didn't understand that. He escaped from Singapore with a safe. And one day he came into me and he said, "Will you take out this message for me?" Meaning I had to take it out from cipher into English. And he stood over me while I did it and looked it up, and he said, "What is that?"

31:00 And I said, "Oh sir, they're the name of the horses in the Melbourne Cup."

Oh yes.

Did I tell you this?

Yes, yes you did.

I'm sorry.

That's alright.

I beg your pardon. No that's alright. No. So he said, "I'll have you know we're running a cipher office here.. not"

Not a bookie.

Yes, that's right.

So with all these young men away, how did you deal with the absence of men in your life?

Oh well, I mean look, you just had so many other things to do,

31:30 you filled your life. You knitted socks, or you helped the Red Cross. I went up to Government House here. They had hundreds of machines on their ballroom floor. They'd got them from factories and everywhere. And you could go up there of a night time and you could sit down at a machine and you make little coats with hoods on for the children in England to wear, in the cold. There were all sorts of avenues for you to work through the Red Cross.

So the Red Cross

32:00 **were very important?**

Yes they were. And all these little coats we made were being sent over to these kids, and all the time I was knitting socks or doing something. That was why, I think, we were very happy when something

happened that we could get our teeth into it, because we'd been doing these things which I felt older ladies could be doing, older women could be doing any of these things I was doing, and surely we had more to offer.

32:30 **I guess, you know, with being in the AWAS, I know that your work commitment was very full, so that probably helped too, I suppose cause you were so busy working?**

You couldn't do anything else then.

You couldn't think about worrying about your brother or, you still worried about…?

You still worried about your brother, but I mean, we didn't have the opportunities to be knitting or doing anything like that because we had to concentrate on what our work was and everything.

But I mean also, you wouldn't have had the time

33:00 **to get too sad about things, because you'd be preoccupied?**

Well sad things were happening all the time, but they were happening to someone else, but you just had to accept that because if you didn't, you'd cease to be effective.

Was there ever, you must have known mothers of sons who'd died in the war, family friends, did you ever,

33:30 **given that you were in the army, did you ever feel like you had, or were compelled to give them some support?**

Oh, there was no time to do anything like that in war time, dear. No, you just had to speak to them as if life was going on. There was no time to.

Did you attend funerals?

Oh no, no. When you don't get a body back, when somebody's killed overseas.

Did they have services though for men who had died?

34:00 **Church services?**

Not that I know of, no, no.

So there was no process for…?

A padre might come and tell you. A padre might come and tell the woman.

But there was no process of family saying goodbye?

No, no.

That must have been hard on people?

I suppose people had their religion and I suppose they had someone to go to and discuss it with, and everything, but other than that, they just had to get over it themselves.

34:30 In their own way. There was nothing, everything's done quickly in war time. There's no time to organise anything like that.

So there was never any…?

If you were Jewish, well I'm sure that the rabbi would come round and be very good with them all. Perhaps mention it at the synagogue, and things like that. But there was no actual instantaneous relief for anybody like that because

35:00 the whole thing escalated so quickly.

Did bodies ever come back?

No. Not that I know of. No, no, no.

More often or not if a man was killed on the battlefield he'd be buried over there.

He'd be buried over there.

Did relatives travel over there at the end of the war to visit their graves?

No, I don't think so. Now, that was my uncle in

35:30 Gallipoli. He's buried in Villiers-Bretonneux, where he died in France. But we only found that out from army records years after. Nobody knew.

Really?

Eventually, you find out that was such and such and Rattray, Frederick Rattray, and that was where he

died. And then you find out it was a pretty big battle that he was in with the Germans and he was buried at Villiers-Bretonneux but

36:00 it's a long time before people get word out about where these people were. It's like some sort of jigsaw.

So what sort of information do relatives receive?

Nothing. They just say that "So and so died at such and such a place".

On such and such a day.

Telegram. In the first war the padres or the church chaplains, you know, the church ministers, used to come and tell people. And they asked that "They not be given that this war",

36:30 my war, because they said "People hated to see them coming, and they might only be coming to pay a visit and they didn't want to get this name of always being associated with death". So the people would get a telegram, or something like that, from the war office, or whatever it was, and saying so and so.

Was there people especially assigned to deliver this news?

No. I think it would just come through official channels. The

37:00 army or someone. Cause I must admit, that people had people around them. Like I was always working with my brother's battalion, say "The Mud and Bloods". They were called that because their colour patch was brown over red, so they were called mud and bloods. But you had your own family around these, and say you had a letter from your cousin or

37:30 your brother, or whoever it was, your Dad, and you'd read it out and they said say, "Oh that was good", and so on and so on. So, I don't have any doubt that when something happened, that this group, they would have got to them.

The word got around.

"So and so is gone", or "So and so is a POW". And then you'd get onto them, and do what you could for them without being over sympathetic, but congratulating them and things like that. Trying to fill their life with other things.

38:00 **When you brother came back from overseas, from battle, from seeing action, did he talk about with you much?**

No. No, he didn't. He didn't ever talk about it.

Not even way after the war? Well after?

No. Something I said, I asked about it and he said, "Oh well, that particular person had been

38:30 drinking", and he said, "It's no good saying anything about that now, because all you do is hurt his feelings, his family and his children, so it's best you forget that."

Who was he talking about?

He was talking about something that happened and this man who was supposed to be in charge was drunk.

So there was a bungle?

It was more than a bungle,

39:00 it was a debacle, but he said, "Don't say anything about that. He's got children and grandchildren. It's only going to hurt them. You can't hurt him now, he's gone." So my brother was very tactful.

Do you think that was a common thing with most war vets, that they didn't talk

39:30 **about it for a very long time afterwards?**

Yes I do. I think they just wanted to get back into civilian life. It was hard for them, but I think they just wanted to get back into civilian life. And if they weren't married, get a bride and have a family, then it was a battle to get the money to put a house down, or something. I think they just wanted to get settled. I do think this, that there was a band of men, and I think this applied to the air force, because their life was different to

40:00 people in the army, because they were out on deserts and different places. But the air force was particularly centred around an air force group, where the planes where, so therefore those men were used to having a drink every night at six o'clock, or whatever it was, in the mess. They had a different life, and there were men who came back and they never

40:30 really, the adjustments were incredible that they had to make, because they were used to having there, whatever was going on, they were used to doing that each night.

They had a routine?

And it was very hard for them to settle down into, say you've got a nice house and a garden to do, and you might have a baby, and all this sort of thing. This camaraderie that went on whenever they got together and had a drink, was very strong.

Tape 7

00:30 **Just while we're on the subject of veterans, returned servicemen, do you think one of the things they missed was that sense of mateship, with their fellow …?**

Yes, yes I do. I think they did.

Did your brother miss that do you think?

Well, I don't know because he went to live at Gippsland, and when you're down there, you're amongst a whole lot of pastoral people, anyway. And

01:00 in his position he was not used to necessarily used to whizzing off to the mess to have a drink with men every night. You know what I mean? He had a different position. But where people were younger and had this regular habit, and that, I think a lot of the men missed it. There was quite a bit of disturbances between families when they got married because

01:30 a lot of the chaps couldn't get used to this idea that it was just the wife and children. This was a big gap in their lives.

For sure. I'd just like to ask you, this is sort of going off the topic a bit, or off that topic. A very general question. How did Melbourne, as a city, change or alter during the war?

Of course you had to have blackout, you know,

02:00 you had to have your lights turned off. It altered, the seaboard altered the minute the Americans came in. We were all in the Red Cross, or we were learning to make covers for bombs. We were all working for things like that, and so on, but I mean

02:30 Melbourne itself, the minute the Americans arrived in, that made a tremendous difference. They were in our streets, now we had never seen full blooded men of our age. They'd all gone, and the men we worked with were older or incapacitated, of some sort. We saw these men all dressed up. They all looked like officers, beautifully dressed and everything like that.

03:00 And they were suddenly all at the Australia Hotel, and they had leave and they were at Royal Park and of course, it wasn't a temptation to any servicewoman that I knew, but it was a temptation to some of the other men's wives who were away.

So the American's arrival was a big change, what about, I guess what I'm trying to find out is the general mood of the place. How did the mood

03:30 **of Melbourne change?**

Well, I think in a way, I know my parents were only too happy to invite the nurses home, you know, to their place, because they were visiting this country, and they were away from their mothers, and they…

What nationality?

Well, they were Americans, American nurses. And they…

They were here too?

Oh yes, the nurses came.

04:00 Sydney, of course was… It affected a lot of people. It affected a lot of families, where the men were that age and they had an affair with someone's wife who was away. And that did happen.

So the war was clearly everyone's focus?

Definitely, definitely. Yes, yes. It was, unless you were a conscientious objector or something. Had to

04:30 be extraordinary to keep out of it really.

Tell me about, did you know or meet any these American nurses?

Yes, my parents had out for a Saturday afternoon, and they were amazed because they put the fight on between Max Schmeling and Joe Louis, and I think, well that, was a German, Max Schmeling

05:00 and Joe Louis

Boxing?

Yes, there was a bout on, and they weren't barracking for Joe Louis, they were barracking for Max Schmeling, and my parents couldn't understand that, and they said, "Oh, you know, he's black."

Your parents said that?

No, they asked the nurses.

05:30 They said, "He's black." It was the first time they'd ever come up, it was a matter of black and white with them. They would not barrack for him, because he was a coloured man. But it was nice for them to have the nurses out. They always thought, "Well, it could be their daughters", you know, that. They did things like that. It was wonderful when some of the boys

06:00 came back. That was unbelievable. It was like a dream come true.

When the boys came back.

But we were all war weary and worn out, and underfed and tired and everything by then.

While we're on the racial issue, or that racial issue, what did you think about, because apparently the American soldiers were segregated, or there was segregation?

06:30 That's what I was saying. These nurses were. They had battalions of men that were all brown. They didn't mix them.

What did you think about that?

I thought "It was ghastly". My parents thought "It was dreadful they were barracking for someone and he was just different because he had a different coloured skin". And these educated women, nurses, trained nurses

07:00 and this was their attitude. They didn't hold it against them, but they just couldn't believe it. They could hardly believe this was being said because of the colour of your skin. And you know, we were never bought up in a home like that.

Did you meet any black servicemen?

No, I didn't meet any. It wouldn't have made any difference if I had but I didn't meet any. I don't think there were many, because

07:30 I mean there would have been with the Americans, but we wouldn't have had any here, because the aboriginals were not taking part.

What did you know of the local aboriginal community in Melbourne?

I didn't know anything about them. I mean I went to see a camp at Lake Tyers, down, but I mean that was all. We only ever saw them in a whole camp

08:00 and that with the little children and that. But we really didn't have much to do with, they didn't come into our lifestyle, so there wasn't much to think about, really, except that, you know, you'd be sorry for them and if you could do anything.

Were you aware of their position?

No, no.

What was your view on the White Australia policy?

08:30 I didn't think there was anything wrong with that. I think the people that were in power at that time, that made that, probably knew a lot more about what was going on in other parts of the world than what we did. I never knew anybody here that would be cruel to anybody whatever colour they were.

09:00 If the powers that be, thought it was a fairer go for our white men to have first chance at the jobs, and all that sort of thing, well economically that was a good thing before letting in other people that might have ended up unemployed anyway. I mean so they weren't hurting them, they were just saying "You can't come in", but they weren't really hurting them.

What do you think about our society now

09:30 **that it's multicultural?**

Well, it's happened now. Probably got a lot of good qualities in it, that's mixing in. People that have a lot of knowledge about music, and dancing and all sorts of things that are different. Foods are coming and everything. As long as they're law-abiding citizens, I can't see anything against that at all.

10:00 **I'd like to sort of talk to you about, getting towards the end of the war now, and you're still working as a cipher operator, do you remember the day that peace was declared?**

Well I remember the day that it was, yes. I remember the day it was given out. Yes, yes I do.

10:30 **Where were you at the time?**

I was in camp. Yes. We knew it was coming, you know. Everybody was sort overjoyed in a way, but it was more like a relief, if you know what I mean because I don't know how much longer we could have kept going. Personally speaking, we was exhausted, absolutely exhausted.

11:00 Because we hadn't had a break away from it, and we were living in camp, and we were not getting the same food, and the same rest, and everything like that. And I was very, very, well I was pleased of course when the war ended, for all the reasons of the Jews and, but counting all that out, all the goods things that went with that, we were absolutely pooped at the end of the war. We were absolutely exhausted.

11:30 Almost just walking around on our feet.

Like zombies?

Yes. In all the things that led up to this we were in on the all cipher, all these signals, the war ended, I mean, but there was all this trafficking that went on before it happened, that we were involved in. All the horrible messages we were getting.

What sort of messages?

Well the girls were getting, they were getting the names

12:00 of men who'd been killed or whatever, died in the hands of the Japanese. And this was not funny, this was got to go home to their people. This was absolutely, they were just... It was terribly worrying for them. All these names of people suddenly, after the war, and these people were dead in the hands of the Japanese. They were dead, died in a concentration camp. Dead, dead. Then these had to be sent into the records office.

12:30 Victoria Barracks - they had to contact the parents.

This was after the war?

Yes, that was when the war was over. That information was all coming over, so that was really a worrying time. They were distraught with all these names coming through. Name after name, after name, and their numbers. And knowing this was going to Victoria Barracks and their parents would have to be told.

13:00 We knew where we, the Germans were very good. They fitted in with the Red Cross. People knew who they were, they knew which place they were in – Stalag so and so. They sent the things there. But with the Japanese, people didn't know where their sons were. They thought "They were still up fighting in Singapore" or something, and all the time they'd died in Changi, or something had happened or what happened. I mean we still don't know how many men went down on some of the ships

13:30 and things. We know the ships were bombed and they went down and that. I mean these people never knew. These people never knew and that was a worrying time.

So all relatives knew during the war was their loved one were missing, but they didn't know whether they were dead or alive?

No, no. The ships went down and they were all taken. I suppose that they thought "They'd all died". They didn't know.

14:00 **So after war was declared over, did you continue to work there? Was there still work to be done?**

We were sent out accordingly to when we joined up.

So how long after the war did you...?

I mean, it finished about the mid, and I was home before Christmas, so it would have been so many months, before it was all wound up.

So that was a tough time

14:30 **obviously?**

Yes, we were tired. We were tired. We said "Goodbye" to our friends. We just said, "We'll see you again", but the main thing was we were tired. We were terribly tired and we were relieved, and, you know, all the great friendships and everything we'd struck just sort of fizzled. But it's still with us, that's why we're still meeting for dinners. But all we

15:00 wanted to do was get home.

Get away from it?

And I remember, you see we were told what to wear every morning. Six o'clock in the morning, there'd be a bugle play over the loud speaker and we'd hear, "Wakey, wakey, rise and shine, show a leg, show a

leg", and we'd have to wake up, then they'd say something like, "Shirts and skirts will be worn, great coats may be carried." Well, you were told what to wear for the day, and I remember after I was,

15:30 I walked out of the camp, and I thought to myself, "Every day when I get up now, I'll have to decide what I'm going to wear." It was one thing that struck me. I had to decide whether I wore open shoes or whatever, because we'd always been told and that was a decision we never had to make. Everything was made for us. What we did, where we went, what we did, you know.

So did you feel a bit lost?

It was

16:00 intransient, yes it was a wonderful thing to go through but it wasn't an easy path to tread to start with, because you looked at all your shoes and your clothes that were hanging up and you thought, "Well, where do I start?" These were all the things I wore before the war.

So you must have felt a degree of grief having to leave the army?

Yes. We felt, we felt all our friendships were going

16:30 but it was a relief because we were so tired. We were so tired, and we'd been so worried. We'd all been worried.

So what did you do when you got home?

I got home and I didn't know myself. There was fifty six pairs of shoes, evening frocks.

Fifty six?

Yes. Evening frocks. I didn't want gold and silver shoes, and there was this and that. Oh decisions, decisions. I had to make up my mind everyday

17:00 what I was going to wear. Summer or winter, you know.

Did you just go to bed and sleep for a few days?

Oh yes, I did. It was a long time before I came round to worrying about any of that. It was getting back to normal, it was great.

Assimilation was difficult?

Home talking to Mum and Dad and the general feeling of... It was hard. It was the first time we knew exactly that my cousin had died

17:30 on the Perth. It was strange, you know. Something like that happened and somehow or other all the mothers and fathers got the names and addresses of the other mothers and fathers of the people who were serving. And they all rang each other up and wrote letters to each other to see if they'd had any word or any news or anything like that. And it was a great relief to them to be all together talking about it. But it wasn't till the war was over, that we found out he'd died.

18:00 He was at the bottom of the ship, but those who were at the top of the ship were fortunate enough to be saved and they were POWs. So it had its heartbreaks too for people for the first time. That boy was only seventeen. He'd only left Scotch College the year before. And, you know, you educate a boy, you send him to a good school and this is it. A year out and he's drowned, at the bottom of a

18:30 ship. So there were things against and for that you had to get used to. That you'd learnt to live with, you know.

Did you stay in touch immediately after the war with your AWAS mates?

Oh well, not immediately, no. The chaps who'd been away came to see you, you know. That was when two of them came and told me that "My friend had been shot by the Japanese". They went into Changi, but he'd been

19:00 shot. And you know, they said, "Jack was one of the one's that didn't have a rifle." There, they were in the hands of the Japanese and there were only so many rifles. And they said "Jack didn't have a rifle". You know, a chap you'd been to church with, a nice chap you'd played badminton with and everything. He enlists to do the right thing by his country and that's the way it ends up. He

19:30 didn't really get a fair go.

Did those men talk about their POW experiences?

No, no but other friends I had who were English, Englishmen who were caught up in the same thing at Changi, they told me. They told me that Weary Dunlop, you know, and Coates, they said "If they caught an animal,

20:00 they'd let them eat it. If a dog or a cat or something wandered through your camp, people would try and get it and kill it and they had to take it to Weary Dunlop or Coates to be examined and if it was a

perfectly healthy animal they could eat it. But if it wasn't, it would be destroyed. And they were also allowed to get any green weeds or

20:30 anything that might grow at the corner near the posts of your camp." And, you know, you could eat those because they were green. Anything you could get that was green was good, you know.

Did they come back very skinny?

Yes very skinny, sunken, pallid. I don't think they've lived as long as other people would have.

21:00 I think it's curtailed their life. I don't mean they haven't been happy. They were very subdued by it, but I don't think with any of them it's led to a long life. I think it's made a difference to their lives. It's terrible when you hear people speak like that about eating cats and dogs, and things. And these people have been nicely brought up, and everything like that and it's hard

21:30 to imagine that terrible fight, desire to eat.

You're really reduced to survival instinct?

That's right. That's right, yes.

Do you think it's healthy, or good for veterans to talk about their experiences?

Well, I've only heard them when they actually came back. I don't hear any of them talking about it now.

No?

No. I don't know anybody. I belong to the

22:00 RSL [Returned and Services League] and I'm in the Anzac whole thing, you know, but no, I don't hear any of them. They might on Anzac Day if they get together and have a few grogs or something in. But I belonged to Z Special Unit and I go to their things. Very rarely, well John Holland was a man who was with Z. But it's

22:30 very rarely… They might if they got a few Z men together say, "Do you remember something?" Although they get together, they don't necessarily all talk about it. They get together because they're used to that group, and I don't thing they're ever going over the sad bits or anything.

It's interesting, we've come across quite a few veterans who saw action, who get very emotional

23:00 **on camera, do you think that's pretty understandable?**

Oh yes, certainly. I think when they're recalling something like that you would certainly remember it.

One thing I haven't asked you about is your husband. And I'd like to ask you when you first met your husband?

On an aeroplane coming back, leaving Tasmania.

23:30 **So you met him during the war?**

Yes, yes. During the war. Towards the end of it.

And he was a serviceman?

Yes, yes. He was an officer then. And I'd bought back a great leg of pork because things were rationed still in Victoria and so I had him bring this big leg of pork. Carried it for me off

24:00 the plane.

Was it love at first sight?

No, I wouldn't think so. No, it was just that we got on well together and I met his friends, and mother and father in South Australia, and everything like that. It just all sort of came together, you know. Because there were so many people passed in and out of your life in wartime. People you'd gone to church with, people you'd known, people who would always,

24:30 they just weren't there anymore. They'd gone way out of your life, POWs, or. It was such a, I don't think anybody can realise what the fall out was out. The minute war came men just went. They were studying this, they were off there, they were there. I'm not just suggesting I was only interested in men, but I mean it was so obvious that the whole thing had changed and…

25:00 **Was your husband-to-be in the army?**

Yes, oh yes. I don't think I would have ever married anybody who wasn't in the army.

What rank was he?

He was a Lieutenant.

Where did he serve?

In the Middle East. He came back here and was working here.

And when did you get married?

Oh, I can't remember now. I think it was 1943,

25:30 that's right.

So you married during the war?

After the war, after the war. The war ended in forty two.

Forty five.

Forty five? Well I must have married in forty six, yes. Sorry, the year after.

Is there anything else you'd like to talk about... about him?

No, not particularly. He's passed away.

That's ok.

26:00 **We're nearly up.**

He was from South Australia, but he settled here to be where I was brought up.

Oh ok. I'd just like to ask you when things were tough during the war, did you have any faith in God, or religious leanings?

Well, I always believed in God.

26:30 I was responsible for us having the little chapel in Fawkner Park. Yes, yes. We got hold of a minister in South Melbourne. He got permission to come into the camp, as a man. There was he, the padre, and the boy that stoked the boiler. They were the only two males permitted to come into camp. Yes, and that was nice because sometimes they'd have

27:00 little dances and things in their church. But he would come over and I was responsible, with another lady, for establishing the Church of England chapel. They had a Roman Catholic chapel called St Mary's, and we had our own chapel, and that was actually opened by the Archbishop of Melbourne. And I was there for that with the padre. So we had our little chapel and we could have

27:30 communion and that sort of thing. It meant a lot because of those who went to church, being in a camp where you were evolving around different dates and times, it didn't suit people to get to church. But when you had one there, they ran a chapel service at a time that suited the girls. Because I've come off shift at Grosvenor, and my friend and I,

28:00 who was also Church of England, a girl in my tent, and we'd get permission to go up to Christ Church, South Yarra, which was further on than Fawkner Park. And I remember when Delhi said to me "When you were kneeling over, bending, I had to wake you up." We went up there to have communion and then came back. That was why I was glad to get, glad to get one of each opened in the camp where the girls could go.

Fantastic. And did that really assist you

28:30 **in, assist in the morale do you think?**

Oh yes, but I was always doing something, I mean. I'm just one of those people. I see a need for something and I was always doing something if I could bring it about.

Did you pray during the war?

Oh yes, yes, yes. Not openly. We didn't get down on our knees and that. I didn't see anybody doing that in the tent, no. I'm sure we all did.

29:00 **Did your experience in the war, how did that affect your belief in God? Did it make your belief stronger or less?**

It didn't make any difference. It didn't make any difference. I mean right through the bible there's always been wars, and there's always differences in people, and no matter, you know.

29:30 It's a matter of really people living by the commandments you're given and if that happens, well everything is ok, but it doesn't happen that way. It didn't break my faith in anything at all.

Did you have any lucky charms or were you superstitious about anything?

No, no, no, nothing.

You weren't superstitious?

No nothing like that, no.

30:00 **After the war did you speak about it much with people?**

No, not very much.

Your experiences?

No, I still gave blood. I've got blood which is a very unusual group. Its AB1. And I was still giving it during the war, and much to my horror I came back on the tram from the blood division of the Red Cross, and I woke up on the floor of the tram, and my tie was undone, my collar was undone. I saw

30:30 all these people looking at me, and I said, "What?" and they said "You fainted." I was regimentally undressed. I mean, here I was, you know, the top of my… And I said, "Where are we?" and they said. I said, "Ring the bell, I've got to get off at Fawkner Park." Well how would you feel, you know, if you woke up with all these people staring at you, and everything undone?

31:00 So I had to pull myself together, and walked up the big path, and anyway I went into the Red Cross, we had a little Red Cross place there, and when the woman doctor that we had, she said, "No more transfusions for you, no more transfusions for you." But I said, "They need it." But she said, "We need you. So no more transfusions for you, you're working shift work, and you're not getting sufficient food

31:30 that you could, so you'll just have to say 'No' in future." So that put a stop to that. When I was dreadfully undressed on the tram. Look all these faces looking at me, you know. Oh dear.

Did you dream about the war during the war? Or after the war?

No, no, no.

Never dreamt about it?

It was all too much that was going in your head. You didn't dream it. You just wanted to get some sleep and get on with your work the next day. That was

32:00 the best thing you could do, keep working.

Did you sleep well?

Yes, never had any sleeping tablets or anything.

That's good. Did you know any of the girls who had trouble sleeping?

Well, there was one law that you were never allowed to get into bed with another woman. That was not meant in a lesbian way at all, because we wouldn't know anything about that, but it was the fact that some of the younger ones,

32:30 they were worried someone might be crying and you might be tempted and say, "Stay with me here, you'll be warm", but we were told not to do that. So that was a nice gesture, but it was something you might do with a sister or something like that if they were younger.

Why were you told not to do that?

It's not a good thing to encourage two members of the one sex to be in a small bed. Not the best idea in the world.

33:00 **What personal changes did war bring to you, as a person?**

Made me much more aware of the world, of course, I mean. The people are now more aware of the world because you've got television and you've got cameras and wonderful films and things. We didn't know very much about the world except if you had, like I had a grandmother that travelled a lot

33:30 and she had pictures and photographs. You knew what London looked like. We heard bits about it in the war, being blitzed and that, but we were not, we didn't have what I call "New Australians" coming here. We were not, we were all Australians who'd come from England, other than that, you were Aboriginal. Or they'd come from Ireland or Scotland. So we didn't know very much about, we didn't know very much about other parts of the world

34:00 really, except what we'd read or what we'd heard about World War I with the Germans and that sort of.

That made you more aware of the bigger picture?

Yes, that's right, it did.

Did you resent the war ever? Did you ever get angry that the war was on?

No, never. I didn't. I mean it was tempting now to say "Well, I wish it hadn't happened in my time"

34:30 or something like that. It's pointless. There's nothing anybody can do about it. It just happened with

Hitler and that's the way it came about. I'm sorry that I could have done without that, because it altered my whole life. The same as it altered hundreds of other peoples. But it altered my whole way of life and things like that.

In what way? In what way did it alter your life?

To start with I stopped

35:00 dancing, I stopped having boyfriends, I stopped wearing pretty clothes. I stopped going surfing. I stopped playing golf, I mean I belonged to Kingston Heath. I belonged to three golf clubs. I didn't work. My father was against his children, his daughters were his responsibility until they met a man and married them. And that was the life we had.

So you had a pretty good life?

I did, yes, I mean

35:30 that's nothing compared with people being killed or shot, but this was the life I gave up. Now suddenly you're out of the army, you know a whole lot of horrible things that you didn't need to know about and you've got to start again.

It was a big adjustment.

A very big adjustment, very big adjustment.

I believe that when you left, well when the war finished you

36:00 **got involved in helping ex-servicewomen.**

Yes, I have now. That's why I've got this award now.

This is what you've been doing now? Ex-servicewomen who were spinsters.

Yes, yes. Well dozens of them never got married because the men didn't come back. So that meant they had to go into civilian life, this goes for anything, the WAAAFs, the AWAS, or whatever. And then they get to when they're older,

36:30 when they've stopped working or near the end of their working life and they've got no one. Their mothers and fathers have gone, their cousins or whatever, don't think about them. And they're in an age group, there's a whole lot of other women their age, that there aren't men their age, and they never got married because they didn't have a chance to. And somebody said to me, "So and so's in hospital and she's this and that"

37:00 and I realised there were a whole lot of women of a certain age that had, especially when they'd finished their working life, let's face it, it was hard for those girls to even get jobs. Because what you were trained for in wartime is not the same as peace time.

Did many of them go from AWAS to say an office job or in civilian life?

Yes, they could have. Even their mothers and fathers would have expected

37:30 them to be working before long. But it didn't mean the work they'd been doing in the war trained them for anything necessarily.

And the other issue was, I suppose was the men that came back from the war took over those jobs again. So it would have been a shortage?

It wasn't easy for them to find jobs and this is why I was able to go in. Now what I've done is, the Corps of Signals has people that are radio operators, dispatch riders,

38:00 cipher operators, special wireless. There's six or seven different categories. Now if I find out that women came from a certain category, I get in touch with the group of women I know that did the same work, and I'll say "So and so's in hospital." You know they'll go in and get her washing and do it and take it back and they'll talk to her.

Fantastic. You've created a sort of network.

Well, that's the point. Even if the girl passes away

38:30 then one of us, they very often don't have anybody. They don't have anybody and I will sort of help take the service and speak and one of the other girls will then read the, we'll choose the hymns and we'll go right through the whole lot.

And these are all AWAS, ex-AWAS?

Yes, yes. Signal women.

Fantastic. Signal women?

Signal women, not single women. Signal, but they were single.

39:00 **Women you were working with. That's brilliant.**

So I've been able to do that.

So you established that?

Yes, I still get them. They ring me up and say, "Pat, so and so's at Heidelberg" or wherever they are, and I can get this little core of group going, or whatever, and somehow they've felt good with those girls around them and they haven't felt lonely. They've had these girls around them prepared to say "Pick up this" and

39:30 say "Come on, give us that" and talk to them on that level, instead of being patronising,

Like a family?

or being sorry or whatever.

How often do you all meet up? Do you have gatherings?

Every year. Every year, I have a luncheon.

Fantastic. Do you organise that? Where do you hold that?

Well, I'm holding it at the Holiday Inn, which is near the Shrine. It's got nothing to do with us historically except it's in that area

40:00 where it's easy for women to get to, it's easy for transport – trams, taxis , everything. And I have to put people at tables according to where they served. The dispatch riders all sit together, and so on and so on, cipher operators, and for that time, thank god, none of them talked about their grandchildren. I though "I'd cut my throat if they're going to come this stunt" because it was going to make the other girls feel uncomfortable, but they

40:30 don't, they start talking about their dispatch riding. "Do you remember when we did this and that colonel or when we were on that night?" It's wonderful. I just love to hear this because it goes on for about two and a half hours, and they love it.

I'd just like to thank you very much for talking to us and wondered, for the record, you had one last thing you'd like to say about your experiences?

No, I'm sorry there isn't one last thing I'd like to, no I can't say. I'm always glad I took part in helping to win the war, but I never regretted it and I would advise anyone else in a similar position to pull their weight and do…

INTERVIEW ENDS