

Australians at War Film Archive

Elaine Markby - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2116>

Tape 1

- 00:39 **Let's start with, we'll eventually get to that story and I can't wait to hear more about that, but to start Elaine, can you tell us about where you were born and grew up?**
- Yes, to the best of my knowledge I was born at Leonda in Elsternwick, Victoria, Australia. My mother was English,
- 01:00 an accountant, so Mother says, and my late father was a barrister and solicitor who practised in the City Mutual Building in Collins Street, Victoria. I was the eldest of three children. My brother John was eighteen months younger than me and then seven years later, I had a sister born.
- 01:30 My brother, he was very keen on going into the navy, so at thirteen he sat for the Royal Australian Naval College exams, and was one of twenty, out of five hundred that got in. I have pictures of him.
- 02:00 **That's all fine, we go where you want to go, it's up to you.**
- All right then. Following my birth at Leonda, Elsternwick we lived at Kerford Road, Glen Iris, and had a very happy childhood. Following Kerford Road, we moved to 339 St Kilda Street, Brighton, which was lovely.
- 02:30 There was the North Road pier to learn to swim off, the beach was gorgeous, the people were lovely. And it was at the age of seven, having survived Miss Gregory's kindergarten where John and I were taken to school, by a very strict lady who picked up a crocodile of children, and marched them off to kindergarten. And following that we went to, I to Melbourne Girls' Grammar, commonly known in those days as Merton Hall,
- 03:00 now called by the boys 'Flirtin All'. John went to Grimwade House, the junior school of Melbourne Grammar. My sister Dorothy, later on followed me to Melbourne Girls' Grammar. Following my school career, I joined the Commercial Bank head office in Collins Street. I worked in
- 03:30 remittances and exchanges and in ledgers. Remittances and exchanges was quite an interesting job for a young girl of seventeen, because you went to the clearing house every day, and all the other banks came over when we exchanged cheques. It was particularly interesting one day when the Wales had a problem in the middle of Collins Street, that their tray full of cheques was picked up by a tornado
- 04:00 that ripped down Collins Street and distributed them all over the place. The war proceeded to get worse and worse. John passed out of the naval college, or was going to before his fourth year; I joined the air force on the 20th of January 1943, much to my mother's annoyance. My mother being a Brit was absolutely
- 04:30 besotted about the navy and the Spit Head Review, 'My Dear', that's Mum. John was the apple of her eye; I was the wretched argumentative child. So, I decided one day to skip work, I went to recruit centre, I got the papers and rushed home, threw them at Mother, who was in a particularly bad mood and I said, "Sign them." And much to my amazement, she did.
- 05:00 I was out the gate and out on the next bus up to town, they were well and truly at recruit centre before Daddy got home. Well this is an interesting story, because Mother was going to stop it, but she was too late. My father was going to stop it, he roared and raved, he was in the army, Wallace McMahon, World War I, and he was army oriented. Mother, navy, but I wanted the air force.
- 05:30 So, two weeks later I'm called up for medical and intake. I'm the only one of about one hundred and eighty WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] and about one hundred and twenty RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] that had 'See manpower officer' stamped across my papers. Well, manpower in those days, as everybody knows, you could be conscripted into a factory peeling spuds or making jam or doing war service in some other
- 06:00 mechanical field. So I went along in fear and trepidation to the manpower officer's office, and knocked

in the door and a big voice said, "Come in." I walked in and who should be sitting behind a great oak desk, but Bill Merritt, architect and engineering, pilot, Royal Flying Corps, World War I, and one of Daddy's best friends, whereby I collapsed in a chair and said, "Uncle Bill!" And Uncle Bill said,

06:30 "Darling, your father want's this stopped, why?" I said, "Don't you know? They want me to join the navy." "What?" said Bill, "Bloody ridiculous, 'Passed'." Away I went. I never looked back. So of course off I go to 1ES, 1 Engineering School, Ascot Vale.

Can I just ask you a bit more about your parents? You said your mum was from England.

Yes.

And your father

07:00 **was he?**

He was born here of English parents. I've got Mother's history, Bradford, Yorkshire. My grandfather Fredrick William Wardell, I've got his passport to Russia, so I'm Gladson, his father was the engineer on the Trans Siberian Railway and his grandparents,

07:30 his mother was the daughter of Marion and James Robertson, of Robertson's Jams that used to have a little golliwog on them with the tartan. So they are all in my family history. My grandmother, she was an Ogden, and Hoyles and Briggs County families in Yorkshire, that's, I've done quite a bit of research

08:00 on the family archives. Grandad worked for a biscuit firm called Armiston and York in England, and he apparently, according to what I remember as a child, was posted or sent to Australia to open up a factory. But prior to that he had been going to go to America and was booked on the [USS] Titanic.

08:30 Mother got the measles, highly infectious, so they got off loaded, well, they didn't get on, they were just told, "No, No." They came to Australia on the [SS] Ceramic, which was a Blue Funnel Line. I remember as a child, being marched off down to Port Melbourne, along the Station Pier to look at the Ceramic. And Wag, my grandfather, that was his nickname, would take me over and show me with pride, the ship that

09:00 they came out on. So, all our ancestry of course, is British. Are you firing with any more questions?

No, that's fascinating. So how old would your mother have been when...?

Mother died at ninety-three, she died in 1995. She's buried in St Kilda cemetery, no, Brighton cemetery. The rest of them are in St Kilda cemetery.

09:30 **And she was just a young girl when the family came out here?**

Yes, and then apparently she and her sister and her twin, I don't, there seems to be some cousins in New Zealand, she went over there for a few extended holidays. But Grandad came from one of nine children and I was obviously a great favourite of his. I absolutely adored Wag. I christened him Wag. All the others,

10:00 all the other grandchildren after me called him Wag. I have a picture of him in the front room. He was very stern. I remember the house they lived in, 2 Hillside Avenue, Caulfield; it was a weatherboard with a brick facade and front veranda where one sat on a hot summer's night. Grandad built a garage on the side when he

10:30 purchased a T Model Ford. Which at this stage of the game he's working for Burnley Flour Mills. Occasionally he had to go to Geelong, and I was taken with him. It took three hours to get to Geelong in those days and three hours to get back. I noted all the fences, all the way were made of stones. The convicts had cleared all the

11:00 paddocks for the squatters and made stone fences along the Geelong Road. Well now there is not a stone to be seen, they're probably in every garden in Melbourne. My great-grandmother was alive too, she lived with them. Her name was Victoria Margaret Alice Ogden, and she came from a very close-knit family in the same area. They were all Bradford,

11:30 Durham, around that area. Her maiden name was Bartley, and her father was in the British Army and he was, John Bartley who went to the Opium Wars, and we've got some memorabilia still, that he brought back with him. All I know is that her mother is a McCabe from Northern Ireland.

12:00 But that's where I ran out of research and had to stop.

Well there is a lot to research, isn't there? It's quite fascinating.

Oh, there's more, because there is Dad's side. We could be here for two days on that.

You are Yorkshire people; your mum's side are from Yorkshire?

Yes.

OK. So tell us about your dad, give us a summary about your father?

Well, I tried very hard.

- 12:30 I went into the Genealogical Society and joined and looked at millions of microfiche, then a friend of mine who went through naval college years ago with my brother, Commodore Ian Burnside, who now lives in Canberra, Ian went into a lot of research for me on the Francis side. Dad's father died just
- 13:00 before they were married. All we know is that he came out, and a friend of his, they were living somewhere around Yass, one of my aunts on his side, Caroline Francis, she became a jeweller and won the All England Award, which I've got documentation on. Unfortunately today it's in the bank.
- 13:30 And Carrie Francis, they've got some of her exhibits in the National Gallery, here. I've got a set of beautiful white gold and jewelled coffee spoons, also in the bank. A beautiful necklace and earrings, my daughter has, of course, that's over at Hawthorn, so I can't show you those. But Carrie Francis apparently was very well known.
- 14:00 They have a beautiful triptych in the National Gallery. I went in and showed them my coffee spoons because there was an article on them some years ago, and I got in touch with the curator at the time. And they said any time I wanted to get rid of the coffee spoons they'd be delighted to have them. Now, all I can add was that my grandmother,
- 14:30 my father's mother, she came from a big family at what they called Emerald Hill. Which we call South Melbourne, and names that run through her ancestry are Hewitt, Green, Browning and Holt. And I've got pages of documentation
- 15:00 on them. And goodness knows how many other little Holts there are around now, or big Holts or medium Holts, or Brownings, the family's spread. So that's about it.

What about your father himself, had he served in World War I?

Daddy, Edward, James' father, I can't really tell you.

- 15:30 He was some sort of commission agent, but he died before they were married. Daddy was very clever, they weren't very wealthy. He went to the local Spring Road State School, won scholarships to Caulfield Grammar and Melbourne University, Trinity College and graduated with Archie Menzies, one of our famous Prime Ministers who strangely enough,
- 16:00 the Menzies family are related to Harry Markby, my late husband, and Graham Menzies is coming to my eightieth birthday in three weeks time. So Harry's second cousin. Dad set up a practice in Chancery House in Bourke Street, and it was Francis and Stretton in those days. Then Stretton became a judge.
- 16:30 Following that it was Francis and Campton, and Campton, and Harry Campton became a judge. Eventually he ended up judge of the licensing court followed by his son John Campton, who was then judge of the licensing court and is a member of South Yarra Tennis Club, where I belong.

Sure.

Had your father been too young to see any service in the First World War?

Daddy was in the army in France, he was a signaller. I've got his certificate of service and discharge in my album and he seemed to be able to make a lot of conversation about climbing telegraph poles. Which of course gave me the giggles as a kid, because

- 17:30 Dad had to employ an electrician to fix a fuse. He was not exactly handy with his hands, but he was a brilliant lawyer, had a very fine practice. It was eventually sold after Dad's death, to a Mr Cohen. Daddy had a big Jewish clientele, he wasn't Jewish, his mother was Methodist and his father was
- 18:00 Church of England, and we were all C of E. Well, Anglican, as they call it these days.

So what sort of cases was he taking on then?

Not criminal cases, a lot of conveyancing, general cases. Not criminal cases, general practice, yes. I possibly

- 18:30 was a bit young to be studying exactly what cases, but he wasn't a criminal lawyer like the Galbally tribe. I know them. And I think if he had such a big Jewish fraternity it was all related to money and dealing and conveyancing and setting up companies, that sort of thing.

Do you know how your parents had met?

I can't quite answer that. All I know is that they lived, Daddy lived in Hotham Street. The house is still there, near the corner of Carlisle Street, and Mother lived in Coolhillside Avenue, Caulfield. I seem to recall that Linda Francis, my father's

- 19:30 sister, met Mother and introduced Mother to Daddy, Newton-James-Francis. Yes, that's right, I haven't thought of that for years.

So he probably grew up with Jewish kids, maybe had those contacts?

No. I can't. Oh, across the road, when we lived, we moved from Glen Iris to St Kilda Street, I think I mentioned that earlier.

- 20:00 And across the road was the Marx family, five boys, all at grammar. J and H Marx the jewellers in York House in the city, so they, we knew them, and of course we knew many of the kids at school who were Jews. But not as many, cause now they've got their own schools, like Mount Scopus College, and all along Hotham Street there's a huge Jewish school.
- 20:30 There were very few, I can't think of anyone except the Marx kids. Oh, and Leon Bulleen comes to mind. He was at school with John, and John threw a brick at him and hit him on the head. Trauma. My brother had a rather bad temper. Oh yes, I was on the receiving end on one occasion,
- 21:00 he threw a toy broom at me and it hit me across the forehead and six months later I had a big lump coming down. Mother and Dad took me to Dr Basil Kelvington because they couldn't work out what it was, just this lump was growing. X-rays didn't pick it up, so he operated and cut right through the eyebrow, as you can see, down there.

Just.

And he removed a splinter that big.

- 21:30 It took me six months to work out how the splinter got there, and then I remembered the fight and the toy broom.

What else can you tell us about your childhood? I mean you told us what your parents did and their background, but what was family life really like? How did you all get along?

At Glen Iris, I was a bit young to, well, I remember certain things.

- 22:00 Because I was born... I would have been five when they left there. I remember that Mother had household help, Mrs Cornish, who did all the laundry, and John was born there, then we moved to St Kilda Street, Tuffanall Lodge, and I remember a lot about that place because we went to kindergarten
- 22:30 from there, and then on to, later onto Melbourne Grammar, Girls and Boys. We had a lot of friends round the area. We were intrigued with the old Chinaman who used to come 'round with his cart and horse and deliver vegetables and fruit. He used to go down Dudley Street, so when he wasn't looking we'd hop on the back step and get a ride down Dudley Street.
- 23:00 We all went swimming, usually at North Road pier which is now gone. At this stage of the game, I'm beginning to look at cadet dinghies. I've was very, very keen all my life on yachting. I think it was during the depression. I think we are looking at about 1932. I was born in '24. We moved to
- 23:30 Orrong Road, East St Kilda, a magnificent old home, 'C' Classification, National Trust. It had twenty-eight rooms, two tower rooms with a round balcony on the top one, a split level, one level and then on the Lynedoch Avenue end it became two storey, whereby there was
- 24:00 a flat or an apartment, possibly a maid's apartment. It had a sitting room, a little kitchenette there and a bedroom and there was a huge ballroom up there. We went to school from there.
- 24:30 John and I had beautiful gardens. Mother was a keen gardener, so we had a full-time gardener, Jack Agview, he was a dear. And Mother had a series of maids who went, came and went according to Mother's whim. My mother was a beautiful artist, but was not gifted with housework.
- 25:00 It had a tennis court and on one block, on the Lynedoch Avenue side, it had a stable and a paddock, which Daddy promptly built more flats on. He also built on the front garden, eighteen flats at right angle to, two right angle blocks in Tudor style, coming through the front gate.
- 25:30 Round the sun dial to the front door of Cregallighi, which had a magnificent tiled hall and beautiful doors going out onto the veranda, which ran for twenty-five yards around the house at the back. All lead lighted with the crest 'Nino Me Impure Fasesis' on it, which I have been told was the Grant Family Crest. I don't
- 26:00 think that could be right, because the first people that built that house were the Pearsons. They were Scottish, Pearson Grove opposite is obviously named after them, then came the Thompsons, and then Madame and Monsieur Saint. And then Daddy, over the years... Down the road was another huge mansion,
- 26:30 Chaddersley, it's now gone, that was demolished at that time, and we had a field day. All the Grimwade House boys and myself playing kick the tin after school and, we won't talk about things, but shanghais were very popular, commonly known as gings.

Oh right.

Well, actually you made them of wire, twisted and aeroplane elastic and the leather

27:00 pouch and you put the required stone in and fired at your enemy.

Were you a good shot?

Yes. Talking of childhood whoopee, my school friend who's now dead, Jo Munroe, who's father Charles A. Munroe was the big one in the

27:30 land boomers. All the land around Victoria Market was owned by her family. She died after years of working at the stockbrokers, and Joan was a very lady-like girl, just the opposite from me. Anyhow, John and his boys locked Joan and I in the upstairs sitting room of Cregallighi.

28:00 The name of course, Cregallighi, comes from a tiny town in Scotland. So Joan would not follow me, I got out the window and went along the veranda then up onto the slate roof and everybody, all the kids, we knew that you didn't walk on slate. You went up the lead gutters to a lead inset on the lounge. I said, "Come on Joan,

28:30 we'll nip in this way and get in the tower room window." Which John and I of course found stuck when we moved there, but we soon got it unstuck. Anyhow, John apparently had similar thoughts, because as I'm going up the lead gutter to get in the tower room window, John and his bunch of hooligans came out the tower room window. So I went onto the corrugated tin roof which followed the veranda right around

29:00 the house, and I jumped eighteen feet onto the buffalo lawn and I waved the heroes goodbye, because nobody would follow me. John of course decided to show off, he went straight up the slates, and would you believe it, he went through. Right through with two legs, this part didn't go through, his trunk. That finished the game in a hurry.

29:30 We went up there, we found bits of slate from everywhere, we patched up the roof, and we looked around, and we look as if we'd put the slates back, a couple of cracked ones. Would you believe, three weeks later John and I had done our homework, it was raining cats and dogs outside, we snooped around the house looking up to see if there were any drips. And they had beautiful ornamental cornices,

30:00 oh, exquisite with great leaves, possibly nine or ten inches wide. And so we nodded and went off to bed. The next thing we were hauled out of bed by two irate parents who'd gone to go to bed, and their beds, which were twin beds, with dark green covers, next to each other, were soaked. The drip had come down through the cornice and drip, drip dripped, and no one had seen it on the covers.

30:30 And John and I were lined up in the bathroom to touch the bottom of the bath, while Dad wielded a strap on ones posterior. I was saying to John, "Don't you dare cry." Anyhow, that was one episode not to be repeated. When Granny died and my grandad,

31:00 Fredrick William Wardell, who I mentioned earlier, when... He lived in his own home for several years, then his younger daughter, Agatha Brewton and her husband moved in and Grandad moved out into one of our flats, or apartments or units, they call them flats in those days. And so he lived there until he died. And when Harry and I met and married in 1946, we also moved

31:30 into one of these flats, which was very conveniently vacated by Lady Weedon, who died, who was the wife of an earlier lord mayor of Melbourne. The stone that he laid on the Melbourne Town Hall, I've seen it because I spent some years on the lady mayoresses committee. But it was our luck that Dad didn't want the run of the flats, otherwise there was a queue as long as your arm with all the ex-service servicemen

32:00 coming out of army, navy and air force and getting married and wanting apartments or flats, and nothing had been built during the war years. So we scored.

Are those buildings still there?

Yes, I can't give you the exact year, but it would have been possibly in the late 1966 I think. It would have been in the early '70's Mother and John decided to

32:30 sell them. Now John my brother had, he was involved in Dad's estate, but Mother, there were two partners that chatted and brothers that, Mother was the third owner of the estate, and it was a company. I do recall a couple of other names that had some shares in it, but not a lot of, a good slice of the action.

33:00 One block that I attended the auction of, went to a Mr Neill and the other to a Dr Mernstein. And it makes me choke, and I think of it today, they were sold for two hundred and eighty-five thousand a block, eight flats in each block, bachelor flats to three bedroom. What would that be?

Millions today.

I drive past often, I'll have a look at the place, it's been kept beautifully and the

33:30 garden. They strata titled them, because occasionally you see one up for sale. I would think that they have possibly have updated kitchens and bathrooms, but they are still there. They were clinker brick and Tudor style, and it had beautiful lawns and gardens.

34:00 But they were solid brick, in other words, two layers of brick, tied with metal rods between them. Not brick veneer, so they were built like brick chicken houses.

It sounds like when you were a child, those big houses along Orrong Road provided you with a playground?

Oh yes,

34:30 Pearson Grove and the Labassa Grove, and of course just around the corner was Manor Grove, oh it's there today, National Trust, Labassa. And then of course, Ripponlea, which is National Trust, and that was owned by Louisa Jones, and Lou Jones was a dear old sweetie. We all used to go to Eildon some years later, as our kids were growing up, we had a houseboat up

35:00 there. And Lou Jones had a house-boat too, but it was built like a double garage and she took Miss Lea up there with her, her helper and her chauffeur. But when she died, she had a great problem; none of her three children wanted the huge estate. And the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] had taken the back paddocks for Channel 2, but

35:30 she wanted to maintain the lake and the magnificent gardens and things, so she gave it, willed it to the National Trust. It's still there for anyone to look at today, it's in immaculate condition.

You mention the shanghais and the boats, you make it sound like you were a tomboy?

I should have been born a boy I think. I've always, sports at school, ice-skating,

36:00 I was going for Silver Wings, figure skater. I've done all the dances and jumps and things. But of course, that came to an end when I joined the air force. But I sailed illegally at the age of seventeen when Clinker built the cadet dinghies because girls were not allowed. So I decided, that I would sail in jubilees, which I did.

36:30 So I usually became fore at hand where I copped all the water if it was a rough day. And then I sailed in twenty-one footers Lolita, up to division one eventually, Miranda which won the Admiral's Cup. I've done the, not the Sydney Hobart, the Hobart Sydney in a forty-two foot Wombat Class. I've sailed

37:00 races off Sydney Heads in Ballandra, I joined the Royal Brighton Yacht Club. I took myself off to Newport, Rhode Island for the Southern Cross Courageous Challenge, and that, the date is evading me in the '70's. And just recently, I wrote

37:30 a poem, 'The Ode to the Old Jug', on the Americas Cup, which of course runs to about twenty versus, covering the years. And I won second prize from the Veterans Affairs Writing and Poetry Competition last year for it. I sent a copy to the Royal New Zealand Yacht Club, and I've got a covering letter from them thanking me. It's in the cabinet with their memorabilia.

38:00 **Well done.**

Yes, I know Jock Sturriker; I've known them all. I know John Bertrand.

So where did your fascination or your interest in yachting come from?

That's a good question. Dad wouldn't know the sharp end from the blunt end. It was Mother. My brother John, of course, went to the naval college and he served in [HMAS] Shropshire and [HMAS] Warramunga

38:30 in the battle of the Coral Sea, and survived. No, I can't, maybe it's one of my forebears. I do recall my great grandmother, one of her relations, Vicki Shackleton, a granddaughter of Erna Shackleton the arctic explorer,

39:00 that's in the family. But Royal Geelong Yacht Club, to this day, has the Lady Markby Perpetual Trophy for the Corio race of the Geelong Advertiser Cup. And for some years I went down and presented it. It was lovely, one donned a terrace frock and went upstairs with 'Who's Who' of yachting and had lovely lot of booze and a beautiful meal.

39:30 Now it's just bands and hamburgers on the balcony with the all getting drunk and noisy bands. It's all changed, but the trophies still going.

Who taught you sailing?

I think I would have to say I learnt to sail in freighters, Spill La Liquor. David Litticker is an international judge; David of course will be at my eightieth birthday

40:00 party on the 30th July, this month. And Bill died some years ago, but I started to sail at seventeen, in freighters regularly, then from there on, like sink or swim, you soon, if you are keen, you soon pick it up.

How close were you to your brother John?

As children

- 40:30 very close, but not now. John never married. After the war he went to Melbourne University, architecture, and he's an architect, and a surveyor, an 'A' grade electrical welder, a qualified herd tester, and he has a farm with horses on it.
- 41:00 But John and I parted company when I found out that he and Mother defrauded me of my share of Dad's estate. My late sister died at thirty-seven, of a stroke, devastating, she was a gorgeous kid. I was overseas when it happened, anyhow, John being an
- 41:30 executor of the will of Newton James Francis and my mother, it didn't occur to me to be checking up on them. I was too busy. I had the family and I had a job. I was flat out and about twice a year would get a small cheque, which of course to me was like manna from heaven. But of course, later on I found out that he and my mother had defrauded me of my share of Dad's estate
- 42:00 and I took it to court. My nephew came in...

Tape 2

00:31 **Ok we're on Elaine.**

As I just mentioned, my nephew, my late sister's son, Bruce and I took it to court, we ended up with thirty-two thousand each. John got the rest and the lawyers lined their pockets and went home laughing all the way to the bank.

01:00 **No good.**

Who knows what else, cause John could fiddle the books with ease, he's as smart as a whip. I never saw him again. Luckily when Mother died, and of course, I was her gopher forever, do this, do that, get this, get that. As you can see, I'm super efficient,

01:30 and loved her, always hoping to get a pat on the head and all I ever got was... I wrote a poem, 'Girls Are Servants, Boys Are Heroes.' Oooh, she was a tough old horror, anyhow. I was getting pretty run down, and I'd had fourteen years as a carer for Harry plus Mother, and I put myself on a trip to Alaska

02:00 through RSL [Returned and Services League] Travel, and Mother went downhill steadily. They moved her from Elsternwick to Bethlehem and she was on her last legs, and Harry said, "Don't cancel your trip, go." Harry being my late husband, "You need it, she's not going to be here for a long." Well she died after the day I left. I'm very pleased, and so was Harry

02:30 that I wasn't there, because John and I, it was a very unpleasant affair according to Harry. Even my brother fought with my eldest daughter, who adored her grandfather and grandmother. They had spoiled Narelle rotten. They fought over the price of the casket. I think God willed it that I was a geographical impossibility.

03:00 **So back when you were a child, how were those dynamics played out at home? Your mother had her favourite with John, and how did she treat you?**

I grew up like Topsy, and Daddy was, he never interfered, he had his practice, he had his bowling club,

03:30 and he loved the gee gee's. He had a few racehorses and he was the man that came round. He wasn't what you call a fun or a loving father, but he certainly changed his mind after I got out of the air force. As I came out of the air force,

04:00 and met and married Harry, Dad became quite a fan of mine. He was a nice fellow, he was a brilliant lawyer, he used to come to my parties and he had a ball, he had all our friends around him, and he'd take off on one of his legal stories, he was a great raconteur.

04:30 And they'd all be, absolutely waiting for the punch line. Wonderful. I remember on one occasion the terrace frocks were very much vogue, and I'd come back from somewhere via Hawaii and I had an absolutely lovely one with a split up the side. All my friends were there, and all of a sudden, Daddy came in, and nobody knew who he was, and he put his hand down

05:00 and went, "Whoop, whoop" he was, "Oh, you're showing a nice bit of leg." They all looked and thought how rude, and who is this? I said, "Don't take any notice of him, that's my Dad." He was a dear; eventually he died of a heart attack. He came up to Eildon on weekends; we had a houseboat up there

05:30 and the kids loved it and they all water-skied from their utes. I loved it and we tootled round the weir, and we had a lot of friends. Daddy came up from the weekend; well he wouldn't sleep on the boat, although there was room. He decided he'd book into the motel in the township and we'd pick him up daily and take him out. On the second

06:00 day, Harry went around to pick him up and he said, "I've had a heart attack," he knew. And so he went into hospital and then they took him to Melbourne, and eventually he died in Cabrini. He was seventy-

five, and he'd had a good innings, and a good life, I guess. Nice fellow.

06:30 Dear Dad.

So you've told us about your love of yachting and the sort of fun and games you'd get up to as a kid. Did the family do things together, were there holidays?

Yes.

Where would you go, what would you do?

Yes, I could tell you a beauty. We took the children away on holidays.

07:00 This was of course, before we bought the house, after we bought that that was holidays. And of course, they were growing up and loved water skiing and....

Sorry for interrupting, I mean when you were young, with your parents?

You've got to be joking, no. On one occasion John and I were packed off to the Williamson's at Wangandary via Wangaratta. We'd be

07:30 perhaps five and seven. The Williamsons obviously owed Daddy a lot of money and so Mother suggested that they took the children for two weeks up on the farm, to help pay off the debt. It was horrid. We were off with the birds, which of course all kids are, that doesn't matter. They fed us and bundled us into bed at six o'clock at night. We had nowhere to go

08:00 except we tried sliding down the haystacks, and we got told off about that because, fair enough, snakes do live in haystacks. I don't recall other than going to Warburton on one occasion as a child. I think it was a, Mother took a house with Chummy Merritt, the wife of

08:30 Bill Merritt, the architect I mentioned earlier in this speech, being instrumental in my joining the air force, that's right. Anyhow, we went up there and of course, I was seven

09:00 and I was left to baby sit while Chummy Merritt and Mother tootled off down the road to some fellows place that they'd met, where they had cocktails. She left me with three little children to look after. Just a hard humpy, horrible, I do remember that. So there is the Williams's and there's that and nothing. When I was seventeen she promised to take me to Buffalo.

09:30 I'd never seen snow. By the time Mother got ready and mucked around, the taxi came and we missed the train. So wartime, we missed three days and had to go up on the train three days later, so it took three days out of the week. They were the only holidays I ever had. I've sure made up for travel since. Not only with Harry,

10:00 but I've taken myself off on five overseas jaunts, and paid for it myself. I like to be independent and earn my own money.

It sounds like back then, you found your own escape, didn't you, out on the water?

Oh yes, the yachting and the air force got me away from it all. And then of course as soon as I got

10:30 discharged I'd met Harry, and it wasn't too long before we were... so I was. Do you want to hear how I met him?

We haven't really got to the war starting yet, just trying to get a picture of who you were before the war, before you joined the WAAAFs.

11:00 **So if we can fill in a few blanks there. You talked about going to Merton Hall, 'Flirtin All',**

'Flirtin All', that's what the grammar school boys called it.

So what do you remember of those years at school there, do you remember any stories from school?

Oh yes, I've written my memoirs, I've got two books. I could start and tell you the whole lot, but it might be rather boring.

11:30 **Well, if you could just select one or two incidents that sort of typify.**

Well, I can just say that when I arrived at Melbourne Girls Grammar, Merton Hall as it was known then, our uniform was a silk dress, brown shoes and socks. We had a white panama hat with the school hat band, we wore gloves at all times, and we had school bags with the school crest emblazoned on it.

12:00 I travelled in three trams from 339 St Kilda Street, Brighton, on the Victorian railways tram along St Kilda Street, which is no longer there, to the St Kilda station. And then of course, boarded the East Coburg tram to the Shrine, and from the Shrine the Toorak tram round to Park Street. Now an interesting aspect of this early memory is that

12:30 the hill on which the Shrine is built, was put there. The old Clydesdale horses pulling drays of dirt, year

after year of dumping it put that hill there, on which the Shrine was built. So I watched the Shrine being built, and funnily enough it was built by the Lodge family who, Brenda Lodge, one of my school friends was married to John.

- 13:00 Also the beautiful fountain there was put there by Sir McPherson Robertson, Dallas and Eric Robertson, now deceased, were two of my very best friends. Sir McPherson's sons, and they sold out MacRobertsons chocolates, Cadbury Fry took them over, and Dallas and Eric went to live at Kensall Green on the Corryong road out of Albury, and that's when Eric died and Dallas moved into Albury
- 13:30 and later died. So we are at school. I remember all the teachers. I was never in the kindergarten. There was a dear woman called Miss Muirfield, everyone loved her. I'm sorry, 2C was Miss Quinlan who was austere with black hair pulled back in a bun.
- 14:00 We learned English, and we learned French too from scratch. maths, scripture, drawing etcetera... geography, history. Then to 2B, Miss Murfield, 2A, Miss Merryman who was not exactly merry, she was a sour puss. I met her later on as a border in my senior school years; she was the boarding house mistress, then followed 2B Miss McKay.
- 14:30 Then on to the big school, senior school. There were three houses, there was St Cecilia's, of which I became a member, St Hilda's and St Joan's. The girls called St Cecilia's 'St Silly Asses'. We had first second and third year, we changed classrooms when the bell rang for different subjects, and we carried our books in a blue shoulder bag.
- 15:00 Then intermediate, and then leaving, then matriculation, which of course is the equivalent of VCE [Victorian Certificate of Education] these days. Some girls stayed on for leaving honours. Most of them went on to Melbourne University, because there was no Monash or Latrobe or any other universities, there was only the one in those days. Jean Hales comes to mind, who was a famous doctor
- 15:30 and the Jean Hales Memorial now is well known in the medical world because she, and Pat Scrivener, both looked into women's health and particularly the affect of menopause on women. Of course, they are very, very well known now, Jean Hale's Memorial Fund at Monash University. Jean died,
- 16:00 funnily enough, from cancer, a doctor, married to a doctor, heart specialist, they didn't pick it up. I'm staggered at that, because I'm a survivor of two lots of cancer, both breast cancer and bowel cancer. I've had them both, so I can talk about it quite freely. The shot is to catch it early, and then get rid of it, which I have. Fingers crossed, I don't want a return bout, but every year
- 16:30 I get my checks and do everything that's necessary. Anyhow, so I was at grammar right through, but during the war they were, I'd left, I was in the bank and then the air force. They evacuated all the pupils and some went to the Doncaster golf course and some went to a couple of lodges at Healesville.
- 17:00 I, at one stage, got transferred to Merton Hall, to do some work in between my posting at Ascot Vale and my telegraphy. I had to go to Melbourne Girls Grammar, or Merton Hall with three other girls, and they, in three weeks, they wanted the name of every city, town, borough, whistle stop, in Australia.
- 17:30 They were putting together the DFRB, the Defence Forces Retirement Benefit fund and we had maps coming out of our ears, and scrutinising them with magnifying glasses. Anyhow, I recall on one occasion telling one of the girls that I'd been to school there, and I said, "Come and..." Some of the girls, the seniors, were at family Grimwade
- 18:00 House, the boarding school further down Anderson Street. So I whistled through the back lane, knowing every nook and cranny at the joint, and I was showing her the beautiful garden at Grimwade House, when up went the window and the face came out, "What are you ACWs [Aircraftwomen] doing here?" I took my hat off, and said, "Remember me Miss Ross?" "Oh my dear, Elaine Francis, come in, bring your friend and show her around." What a difference.
- 18:30 So, that was Dorothy Ross who was head mistress when I left, but not when I went to school. I was with Katy Gillman-Jones in the first eight years; Ross only came in the last two years of my school career.

So you went onto the bank? After you left the girls grammar, after you left school, you were working, where was that again?

- 19:00 1942, I left school at the end of. I was there from 1931 to 1941 and I went to work at Commercial Bank of Australia, now Westpac, in Collins Street. The banking chain that is still there with magnificent wrought iron doors, classified by the National Trust, they built up the building behind that area.
- 19:30 **So did you have, back at school, did you have much to do with boys?**
- Oh you bet. If ever there was a match on, either way, you'd be popping out down through the courtyard at the Grammar, to see who was kicking the best goals, and I do recall, a friend of mine, John Birrell, who was a police surgeon, he kicked fifty-seven goals for the season, and he only died last year. Yes,
- 20:00 I doubt whether they went to see the football or the boys, but I suggest the boys, and certainly a good cheer squad. We all wanted Grammar to beat Scotch, and funnily enough, I ended up marrying a Scotch College.

So who was Merton Hall's great rival in those days?

PLC [Presbyterian Ladies' College], MLC [Methodist Ladies' College], Melbourne

20:30 Girls' Grammar, Hermitage Geelong, then there were GPS [General Private Schools] schools, then there was another bracket, like St Catherine's, Shelford, Strathcona, Clyde, I think they were called associated grammar schools. Bit vague on that, haven't thought of it for a thousand years.

21:00 You were obviously a bit sporting, did you play school sports?

Oh yes, I was a very good swimmer, which of course was very good later on in the air force, because I made the inter-services team, and I got a week's leave in Melbourne to swim at the Wesley pool. So we used a scarfing,

21:30 elongated. A coach or bus would pick us up and take us to the Olympic pool, which of course was next to the city morgue in those days. Everyone eyeing off the morgue. In the prep, we played basketball and of course, track and field right through.

22:00 In the senior school, I played tennis, I played hockey, I played baseball, loved it, not softball as some people say, it was not, it was baseball. And then of course there was swimming and track and field and there were other extra subjects like fencing, callisthenics, all that, I never went for those.

22:30 So I'd say my major sports were baseball. I was in the team, hockey, tennis, I played 'C' grade, I wasn't a star, but good all rounder I would say. Skating of course, I absolutely adored, I was bent on becoming a Sonia Heney until the war put finish to that. So I could do all the dances and jumps and

23:00 spins and entered the competitions, but once I joined the RAAF, that was that. You can't be posted all over Australia, cause there are very few skating rinks.

Where did you skate in Melbourne?

St Moritz. Started off at the Glaciarium, but then the St Moritz opened at St Kilda, which was a tram ride from East St Kilda, very convenient.

23:30 In fact I was watching skating world championships last night on the television, very good. They are doing triples now. If you did lutzes [jumps] or a spin in those days, yes, and splits jumps, but nowadays they do triples and doubles.

Yes, they are quite spectacular, graceful as well. So did you enter competitions at that stage?

Yes. They were called sealed handicaps.

24:00 You'd have to give your programme on the ice, on your own, with the music you had chosen to perform to.

How did you fare?

I never won, but I think, I don't recall them giving any prizes. They just, first, second and third.

24:30 I don't recall any trophies, but as you went through skating in those days and did your figures first, eights, rockers, different figures which is boring believe me, doing, on one patch of ice. Then

25:00 you went for your bronze medal, then you had to do your figure skating, the eights, then you did your free skating programme. That was the interesting bit with the jumps and the spins, and if you qualified you got a bronze medal or the next was silver wings, you got a little silver badge with an ice skater with two silver wings. Oh treasured. And then you got bronze,

25:30 silver medal, and then you've got gold wings, and then you've got gold medal. If you got to that standard you would be skating for Australia - Australian championships. And then of course, later on after the war, the Olympics. I only recall one, Nancy Hallam, she came 11th in the Olympics, and Sharon Burley,

26:00 whose mother Nancy Burley was a very good skater in my day. And one of my dear friends, unfortunately can't come to my eightieth birthday party, he's a doctor, Bill Taylor, an anaesthetist, now retired, he's going away. He was a gold medallist.

Did you do pairs skating, or only solo?

Yes, all the dances. They had, most

26:30 every session they put on the dance music and you'd have a partner, waltz, quickstep, tango. There was another one, I've forgotten. I can't think. I thought there was another one, maybe I'm wrong.

So who would you dance with?

27:00 Well usually, another girl, or occasionally, one of the instructors, there were male instructors and female. I learnt from Betty Cornwall, who had become, who was a Victorian champion and Joyce

Macbeth, of course, was a magnificent instructor, another Australian champion, and Megan Taylor. We had Charlie Babato

27:30 and Dudley St Vincent were male instructors at St Moritz, I remember them. So if you danced with an instructor, it just depends, how many wanted, so when they put the music on, it's a case of hop on the floor grab a partner and off you go. No partner, you couldn't do it on your own.

What were the most difficult moves that you had to learn?

28:00 **The more dance...?**

What skating?

Yes.

Jumps

Sorry not moves, manoeuvres?

Manoeuvres. I think jumps because you've got to jump off an inside edge or back edge going backwards, and you've got to land properly otherwise you know where you land, and that's usually three points.

28:30 **Lets talk about you, now we are getting up towards 1939. Now your father had been in the army, fought in World War I, was there much talk at that time about the possibility of war?**

29:00 Yes, goodness me yes, 1940 to 1942.

I'm talking even earlier, actually before war was declared.

Everybody, well I was acutely aware of Hitler and Daladier, and Chamberlain, I knew all about what was happening in Europe. Of course, Europe was a long way away from Australia, so everybody was interested

29:30 but there was no television in those days, so one read the newspapers or listened to the radio. I do recall the meetings between Chamberlain and Daladier who was the premier of France. And of course, I know, I knew exactly what was going on in Europe. And Hitler, when the war started, they marched into the savannah land.

30:00 Well firstly they went into Poland, so it was on for young and old. Well then, because the Americans didn't come in, it was like World War I, it took the Mesopotamia [CL Lusitania] to be sunk before the Yanks decided to come and have a go. And it was Pearl Harbour that brought them in on the second round, and thank God the Japs attacked Pearl Harbour otherwise we might have lost the war. Because we couldn't have done it without the Yanks. And I'm as Australian and British as they come.

30:30 We had a wonderful army in the Western Desert and we had an absolutely superb air force operating in the Battle of Britain. But we didn't have the number of planes, we didn't have the number of tanks. They put the air force together, just. They had the permanent service, those that had enlisted before the war and those

31:00 officers that had gone through RAAF College. They had to decide what to do in a great hurry, and bring the women in. So in the end, seventy thousand Australian women served in the WAAAF and the AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] and the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service]. And that was a case of get to work and do your best on the home front to release men for the fighting forces. Which was inevitable.

31:30 Then of course, when Pearl Harbour was hit and the Japs came in and then started island hopping, and then came down through Malaysia and over straits of Johore and into Singapore, that was getting very close to home. And then of course, the Owen Stanleys in New Guinea. Now our girls went as far as Townsville. One friend of mine, she was married to a Pathfinder, he's now dead. Fay Crabbe,

32:00 I can't remember her maiden name, but she was on Don MacArthur's staff in Melbourne, took over Chancery House, which of course, was where my father had his legal practice. So Daddy moved to Collins Street, Bill Merritt's office, as Bill had had gone into the air force, who I mentioned earlier, he was the manpower officer. Fay and MacArthur's staff were operating

32:30 from there and then they went to Townsville. Then of course, MacArthur decided as they cleaned up the Philippines by that stage, he wanted to move his whole staff. And we had a prime minister by the name of John Curtin, who I could kick from here to here, who said, "No Australian woman will go north of Townsville. Keep the little girls in their own back yard." Oh, it really bugged us, and Fay and all the others

33:00 that knew their job on the staff had to be replaced by American servicewomen. Just shows you, ignorant male.

Fair bit of it at the time I'd say.

Oh yes, because I've got books, and when they started to put the air force together, I'm a WAAAF, now why, and I resent it to this day, the word 'auxiliary' Women's Auxiliary Australian

33:30 Air Force. It didn't need to be 'Women' for a start, it could have been just RAAF, as it is today. Now Australian Women's Army Service, they didn't have the retched word 'auxiliary' in it. Every RSL had the 'ladies auxiliary'. In other words, little girls in the kitchen, making sandwiches and cleaning up the dishes. That really annoys me. WRANS -

34:00 no 'Auxiliary' in that. But we had to wear it, and then after I'd joined, and six months later we were enlisted, we were enrolled at first, we were enlisted. That was the time to remove the 'Auxiliary', but no way.

Was that something that was an issue at the time, when you signed up? Was that bothering you right there and then?

34:30 Women's Auxiliary Australian Air force they called it.

The word auxiliary, which I understand and appreciate totally what you're saying. But back then in the '40's was that a subject of debate as well?

Oh yes, we all hated it. The army didn't have to wear the wretched auxiliary tag, and neither did the navy.

We know you fought a good fight on that, and it is a subject for later on.

That's later on, yes.

35:00 **Elaine, do you recall the declaration of war? I think it was a Sunday night wasn't it, when Menzies came on the radio. Do you remember?**

I remember, yes.

Can you tell us about that? Do you remember the impact that it had on people at the time?

I can't add very much to that because I was a schoolgirl.

35:30 '39, I was fifteen and you get this on the radio and in the newspapers and everyone discussing it. But as I say, in those days not only to schoolgirls, but to the average Australian, Europe was a long way away. And of course, nobody thought of Britain at that stage being involved.

36:00 As Hitler walked into Warsaw and Poland, and then started to spread his wings everywhere. So no, I can't.

It did feel quite distant at that stage.

As I say, Europe was a long way away, but later on of course, Pearl Harbour, that was '42.

So in those first couple of

36:30 **years of the war, '39, '40, '41, obviously a lot of Australian men were signing up, regardless of where the war was, was that having an impact on society?**

Oh yes, everybody practically I knew, of my age group, and if they weren't in, they were on the waiting list, or they were going to classes and studying Morse code or semaphore, if they were planning to go into the navy.

37:00 There was a group of air force that went to school once a week to learn Morse code, and as soon as they turned eighteen, well, in they went.

And how do you think Melbourne changed in those first couple of years? As you say, Europe was distant, it was a long way away, what socially was the change?

37:30 Melbourne didn't change very much at first until Pearl Harbour, and then of course, Camp Pell opened, and we were inundated with Yanks. As they say, overpaid, oversexed and over here. They were well behaved, they had beautiful uniforms, they had a lot of money, and some women liked them very much, because they bought women. I'm afraid I was a dedicated

38:00 Australian. No, wouldn't have a bar of Yanks. At least they were here and they were prepared to help us, which we needed. And when I hear people talking about, that we don't need ANZUS [Australia, New Zealand and United States of America Treaty] and other things, I think 'you stupid so and so'. We sure do,

38:30 we needed it. And now look at the Muslim world and look at Indonesia sitting on our doorstep. We need America - we need their technology, their help. Because Britain, much as it might have been ruler of the seas, the British Empire, when I was a little girl, no longer is.

At the time,

- 39:00 **when the war started, did you feel there was a surge of patriotism or was it really about the Empire, like you were saying, what was it?**
- Yes, as I say, I was a bit young to realise, fifteen.
- Even for you personally, before you joined up?**
- I was well and truly, I mean, some of them, they've got feathers in their head, not only the men. I can
- 39:30 to this day remember how the boys of my vintage talked about three at Royal Brighton Yacht Club that didn't join up. Daddy's business, protected industry, one was in automotive parts. But the other one I said, now I won't mention any names here, but I said, that one happened to work at Commonwealth Aircraft Factory, and I said, "Once you are
- 40:00 in that you couldn't get out." He was an aeronautical engineer, we needed them more than we needed him somewhere else. But as far as my school friends, I tried to get, in fact I offered to donate an honour board for the girls that served. They turned it down even though I said donate. They put together an album with the girls' names
- 40:30 in it and it was all beautifully hand-scripted by someone who does beautiful old English script, and it's in a glass case. But I'd have liked to have seen the board, like at Melbourne Grammar and the boys schools. But on the whole, for the big percentage of women that attended my school, only a handful joined.
- 41:00 Which, half of them didn't even. I don't know, I find it hard to understand.

Tape 3

- 00:32 **You were just talking about how not many girls from your school enlisted in the services.**
- All I can say is that it was very apathetic. Women weren't encouraged in those days either, you were thought to be outspoken.
- 01:00 You were more or less encouraged to behave like a little lady. I never did get that message.
- Did you have other friends who were like you, who were...?**
- No.
- Kindred spirits?**
- No, Jo Munroe that I mentioned earlier, and Joan was always prim and proper, and met the tram and went home and did her music practice.
- 01:30 I was on my bike and up the Caulfield Park as fast as my legs would carry me, to join the Wesley and the Scotch boys and Caulfield Grammar boys and have a yack. We didn't do anything, we never got into mischief, we just gathered round together, and the boys chatted up the girls, and the girls chatted up the boys. And then on Saturday morning we all headed off to the Ritz, and if you had a date you might
- 02:00 go to the Palais or Victory, to the pictures on Saturday night. But there was no vandalism or anything. I think the worst thing one ever did was play nick-nock occasionally, where you rang a bell and when they came to the door you'd disappeared.
- But you were very aware by the sounds of things, very conscious of what was going on with the war.**
- Oh yes I was, very. And of course,
- 02:30 my brother, at thirteen was at the naval college, he went in at, they took the cadets in at thirteen then. And as I mentioned, five hundred sat for the exam and they took twenty out of the whole of Australia. And three of John's year, Alan Willis, his brother's Sir James, they are both dead now. Sir James was chief of naval staff, Alan was an admiral too. And
- 03:00 Jeff Losley who was at Grimwade with John, he was an admiral and Ross Swan. So there were three admirals out of John's year. But John got out after World War II and went to university, as I mentioned earlier.
- And what about information and promotion in the services, the women's services, how conscious were you of that?**
- Eighteen year old WAAAF's didn't
- 03:30 get very far, or ex-war servicewomen. You had to be twenty-one to be commissioned. You could work up from corporal to sergeant, to flight sergeant to warrant officer, but few and far between, except at

headquarters. Women being clerks, or clerk general, they seemed to get promoted pretty quickly, because, I don't know why.

04:00 Telegraphists didn't although that was one of the higher musterings, that was in the second grade of musterings, was meteorological and a few other things. Nursing service of course, didn't come under WAAAF, they were RAAFNS, Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service. And they were of course, were all commissioned on arriving. They took the title

04:30 Sister, but they wore flying officer stripes or flight lieutenant stripes.

Now you've told us about the day you enlisted and you found that your mother had signed the papers in the morning. Can you tell us about how much time passed from the time you actually enlisted to when you went to your

05:00 **training?**

Oh straight away. I was called up two weeks later, for intake. That's when I had to meet the manpower officer, remember? Bill Merritt, architect and engineer Royal Flying Corps World War I. Remember I told you about how he said, "Passed," when my mother wanted me to go into the navy. I went from there straight to 1EA Ascot Vale Engineering School at the Showgrounds.

05:30 At the Showgrounds of course, one got a good old pep talk of what was going to happen, and then you were marched off to equipment whereby you were issued with uniforms and everything in the clothing line, with two notable exceptions. I'm sorry, three notable exceptions. No brassier, no suspender belt and

06:00 no pyjamas. Now that was quite a problem, because we had coupons in those days, and service personnel got twenty-eight coupons to supply them with a year. Now we hadn't even been issued with coupons at that stage as we joined. And of course, you are issued with stockings at the equipment store, but how do you keep them up? Lots of people had to

06:30 get bits of elastic and make garters, which were uncomfortable.

Why didn't you take your own underwear?

Nobody, see I mustered in '43. I left school in '41. Underwear doesn't last forever, does it, you couldn't get it, you didn't have the coupons. And if you had anything, well, I was lucky; I had pyjamas and a dressing

07:00 gown, others didn't. There was a couple of funny episodes about that one I can tell you.

Sure.

Our barracks was Number 3 Cattle Pavilion, now I'd better finish off as we'd started. So we'd been to equipment store and we'd been issued with our gear, then of course you had to go to medical and be checked over, then you went for your dental check, then you went

07:30 to a medical for your needles, TT [Tetanus Typhoid], TB [Tuberculosis] vaccinations, you got all those jabs as we called them. You had to go to the pay office and get your pay book and everything issued. Then you had to get your bedding organised, whereby you were issued with a sack and told to decamp to the store dump, fill it up with straw, sew it up,

08:00 put it on your cyclone wire stretcher, and you were issued with four grey heavy blankets. Heavy but not warm, no pillow.

Anyway, you were at the Showgrounds and you are doing your palliasse.

Oh yes, but no pillow, no wardrobe or locker, you had a bag with a D lock,

08:30 which was attached to the end of your bed. You put your gear in that. So, one funny episode that I've told many, many times over the years. Across the road from Number 3 Cattle Pavilion, was Number 1 Horse Pavilion, we are at the Melbourne Showgrounds of course. In the middle of the road was the showers and the latrines, service personnel for the use of. In other words, WAAAF,

09:00 because there were no men in that area. Diagonally across from the cattle pavilion was the dental section, and the girls in the hot summer that had no pyjamas, and no dressing gown, had a very neat habit of wrapping a small air force towel around their torso and doing the bunk, very smartly, across what we called Breeze Alley, a little alley between end of Number 3

09:30 Cattle and the shower block. Now of course, this fascinated the young dentists who instead of concentrating on the cavities which they were supposed to be concentrating on, were busy looking out the windows watching the Salome act as WAAAF went backwards and forwards in all states. Now madam, the WAAAF officer who was Flight Officer McClennan, wasn't impressed, so we got a lecture on modesty.

10:00 Some of the girls said, you know, they had no pyjamas, no dressing gown and no coupons, so what was

madam in the air force going to do about it? Now when two hundred girls in Number 3 Cattle are all complaining about the same thing, the air force scratched their heads and decided to get the Department of Works along and they put up a fence, so

- 10:30 the dentists couldn't see it. Of course, the young dentists thought the senior dental officer had instigated the complaint to madam, they thought he was a very poor type.

So they still didn't issue the women with pyjamas?

No.

What were they sleeping in?

Pants, Singlet. They gave you,

- 11:00 I think, four pairs of what we call cottontails, and four pairs of pants drab, and four pairs of pants, navy. 'Airwomen, for the use of'. In brackets.

That was the sign on the...?

No singlets, no night gear and no suspenders or bras.

It was January wasn't it?

- 11:30 I joined on the 20th of January, 1943, it was very, very hot. Now we had three weeks rookie course to deal with before we started telegraphists training. And our parade ground happened to be the railway station. Oh there was a parade ground up further, but the railway station at the Showgrounds was where we did our drill. And of course, it was gravel.
- 12:00 Nothing wrong with it, there was plenty of it too, and marching and exercises and God knows what. The Department of Agriculture did not impress us, because they used to back up trains with carriages that had brought cattle and sheep down from hundreds of miles in the country, because the abattoirs were practically next door to the Showgrounds, and
- 12:30 the livestock and shove the, back up the trains along our platform. They were full of dung, which of course did not impress us, the stink, but the blowfly population were delighted. Oh God, the blowflies 'round there. So, but nobody bothered to complain to the department about that.

Now you said you were in Number 3

- 13:00 **Cattle Pavilion, what was the set-up there, was it a big open...?**

It was, they'd put a floor in it of course, not like it is in the show, it had a wooden floor. It was divided into bays with numbers; there were eight girls, or maybe ten, to a bay. With just the beds, and a hook above your bed, your uniform and great coat would go on the hook above the bed.

- 13:30 And of course. your kit bag at the end of the bed. It didn't have a lock; you could put a padlock on it if you wanted to. Later on in my career, we used a small locker, but that's a long way along the tracks. Apart from doing our rookie course, we were learning all about air force orders and all the air force jargon. Then
- 14:00 of course, we started our telegraphists training and we did oh, up to five words a minute at first and you went up to twenty words a minute.

Your rookie training was there at the Showgrounds?

Yes, that was first and then followed on to the telegraph training.

Okay. So, you said there are two hundred girls there that were part of that intake?

- 14:30 I would think there would have to be two hundred, under training at 4 Wing at that time. I'm taking a guess on that.

Can you give me a bit of a picture of where these girls came from, what the cross-section of the community was?

The cross section of the community was from the rough to the smooth, all walks of life. It did everybody a lot of good, particularly

- 15:00 people brought up in a wealthy or sheltered existence, to see how the other half lived. It was a great leveller.

For you personally?

I think it was a great leveller, because not only was it the women involved, it was the men. The Showgrounds had, they trained flight engineers, flight mechanics, fitter 2E's, 2A's.

- 15:30 The embarkation depot was at the front gate, which was usually for the pilots waiting to be moved on to England or the Western Desert. There were thousands at the Showgrounds, it was huge.

So what about for yourself, did you make friendships there during that time?

Yes, Grace Poppet

16:00 was a great friend,

And what was Grace?

And Betty Ryan, we all joined up together and we all went to Ascot Vale. A lot of the other girls went here there and everywhere. I don't know where they went, but we were the three that were posted to Ascot Vale. Grace was a darling little thing; she was a pretty little blonde. She ended up marrying a petty officer in the navy. I can't remember what happened to Bet Ryan, I've forgot

16:30 about that. What happened to her, posted somewhere, gone, I don't know. See, you were moved around so often, you didn't, wasn't like staying in one place for a long time where you really put down solid friendships. I was posted from Ascot Vale to 4STT [School of Technical Training] Adelaide. Which was the

17:00 Exhibition Buildings in North Terrace. And our barracks there was the city car park in Pultney Street. Similar bedding, except we did get a pillow, and we had a locker there. But we had concrete walls, concrete walls and concrete ceilings, and in Adelaide winter, not to be recommended.

17:30 Nothing to warm it, and if you wanted to go to the loo, the shot is to go before you go to bed, because you had to walk up the ramp, and the showers and latrines were on the roof. So that was Adelaide.

Can we go back, go to Ascot Vale, to the Showgrounds, you were there for three weeks but..

Oh no,

No, you were there for longer?

Oh no, I was there for months.

18:00 **It would be good to get a really detailed picture of what that experience was like for you. There is a couple of things you've mentioned, one is that you were mixing with this cross-section of society, in that community, I'm curious about how that affected you? What you felt about that, because it seems that you had a kind of sheltered upbringing yourself?**

No,

18:30 I was more of a rough and tumble then, out with the skating mob or the sailing mob. I wasn't Miss Prudence and Prims and a particularly good little lady. So I fitted in rather well. It was no shock to me to sleep on this straw palliasse. Some other girls wouldn't have liked it, but what can you do. It was wartime.

19:00 It was total war. The Japs were coming over the Owen Stanley's. You didn't worry about these things and you were too darn busy, if you weren't on parade you'd be in class, you'd be down in the mess hall. You'd be, after work at five o'clock, you'd probably head for the canteen and buy yourself a lollypop, or a glass of lemonade or something.

19:30 There was no liquor of course. I think they had cakes and buns and sweets and cigarettes, normal pharmaceuticals, band-aids and things you might need. And then of course, you had your leave on a Wednesday night. And then you stood down at two o'clock on Saturday, and came back on Sunday night.

20:00 Or you slept in or you went out or stayed. If you were a Melbourne girl, you went home. There were lots of route marches. I remember on one occasion, I was working at maintenance records and John was being sent from the naval college. They did four years of naval college.

20:30 But the war was so bad they were shoving the forth years out at three and a half years, and I applied for compassionate leave to go home and see him before he went off to sea, but it was turned down. So I happened to ask a flight sergeant who's section I was in at that stage, if I could, if he'd miss me if I nicked off.

21:00 He said, "You talk to the riggers and the mechanics, they've got a bolt-hole." Up at the back of the Showgrounds there was the nurses' quarters and ahead of that there was a timber yard, where the air force kept it's timber dry. The riggers and mechs [mechanics] told me to go into the timber yard, and half way along, turn right through a little gap and I'd find that the

21:30 fence had been broken at the end. So I put my cap on and my coat, and off I went and found it. I went out and it opened out onto a paddock. I just got out and was heading across the paddock, when all of a sudden there was a 'nheeee', it was a horse and it was out of my audio vision, behind this piece of galvanised iron, it whinnied,

22:00 my heart jumped out. Anyhow, I went back down the side street, to the tram stop. See, I had to get the tram back to the city. I had to go to the front gate and pick up a suitcase I had to take home with me, which I'd left down there and told the guard, an ACW friend of mine, would be picking it up, that she'd

lent me some stuff. That was from the inside, then to get out, then go and

22:30 pick it up and pretend you... Anyhow, I'm on the tram stop and hoping to God the tram would come quickly and there was a platoon of embarkation depot pilots came on a route march, and who should be on the front row but Russ Williams from the yacht club, "You are AWL [Absent Without Leave], you are AWL." They all took up the call. About fifty or sixty or more of them. My heart was going

23:00 by this stage 'boom boom'. Anyhow, I got out, saw John, and got back at ten o'clock that night, before, on time. So I was never caught.

Is this at Ascot Vale?

Yes, 1 Engineering School, it was called.

So did you have any qualms at all about doing that or was that just what you had to do to get by?

Nicking off?

Yeah, nicking off.

23:30 Lots of people went AWL, but we all believed in the Eleventh Commandment, 'Thou shalt not be caught'.

So would you cover for each other?

Oh yes, definitely. There was one funny episode that you'll enjoy. There was one Flight Sergeant Batty at Number 3 Cattle, and of course,

24:00 sergeants and above were allowed to have their bed made up. We had to precision the fold up of our palliasses, fold up our blankets, all to precision, and each day, but they could leave their bed made up. Anyhow, she was a pain in the arse, she really was and on panic day you had to scrub the whole of the cattle pavilion out, I mean scrub. Swish it out with

24:30 squeegees and clean the showers. She made us do it twice, and some of the girls weren't too impressed. One girl called Lucy Collins, and she was a bit of a rogue, she said, "Well fix her." She had a heavy date that night, not Lucky, Batty the sergeant, she was going out with her boyfriend. So what did the girls do, they took her straw palliasse down to the straw dump,

25:00 emptied it, and they filled it up with coke. And they made her bed up, and she came in, obviously been to the pub too, with a few sheets to the wind, and hopped into bed. And she never said a word. The next day came and went, the rest of the week went, came Saturday time stand down, the whole of 4 Wing was to turn out, in full blues.

25:30 It was summer, not drabs, full blues, then she sent us on an eight-mile route march. Nobody squeaked, they never found out who was behind it. But they got their own back.

And that's how it was done?

It was Collin's idea and a few of the girls helped her, but... That was at Ascot Vale.

26:00 **You said you did lots of route marches and you were inducted into the way the air force worked, what else did you cover, was there elementary telegraphy at that point?**

Oh yes, you had to go through the whole system. You went through your classes. One to five words a minute, five to ten words a minute, ten to fifteen words a minute.

26:30 You were in class with your tapper and receive and send, and then you also had to learn all the slang in case you were signalling with a lamp to the sky or to a ship. You had to do twelve words a minute, all this.

And how did you find that, the signals training? Did you like it?

I don't think you could say anyone likes it. Hearing Morse code hour after

27:00 hour, no.

And how did you do in it, did you do well, did you pass?

Oh yes, we all passed, then you were posted. Everyone's waiting for your posting. And of course, to get posted to a flying station was what everybody wanted. Not everybody got it. Melbourne WT [Wireless Telegraphy] was a horror. Some of,

27:30 there were plenty of breakdowns there because Morse code coming in your ears, all the time you've got your earphones on. Sending, that's not so bad. You can't afford not to concentrate, because if you miss one letter and try to think, you've missed five others. No, not the easiest mustering. I changed over

28:00 then. I got a dose of bronchitis very badly. I got it at home. I was very ill one weekend, leave at home,

and Mother rang the air force to say that I had a raging temperature, and could I come back on the Monday and they said no. And they sent an ambulance for me. Then I was taken to the hospital. They left me with a

- 28:30 sheet over me in a passage, on a gurney for three hours. By the time they got me organised the next day, I was taken to Warrandeen WAAAF hospital in Toorak, and there I had nearly, or close to pneumonia for three weeks, so that disrupted everything. My group had passed out, so I
- 29:00 decided to become a clerk and I was posted to Adelaide. So I went to Adelaide and that was very good. At this stage of my life I was very fond of a very darling fellow called Hugh Griffith, he was
- 29:30 a bomber pilot. And Hugh was in England and he was flying Stirlings, to go on to Lancasters, and Hugh and his crew were killed. I don't know whether they were shot down, or whether there was an accident, but the message came through, apparently Hugh had never had a
- 30:00 girlfriend before and I met him at the St Moritz. I was waiting for my friend Jo Munroe to show up, and I was skating around in circles, and all of a sudden, somebody grabbed me and I went down on the ice. I looked around and there were five sergeant pilots all flat on the ice, and I was the nearest thing when they fell. And so of course,
- 30:30 they said, "We can't skate, can you help us?" And so I proceeded to teach them for the rest of the evening, and Leo reckoned his uncle was with them, Will Falkner who didn't live far from where I lived. So they took me to supper and then the two weeks they were at the embarkation depot I saw Hugh, I was working in the bank. I wasn't in the air force at this stage.
- 31:00 And when they were posted to England I joined the air force then. I think meeting Hugh, Leo Reddin and Brian Shenkel, Shenky's still alive and we are still in touch, the rest are all dead. Brian lives at 'Malana' Kybybolite, near Naracoorte, he's got a property there. His wife died, but he's still alive, he and I, the only ones.
- 31:30 So I was posted to Adelaide then, and when I arrived on the station I was with Mel Glasson and Avonda Seville. Never seen or heard from those girls from that day. But I remember their names. I just remember. This dear lady came up to me, and she had a black coat on, and she said to the three of us, "Which one is ACW Francis?"
- 32:00 I said, "I am." She said, "Dear, I'm Amy Griffith, Hugh's brother. John told me you were posted to Adelaide." John, his brother, had been in touch with Mother. Mother told them, then she said, "I want to tell you, that when you've been through your procedure in the air force, you can come out to my place any weekend you want to, and have dinner with us or stay with us." Well, from that time,
- 32:30 I spent every weekend at 73 Hill Street, North Adelaide. And I loved and adored her. So, well, that's all I think I can say on Adelaide. Then I was posted to Deniliquin. Do you have any more questions?

Oh yeah.

- 33:00 **It sounds like that experience of having known Hugh, and him being killed...**

I've been to his grave twice in England. And took photographs of it for his mother.

Can you tell me a little bit more about your courtship?

It was very short, it was three weeks actually, just became very dear friends, we were writing to each other, sent each other photographs.

- 33:30 That came to a very sticky end with that Stirling. But as I say, I've been to Banbury, the cemetery twice. The first time was with my Harry, and two other friends who wouldn't leave me at the front gate. Oh no, they had to be beside me when I saw his grave for the first time. And Harry said to me, "Now you've made your pilgrimage." He got a flea in the ear for that later on, cause I accepted his wartime girlfriend
- 34:00 very nicely. But I didn't, so he was probably jealous. But how stupid. As I say, I took photographs, and the second time I went, I left Harry in the car and got over the little fence, cause the road had changed at Banbury, and we parked up on the nature strip, little bank, and I could see the war graves, and I hopped over the fence and went and took some flowers.
- 34:30 **So for three weeks, having known someone or being able to spend some time with them just for three weeks, it must have been a very strong feeling that you had?**
- I'll tell you what, well he'd never had a girlfriend and I'd never had a boyfriend. I was a yachty, I was a skater. I wasn't a sexpot if you know what I mean. Had oodles of friends, the boys I skated with sailed with, but I'd never felt
- 35:00 like that before about anybody.

And you met him at St Moritz?

Yes. Flat on the ice, five of them, remember? They grabbed me as I was skating past. He fell over. And Leo Reddin, Leo, one of his friends he went to the bombers squadron,

35:30 and he went up to Italy. He got a Distinguished Flying Cross. Titch O'Donohue was killed. Trevor Newstead was killed, and Ron Paxton he got back, the Branch Eagle got back, but only two got back of that group.

So that was that three weeks you had together while he was in Melbourne?

Yes, and do you know what, my mother, and I was working in the bank at that stage. My dear mother.

36:00 Hugh rang up and he said, "Look, we've got our marching orders." He couldn't say any more because, you know, don't tell the enemy might hear that a group were going on a troop ship somewhere out there. So he gave me this message on the phone. I'd just got home from work. And he said, "We're all going to go skating again, can you get down there?" And I said,

36:30 "Yes." So soon as I hung the phone up I told Mother, cause I'm over eighteen, just. Mother said you've been out four times this week, or in the last ten days, you're not going anywhere. So of course, I thought, what am I? I argued the point, oh no, she wasn't going to have a bar of it, I was staying home. So I turned on the sulky act,

37:00 went down the hall into my bedroom, carefully locked the door, tied the key in the lock to the knob, no one could do the old paper trick, you know, push the paper under the door. Got ready for skating, and went out the window, and closed the shutter and took off like a startled fawn. I made skating, and Leo's uncle was there, of course with his car, with the boys.

37:30 We all went to the Galleon coffee lounge after skating. And then they drove me home. And Hugh, and where the flats, and the sundial to the old home, Hugh was taking me to the front door. "Hugh, I can't." "But I've got to see you to the front door." I had to tell the truth. so he gave me a leg in through the window and kissed me good night, and I shut the shutter and I went and listened.

38:00 He went to the car and he told the boys, well you could have heard the laughter all the way down Orrong Road. And I was hoping to God Mother wouldn't hear him. That was that.

What a wonderful story, and so he went off shortly after that did he?

Yes, he went the next day. And then it was about

38:30 six weeks. Oh, now this is interesting, because he went on the [SS] Westerland, and then the [SS] Highland Brigade. They went in the Westerland to Pollsmoor, in South Africa. And then they transferred them to the Highland Brigade. Harry, my husband, went on the same ship,

39:00 with the same group. Harry saw my album there and he recognised a photograph, I said its Pollsmoor, so Hugh and Harry went on the same ship to England, incredible. During this time, Mother took me to a seer; she loved having her palm read or whatever. This woman said you are going to meet a fair man with the initial 'H'

39:30 and go overseas. Two 'H's'. Hugh, Harry. And I married Harry and I've been overseas umpteen times.

Okay, I'm just trying to piece this period of your life together, understand the chronology of it. So you hadn't actually joined the WAAAF's, you are still at the bank.

40:00 **So it's six weeks later when you got word that Hugh had been killed?**

I got word after I'd joined the WAAAF. They to the best of my memory, they sailed in August of '42, and I joined the WAAAF on January the 20th, '43, at eighteen and a half.

40:30 Now to get to England by ship took six weeks. They offloaded them in South Africa. They had a couple of weeks there, so if it was August, September, October maybe they didn't get to England until November, and then straight to OTU, Operational Training Unit. And then December, I'm in the air force in January. I was in the air force when he was killed.

But only just?

41:00 Maybe three months, I might have been. It was shortly after. I was definitely in the air force because meeting Hugh, that fixed me. I wouldn't have a bar of army or navy, it was air force all the way with me. Never changed.

Tape 4

00:31 **At the Showgrounds, when you were there, were there were many AIF [Australian Imperial Force] units? Were there other servicemen there?**

No, only air force.

So it was all air force?

No AIF. No.

So it was all air force there.

It was air force. Okay,

01:00 4 Wing was WAAAF telegraphist, of course. I don't know what wing they called the others. They were men and women doing flight rigger and flight mechanics. Now, when they became a flight rigger and flight mechanic, they can do a conversion course and become a fitter 2A and a fitter 2E, which is upgraded of course. So you can work on any aircraft, and you are a specialist.

01:30 Airframes and engineering, okay. There was 1 Embarkation Depot down near the main gate. There was the barracks there in the Leyland's building and other buildings. Young pilots that graduated from Uranquinty, Temora, Deniliquin, Geraldton all ended up at 1 Embarkation Depot, or 2ED which was Bradfield Park in Sydney. They keep them there until the ship was ready, and

02:00 their postings were England obviously, a few went to the desert, this was before New Guinea. They would be there on leave, coming and going every day, home at night, and as soon as their posting came through, they moved off on a train, the train to the ship, and away they went. That fills in the whole, apart from headquarters, and the hospital and the dental section. They were on every station.

02:30 **So how much contact did you have with the air force men? You know, were you allowed to fraternise?**

Oh God, yes. Lunch, dinner, tea, the messes were mixed. Everything was - the pictures, the dance, the canteen, no problem.

03:00 The only thing is they didn't go into our barracks, and we didn't go into theirs.

So did you form any close friendships during that time, with any of the men there?

Well of course, they were at 2 Embarkation Depot all the time, and I knew so many. I've got books full of close friendships; they are there on the table for you to look at.

03:30 **So you'd get to know them when they were on embarkation?**

No, I knew them from childhood to coming through there, because we'd all been at school together. They'd done a pilot's course, or a navigator's course. They came through ED and I just happened to be in the air force at the time, there. There wasn't much time for close friendships.

04:00 It was a whistle stop in and out.

But you were coming across people that you knew?

Oh yes, Ross Williams was leading the platoon when I was going AWL, knew damn well I shouldn't have been there.

So that must have made it a little bit more exciting I imagine, if there were people

04:30 **that you knew who were coming into the depot?**

Well, it was all work all the time. I mean, you only got one day off a week. And you were at work at eight o'clock in the morning until five. Not a lot of time, you've got your meals to get, you've got your washing to do. Three quarters of an hour for lunch, if I can remember correctly, it wasn't an hour. And then of course there was your study.

05:00 Not much time. Occasionally we'd have to put on all our tiddly gear and full blues and go into Melbourne in coaches and be on the Victory, the War March, War Bonds, thousands of ex personnel. Army, navy and air force on big marches through the city, raising money for the war. The Victory March was

05:30 the largest. And that was selected, mostly nursing service got there. I know one girl that was at school with me, but she was a nurse, and she ended up in New Guinea.

Did you enjoy doing that, going on the War Bond march?

Marching, oh yes, we were marching, nobody. You know, it was precision marching.

06:00 You didn't find people tripping over feet or on the wrong foot. Arms all up, and fists down, oh yeah. Usually, because I remember one, I think it was February the 8th in full blues, along the route march through the city, and I don't mean just down Swanston Street, it was a long, long march. It started, I think, in

07:00 Latrobe Street and down Russell Street, along Bourke Street and down to the Shrine in full blues, when the temperature was two hundred in the shade. It's not to be recommended. There was a place called the My Lady's Rest Lounge near the old Athenaeum theatre, between that and Georges,

07:30 women could meet each other and go and have a cup of coffee, powder their nose and what have you. I

don't think any one could get in the door after the march. I think every woman in the march was there, trying to mop up the sweat.

And would many people come out to see you?

Oh, the place was packed. It wasn't just us, there was army, navy,

08:00 air force, and of course all the services, all ranks, officers, ordinary seamen. Could be two thousand or more. More probably.

So it was quite a morale boost, wasn't it?

It was for the general population, gave them some idea just how many people were missing, contributing to the war effort, on their behalf.

Did you route march around Flemington and Kensington?

I did the one, well, we did go for a route march, yes, for exercise, which we didn't really need, but they used to think it was good for us.

08:30 And of course, the one that I told you about, Sergeant Batty and the, putting the coke in the palliasse, that was a long one, that was, get their own back.

Was that through the streets around?

That was eight miles. Well, I think it was eight miles, it mightn't have been, it might be five but we went right up behind the Showgrounds, and over the hills and past the abattoirs and down Racecourse Road, and

09:00 it was about four hours in full blues.

So were you examined at the end of that time there, the training? To graduate?

You passed when you got to the required speed, and the Aldus lamp,

09:30 twelve words a minute.

How did you practice the Aldus lamp?

The Aldus lamp, it clicks, you click your finger and the bars. You've seen ships blinking at each other, that's Aldus.

Yes, I have seen.

Some of them have a handle down here, and the bars open and close.

10:00 'Dits da da', and you know, 'da da de de da da de de' the whole alphabet. A 'dit' is a little flash of the bars.

So was that something you did within the classrooms?

It's what we did as well as the hammer. You didn't do any Aldus in the classroom, you did the Aldus outside.

10:30 Wouldn't matter where you did it, you could do it in here.

Yes I know, I was just trying to get a picture of what you were actually doing, and how they trained you.

Well, we all sat in classrooms on ordinary timber benches, with ordinary trestle tables in front of us.

Yes, so you were giving us a really good description of the set-up

11:00 **for training.**

Yes, as I was saying, it was a room with a wooden floor and tin roof naturally, and it was as big as this room, maybe bigger. About half as big again. As I say, trestle tables and of course, all the equipment was screwed down so that you, sat there. And the instructor was up at the top of the room.

11:30 And then when he got sick of sending to you, and you are supposed to be receiving. They always sent us to take it down, to try and get your speed up. When he got sick of sending, he'd walk off down the hall and put the tape on which would go much faster still. And so I remember one day, I was there, and Peter Coburn was his name,

12:00 and he'd been sending and then he decided to go down the hall and put the tape on. When he was down the hall I had a nice fat orange. I carefully peeled the orange under the desk, had it all ready and he walked in, of course smelling the orange. He walked up to his desk and sniffed, "Thank you ACW Francis, bring that orange up to me. I've just been waiting for you to peel it."

12:30 And he ate it, the bastard.

Okay.

We had a lot of drill instructors. Warrant Officer Foster was the head of that department. She was excellent, very fair, very nice woman, I liked her very much.

13:00 There was Peg Hamilton, and funnily enough she lives in Brighton and her son ended up going out for some years with my younger daughter. We loved her, some were nice, some were what we call 'happy in the service' that was a derogatory term for being a bitch, or a tabby cat, you know. "Oh, happy in the service." That meant pull your head

13:30 in and behave, you know, it was a slang term. There is a lot of air force slang you know.

Well, I'd love to hear it, anything you can remember, that would be great to have on record.

Oh I see. I've got a dictionary up there with a lot in, but RAAF slang and RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force], FAF [French Air Force] are all similar. I mean 'prang', a prang was a

14:00 crash, and a 'piece of cake' wasn't something you ate in the canteen, a piece of cake was an operation that went smoothly, a bombing operation was a piece of cake.

Yes, I've heard a few terms, like 'dicing'.

Oh 'dicing with death' that was up there too. Perhaps air-to-air gunnery, bombing practice. 'Dicing with death.'

14:30 **Were there any particular WAAAF slang?**

Yes, funny when you ask me straight out I can't think of one, can we talk a bit 'till one comes out?

Yes, let's keep it in mind as you are telling your story, it might come back to you. I know what it's like.

I've only got to look at a few books up there

15:00 with it in. Oh yes, there is a lot of, I remember one, in the WAAAFery. I'm going on to Deniliquin. I'm leaving Ascot Vale.

Yes, tell me the story that you wanted to.

Well no, it connects with Deniliquin better; we haven't got to there yet.

Ok, well we're getting there. It's probably time to wind up

15:30 **Ascot Vale. So you passed out?**

Boring, no I didn't pass out, I went to hospital with bronchitis and re-mustered to Adelaide as a clerk. And then posted to Deniliquin.

Okay, but you got a posting to Adelaide?

The bronchitis pneumonia. I had three weeks of it. They had me sleeping sitting up. I wasn't even allowed

16:00 to lie down, it was horrid. So I'd missed, my class had gone on by the time I got back. So I thought oh blow it, and I was being tempted to go to Adelaide, well I was being tempted to re-muster, put it that way. And so I decided to. But I know enough Morse code to repeat the alphabet to you today. If I picked up, I could send

16:30 possibly ten words a minute at this point in time, if I had the correct equipment. It's all old hat now, no one uses it. Mind you if you were lost in the desert and you had a torch, you could flash to an aircraft. Or if you knew the alphabet you could write 'dits and dats' on the sand. But that's ancient history.

17:00 **Now you were posted to Adelaide as a clerk, yet you'd been trained to work in telegraphy, so why did that change?**

Well, you don't have to be trained up to being in the Commercial bank as a clerk. I'd been through remittances, exchanges, I was highly qualified in that direction, and so I was posted to Adelaide as a clerk.

17:30 **And who were you with in Adelaide, what was the...?**

4 STT, 4 School of Technical Training at the Exhibition Buildings in North Terrace. The air force had taken over the Exhibition Buildings, and I told you about the city car park, that's all recorded earlier.

So can you tell me about a bit of the work that you did there in the Exhibition Buildings?

Nothing to tell, shuffling bits of paper,

- 18:00 usual things, forms, filing, nothing interesting. I told you I went out to Amy Griffiths on the weekend, when I had, wandered around the city on my own, and Hugh had been killed. I used to hire a boat and go and row up the Torrens for a bit of exercise, on my own, and then get the tram to North Adelaide to Amy Griffiths.
- 18:30 Wasn't the happiest time of my life. And then I was posted to Deniliquin. That is the interesting part.
- Yes, I'm really looking forward to getting to Deniliquin I can tell you. But before we get there, it would be really useful for the archive to just get a bit more detail about Adelaide and the School of Technical Training.**
- I couldn't tell you anything, it was a big old-fashioned
- 19:00 building, it's still there. It had a parade ground, the only interesting thing there was, that Queenie came out to Australia on War Bonds, on a Lancaster flown by Peter Isaacson. And Joe Grose, Don Delaney, both are dead now, had trained, they were technical, they came through 4 STT.
- 19:30 And Peter Isaacson is alive to this day. He was at our wedding, we were at his. He owned all the suburban newspapers. He owned about twenty-three magazines. Pete's around, and he's a member of my club. And he of course, flew out here from Queenie and flew over every capital city, and under the Sydney Harbour Bridge.
- 20:00 And that was War Bonds again. Nothing else happened in Adelaide, it was dreary.
- So tell me about that event though, when Peter came and flew the plane.**
- A Lancaster 4 STT, and everyone was out on the parade ground watching him. Later on, Don Delaney and Joe Grose, because they had been trained partially at 4 STT, they
- 20:30 came out and gave us a bit of talk on what was happening in England, on bomber command. They had about, I'm guessing, they had at least one tour of ops when they came out, maybe two. It's long ago, and Pete could tell me at a drop of a hat, but they came out, the two that had trained and gave us a talk that was all.
- 21:00 **Were you mixing with any aircrew at all during your time in Adelaide?**
- No, none. David Murray rang, that was funny, a friend of mine, he'd gone through Uranquinty and then he went to Mildura, which was 2 Operational [Training] Unit, 2 OTU. He had leave, and he
- 21:30 was coming through Adelaide and he decided he wanted to take me out, and he rang the flying officer. He was commissioned of course and he was an officer and he spoke to Flying Officer Grover and said he was my cousin, and was only in Adelaide over the day and night, and could I have leave. If I hadn't seen his hat on the central heater and
- 22:00 recognised it, I wouldn't have known. So I got called into her office, and she said, "There is a gentleman in the next room, who wants to see you, and have some special, a few hours off." I'd spotted this cap and recognised it. I said, "Oh, David?"
- 22:30 So I came up with the right name, and she said, "Yes, David Moon. In that case you can go off this afternoon." It was about half past three then. She said, "You can go off now, and go out to dinner and come back at..." You had to be back in barracks and in bed by ten o'clock bed check. But that's all.
- 23:00 No, Adelaide wasn't, it's a lovely city, and I've been there many times since but it wasn't very nice at that time. And it was cold and it was winter, and Hugh had been killed. Not very interesting posting rate notices.
- How long were you there for, at that?**
- I think about four months, not long my posting.
- 23:30 **Did any of the other girls go to Adelaide as well?**
- I went on the train with Mel Glasson and another girl, but where they went from there I don't know. We just happened to lob onto the train together. See, there were thousands of personnel, going north, south, east, and west, people being moved everywhere. But civilians weren't allowed to cross state borders, you couldn't hop on the train and say, "I'm going to Sydney
- 24:00 or Melbourne." No way, if you were in the air force you had VE34, the bus and transit voucher. All the trains were policed by certain service police that checked. Of course civilians had to have the required documentation. So it wasn't like it is today, that you can hop on a plane and go to Sydney
- 24:30 or hop on a train or anything, no. And of course, everything was rationed, tea, sugar, butter across the board, you had to have coupons for those things and clothing.
- So when you knew that you were being posted to Deniliquin, was the job that you would be doing described to you? What were the expectations of the work that you would be doing?**

25:00 Clerking, in an orderly room.

But were you looking forward to it, or were you very annoyed that you'd got this posting?

No. You don't, you're not annoyed, you do what you're damn well told in the air force. You were enlisted to go wherever, whenever. There is no comeback. If you are unhappy, too bad.

25:30 Lump it.

Okay, so by that point, by the time that you had finished your training, you were.

No, no, I was long through the rookie stage.

I'm just trying to get at, you'd done six months or whatever training, four months.

I did three weeks rookie training.

At Ascot Vale?

Yes. Three weeks,

26:00 and then I did the rest of the time at Ascot Vale learning Morse code.

Okay.

And then after the bronchitis, I was posted as a clerk to Adelaide.

Yes, so like you said, you just did what you were told to do, and you didn't.

26:30 Everybody has a job, it's just like running your office in there, wherever you are, there is a set pattern in what you do every day, unless you are a sales person or you are promoting something. It's just general mundane work.

So by that stage, by the end of your time in Ascot Vale, what were you enjoying about being in the air force?

You didn't enjoy being

27:00 in the air force, it was part of the war effort. It was within you to beat the bloody Germans and the Japs, there was no enjoyment. You didn't join up to enjoy yourself; you joined up to serve your country, come hell or high water. Or die. If you happened to meet some nice people on the job, so be it, but you didn't

27:30 know that. It was a war effort; it was a part of the war. People were dying in their multitudes, numbers everywhere. I mean look at London and the bombing. Look at the bombing raids on Berlin. Look at when the RAAF and the Yanks plastered Germany. Look at the Germans putting everyone in Belsen and Dachau, and killing the Jews

28:00 in the ghetto. You didn't just join up, but if you happened to meet a nice fellow at the local Red Cross hop, you enjoyed the evening like everybody else. Everyone was in uniform, and those that weren't, the civilians that didn't have any clothes, they were cutting down the lounge curtains and making skirts and things out of them. I made a beautiful pair of bathers out

28:30 of a small cotton tablecloth I got at Coles for no coupons. And when the situation was bad in Melbourne, Dad had a big air raid shelter dug in our courtyard in Lynedoch Avenue and had everything put down there. So if the bombing came here, and all those huge windows that could go, cause I told you, it was a big old mansion,

29:00 they were all covered in blackout material. And at night you didn't dare let a bit of light squeak out from a blind or a curtain, or you'd have the air raid warden rapping on your front door, and giving you one over the knuckles for it. Are these the sort of things you're thinking of?

This is fantastic. I mean cause what you're saying is

29:30 **well, how you joined up and all of that and it's important and it's good to hear very strong statements, and as well as that it was interesting what was occurring for you on a day to day personal.**

Well, what makes me snort is that one female, hummm, 'pussy cat', that said in Harry's hearing some years ago, not in this house. We'd built another one before when we first married, the other side of

30:00 the golf links, and we were in the bar, it's a lovely Japanesey back garden with a spa and lovely bar, and we had a pool at the front. The house grew like topsy, cause the children, we went to two storey then. Anyhow, she said, "You only enjoy the air force for the attractive uniforms." Well you should have heard Harry he went

30:30 through the roof, and I helped him, attractive uniforms, the cloth was rough. I wish I had some, I gave mine away years ago. I've got Harry's uniform, but that was an officer's uniform, that rough course cloth and jeans, buttons up the front. They were tough, nasty things, you lived in those. And in the

summertime, Bombay bloomers,

31:00 shorts to there, men and women, they were practically down to the knee, great big bottoms on them, you know, fit one, fit all. And this silly blonde says you joined up for the pretty uniforms. No one would ever join up the service, unless they were mental, for the uniforms.

31:30 The uniforms certainly have improved. And of course, the Americans had their uniforms beautifully tailored, but our mob didn't. The officers did, but the troops didn't.

Did you get time to convalesce at home, before you went to Adelaide?

No convalescing, three weeks in hospital, back to Ascot Vale, and then

32:00 I was working then in maintenance records. Ted Vargas told me about the fence that opened behind the wood shed when I nicked off, that's when I was there after I'd been in hospital. I was waiting for my posting to come through, and when it came through it was Adelaide. It all connected, see.

I get it. It does help.

32:30 **And contact with your family over that time?**

Only on leave, I lived in Melbourne, so whenever I had leave I went home naturally, for a nice bath and some decent food, predominantly.

Was there anything significant you can remember about that time and being on leave at home?

33:00 I only got a day, Sunday. Stand down at four o'clock Saturday afternoon, got on the tram and go home to Orrong Road, East St Kilda, and then you had to be back in barracks at ten o'clock, in bed on the Sunday night. It wasn't long. Later on, after your training was over, you were allotted leave on

33:30 your leave card, and you got four days leave every three months, which went on your card. So, if you let it ride over one three months, you'd have eight days at the end of six months, which at least gave you an opportunity to go to Sydney. And of course, you'd get the required leave pass and everything paid for. They'd give it to you in the orderly room.

Something else that I think's important is

34:00 **you said before that at Ascot Vale, you had these young men coming through, and it was an embarkation depot. There were men there that you knew from childhood.**

From Brighton, Russell Williams for a start, he went through aircrew and he just happened to be in transit there. There weren't very many.

So were you following what was happening to them?

No.

Was that something you would do?

34:30 No, you're too damn busy.

I mean once they got overseas and they got postings?

Well, if they were a particular pal, there would be plenty of letters flying, and people appreciated letters very much, particularly those on ops, or stuck in the Western Desert. England wasn't too bad because at least they had pubs and dances and everything else there, that the troops could amuse themselves in any off time.

35:00 There's not much joy in being stuck out in Borneo or Tobruk or anywhere in the Western Desert. It's just sand, and freezing nights and sweltering days. So it was a case of wait until you could either get back to England or get to Cairo or something then.

So were you writing a lot of letters to people?

Yes, I had a very nice filing system.

35:30 I'd get the letters back and I'd answer them and put the time and the date on them so that I knew that I'd answered them, and kept a fairly good correspondence going. Most of the ones are in that album right there, the little brown one.

Is that something you would do daily, would you write letters daily?

36:00 I didn't have much time. I was being kept well occupied by the air force.

Yes I know, but I imagine...

But you'd go into the recreation hut or to the Red Cross hut and they had plenty of notepaper and envelopes, at night, if you had nothing to do. Usually you did your washing and you went to the mess

and you had your meal and you went to bed.

36:30 There was very little else you could do, except go to the pictures. And once a month, but not at Ascot Vale, at Adelaide you had the city, to the Toc H. They used to run a dance for the troops, I never went. Deniliquin of course, had their own theatre on the station. They had a dance once a month, which was good.

37:00 **So there was a little picture theatre set up, was there, at Ascot Vale?**

A big picture theatre, big. When you've got several thousand troops on the base, you've got a big picture theatre. The biggest, not quite as big as the Moorabbin Town Hall, but big.

Do you recall any of the

37:30 **films that you saw?**

I've never been a film addict. Oh there were things, yes, 'Mrs Minerva'. Greer Garson and Walter Pigeon, that only comes to mind because Theresa Wright played the daughter in it, and she and I were like sisters, we looked so similar. And I remember John Laws' mother said,

38:00 "Elaine, I saw a film last week and your double's in it." So of course, I rushed along to see it. And I agreed with her. No, I can't remember. They were all good films, they came through fairly regular. 'Waterloo Bridge'. All with a strong war theme.

Were you getting the newsreels as well?

Cinesound used to run the newsreels.

38:30 They put those on.

So you were being kept up to date fairly well with what was going on?

Well usually, we didn't exactly get a newspaper every day, because they didn't distribute newspapers. You could go into the rec hut, and they'd have magazines and

39:00 newspapers, you know, on a frame, that you could look through. But no one had the time. I mean, you are up at six o'clock, you are in the mess at seven having breakfast, having had a shower and got dressed, and stacked your bed up, to procedure, of course. At night time, no, we didn't see much of the newspapers. No one had radios, so you didn't get anything

39:30 on the radio. No, I must say the distribution of news in those days was, plenty of word of mouth, what was happening, for those that could hear a radio or that at home. But you knew what was happening, bad news travels fast.

Tape 5

00:31 **What did you want to say Elaine?**

No, it was only thinking on ahead, now a couple of things have connected about Deniliquin.

Before we get to Deniliquin... You had a background with boats, with the yachts, you considered yourself a yachty, your father had been an army man, First World War,

01:00 **you were in the air force. What was the main motivation for you joining the air force and not one of the other forces?**

I think to be quite honest, Hugh Griffith, you know, from the time I met them at St Moritz and they all grabbed me and we fell over, and I started to teach them. And then of course, Daddy's best friend Bill Merritt had been air force

01:30 and was always talking about the RAAF, and Uncle Bill was a very interesting man, so I had a leaning in that regard. And I think it was finalised then by the fact that, number one, I did not want to join the navy. Mother and brother John, he was my buddy and my best friend in those days, he was navy.

02:00 But navy had no appeal, and army, no. And of course meeting Hugh and Cheeky and Leo and that, I think that swung the pendulum. I had no doubts then.

You mentioned the five chaps who fell on their bums at St Moritz, Hugh was one of them; the other fellows, did they all go off with Hugh as well?

02:30 Yes, Leo Reddin, Leo got a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] in his commission. He got a DFC in Italy going up to Monte Casino. Cheeky, poor Cheeky, they had made him an instructor in England, and then went on to coastal command, but not short Sunderland's, both fighters out of Scotland. Ron Paxton was commissioned, of course I don't know what

03:00 happened. I mean I know he made the war, got through it. Leo did too, but Leo died that was a (UNCLEAR) instead. The only one alive now is Cheeky, Joe Donahue was killed and so was Trevor Newstead that would be the group.

So you kept in touch with those guys?

Oh yes, right through, we were all great friends.

03:30 **How much rivalry, if any, was there between the various services as far as the women were concerned?**

Women, wouldn't have a clue, not a clue. Rivalry between them, the services, men and women in sports was strong. Army, navy and air force all together. I don't think we ever gave it a thought, rivalry between women.

04:00 Only just members of the other services. No.

You are saying on the sporting field there was rivalry?

Oh yes, hell for leather, yes.

Did you get involved in any of those?

I was in the services sports, swimming in the Wesley pool, we came down from Deniliquin for that, and I got four days leave for free on my leave card. I was very happy about

04:30 that. No, there was no, everybody got on well together. There was no friction, there was very, very little hanky panky. Everybody was, it was sort of 'look but don't touch' in those days, predominantly. One was warned, both men and women, particularly men

05:00 if they got a dose, they'd take a little holiday down to a certain enclosure, funnily enough, at 1ES at Ascot Vale with barbed wire round it. And there they were kept until they were cured. Women, I don't know, they probably ended up in the same place. Sex was not widely practiced in the services. The girls of course,

05:30 early on, the medical officer gave everyone a pep talk, and particularly we got a pep talk on what to do and what not to do. And if one got pregnant, one went O U T, services no longer required. Which was a very big blot, I never knew of anyone, in all the time I was there that went out that way. I guess it didn't happen, I never heard of it. I know one fellow who went through

06:00 on 38 course at Deniliquin, John Dingle. He had to take a little run down to Ascot Vale, didn't he, and with a name like Dingle, you can imagine what the fellows made of it.

I can but can you tell us please Elaine, what did they call him?

He got 'McDangle' and all sorts of, anything they could

06:30 think of. Nobody quite knows what, where he got it, although he took a little holiday down, to get cured. When we were at Ascot Vale, we all wondered why there was this pavilion right down in the far corner, with a big, high galvanised iron fence with barbed wire around it. Then we saw this senior medical officer going in regularly

07:00 with a couple of nurses, or the senior matron it was, and of course the word got out what it was. That went round like an operational signal.

No bolthole there I hope?

No, most definitely to be avoided.

What about, you mentioned early about the Yanks and their big presence in Melbourne, you didn't really get to know the

07:30 **Americans that well. What sort of reputation did they have?**

All the Aussies hated them. The men, there were plenty of brawls, a particularly big one outside Young and Jacksons, and one in Queensland where people were killed. Australian Army particularly resented them, because they pinched their women. As if they owned us, they were resentful.

08:00 And resentful because the Americans were (UNCLEAR) and got a hell of a lot more pay, and therefore could shout a girl a decent meal or buy her something and give her a good night out, where... See I got two and ha'pence a day. When I graduated, three and four pence. Now men got six and eight. I think they got double what we did. But if you were

08:30 air crew and you got your wings then you got seventeen and six pence. If then if you were commissioned, Harry was, you got twenty two and six, that was a fortune then. I married in '46, on July the 9th, and Harry worked for his father and he got twelve pounds seventeen and six a week. And our rent was two pounds seventeen, my family owned

09:00 my mother and Dad, owned the flats. I got two pounds, Harry gave me for housekeeping. I went to work and I earned thirty shillings a week, which went a hell of a long way. I mean you could get a glass of beer for two or three cents down at the Riverside Inn, where a number of us liked to gather on the

09:30 Friday night particularly. Until we found out that Twist and Bradshaw were busy there, they were two very famous criminals that were shot, remember the name?

Where was that?

The Riverside Inn, corner of Punt Road and Riverside Avenue, just by the big silos, sort of English style.

10:00 So some of the Williamson company fellows, Bruce Thompson and Ron McCauley and my sister and I we'd go down there. We'd meet Harry, he'd come from work and we'd have a drink or two, and get there straight after work because it was six o'clock closing in those days. You had to whip into a few to get a few.

10:30 But it was lovely, everyone turned up. It was the in place for the young I guess.

So, when you, I mean, did you drink at all before you joined the WAAAF's? Did you enjoy a drink or two?

At home, Mother and Dad always had scotch; I drank some beer, yes. All the Aussies drink beer, for God's sake. Always have some cold tinnies in the bilge,

11:00 in smaller craft, yes. I wasn't a big... I wasn't a spirit drinker. I drank beer.

You mentioned earlier that there was a brawl outside Young and Jackson's [hotel], did you see anything of that sort?

No, it was well written up, and the one in Brisbane was well written up. In fact I think it's in some of the books I've got, there were two or three people killed.

11:30 **I think even shots were fired?**

Well, I don't think it was shooting, I think it was more clobbering each other with whatever they could get a hold of.

You would have been in Melbourne when the Leonski murders...?

Oh, yes.

Tell us about that time.

Well now, that was before I joined the air force, so we are looking at '42. I joined on January the 20th 1943. And I'd go from home, Orrong Road, East

12:00 St Kilda, I'd go down along the tram route to East St Kilda to St Moritz to go skating. Well, one of the murders took place on the Esplanade around the oval just near the Fitzroy Street, in the doorway, whether it was in Fitzroy Street. So everybody was conscious of this, it was within three weeks, three or four women.

12:30 And then finally I'd, all the trams were blacked out too. You could see no streetlights, you had to try to study fences to know when to get off the tram. Of course, rather than walk up on the footpath, and having fences up to my place. I'd go in the middle of the road and run like blazes. So if anyone popped out of a fence or anything,

13:00 I'd be off. It was a very unpleasant time. They got him in the end. Of course they got him at Camp Pell, which is as you know, at Royal Park. He was found washing his uniform, it was covered in mud and a university lecturer was found in a slit trench, and one of the other troops apparently saw him washing a uniform,

13:30 which would be a strange thing to wash, an American uniform. So he reported him and that's how they blew the case open. They hung him. He's buried at Pentridge somewhere.

That's great, you paint quite a picture of that time. It must have been a very tense period, especially for young women.

Not nice when you think of a serial killer.

14:00 But otherwise the Americans behaved were well behaved, and I think our fellows got drunk more than the Americans. But I never went out with one, and I never knew any, or make any effort. I met up with Americans in Japan after the war.

14:30 I was up there for three months during the Korean War. One of my best friends to this day is Colonel Roy Tonkin, he's dead now, and his wife. On the whole, they are just like we are. There are nice ones and nasty ones, but there are good soldiers and bad ones.

You were talking before about the pep

15:00 **talks you received to do with your rudimentary sex education, what to do, what not to do. I noticed in the notes something about a concoction of bromide and tea, what was that?**

And tea. All the fellows drank it, all the tea and coffee were in urns in the messes. Well the air force mess, our mess, not the officers' or the sergeants', and

15:30 I reckon it was three days old, it was terrible. The boys reckoned they put bromide in the tea to kill our sexual drive. Whether it was fact or fiction, I wouldn't have a clue. It was revolting anyway, so one didn't drink it. I preferred to make my own down in my office.

Ok, so do you want to tell us, Denny was the next

16:00 **posting after Adelaide. Now was there a period in Melbourne prior to that or was it straight up?**

Straight.

How did they get you up there?

Train. That train it took twelve hours. 7 SFTS [Service Flying Training School] started in the summer of 1943 following the tedious train trip from

16:30 Melbourne lasting approximately ten hours. One arrived hot and sticky and boarded the RAAF, tender bound for the RAAF station. On being deposited at headquarters one was taken to the orderly room, and following some paperwork performed by the duty clerk I soon found myself in hut thirty-four. On entering the hut I ran into an old school chum, Molly Haslem and following a quick shower and unpacking, headed for the mess. We had dinner

17:00 and proceeded to do a bit of ear bashing until lights out at ten o'clock. Our hut consisted of a corrugated iron roof and walls, timber frame and floor; our beds were cyclone wire stretchers with the usual straw mattress." That was the same as other stations; I'll skip that bit. "Conditions were spartan to say the least, but having survived Number 3 Cattle Pavilion at 1FTS [Flying Training School] and

17:30 the Melbourne Show Grounds and the southern winter in Adelaide." I'll skip that. "The only thing I did that I did not anticipate was the dust storms which I was soon to learn about. One whirled in one night just after stand down, and covered blankets, lockers and the lot. The visibility inside the hut was one and a half metres." Inside the hut.

Can I ask you some questions now Elaine?

18:00 **That's given us a great lead into a couple of things. Deniliquin, obviously as you are suggesting here, is incredibly dry. What season were you there?**

I was there in the summer; I was there in the winter.

So tell us, yeah dust storms, and you said how spartan it was?

18:30 Now you've got the spot where I finished, have you?

Yes. But tell us what you were being posted there to do. What was to be your role?

I was a clerk, but, for want of better words, I hit 'pay dirt.' I was, I thought I'd end up in the orderly room, somewhere. Two of us arrived on the station at the same time, Jane Turton and I.

19:00 And she was sent to maintenance records, very boring, keeping all the nuts bolts and screws, the airframes and things. I was posted to YNZ Flight, AST, Advanced Squadron Training to keep course reports for fifty trainee pilots, and I had about twenty flying instructors to deal with. I had a field day, it was wonderful. They were a bunch of

19:30 wonderful flying instructors, I got on famously. And fifty trainee pilots, I think the world of them, some of them up there in that picture and in my album. So I duly arrived at YNZ Flight. I was given an office, I was told that I was to keep the flying charts and all the pilot's times, air to air, gunnery, bombing, their ground subjects and everything.

20:00 And I became Topsy, they christened me, the flying instructors. A Flight Lieutenant Lindsay Rounds, the flight commander of YNZ Flight, I was supposed to do as I was told and click my heels and say, "Yes sir." Which of course I did nothing of the sort. The first thing of course they decided was that Topsy, apart from doing very neat paperwork,

20:30 and keeping the office very neat and clean, I would then have to make a tea club. So duly, the carpenter, chippie was told to make a box. And everything of course, tea was rationed, sugar was rationed, you could get coco without, butter was rationed. So I could get coco, coffee was rationed.

21:00 So I told, well they were officers and sergeants and warrant officers so half belonged to the sergeants' mess and half to the officers. So I told them they'd better chat up the stewardesses and try and get a bit of you know, slipped into the back pocket. Otherwise they would darn well have to starve. Well, but the supply lines were fixed up very

- 21:30 neatly. The alternative to that was for me to hang around the rations store, wait until the tender came in, and Joe then went into the office, you'd whip a pound of butter and 'shwip' gone. The boys liked bread, toast and they liked crumpets. I had my bike up at Deniliquin, I had that there, so I was given a, signed my leave pass and off I'd go
- 22:00 to the township, which was about two miles away. I'd stack up on crumpets and bread and jam and anything, else. They'd all kick in, you know, twenty cents each, you could buy an awful lot for twenty cents. So the tea club started operating. Then some of the instructors of course, got a little full in the mess at night, and missed breakfast, so how were they going to manage with bacon and eggs?
- 22:30 Well, there again, con the girls in the officers' mess and the sergeants' mess, acquire it by fair means or foul, and I shall cook it. I had a jerry can and an upturned radiator, problem solved. So I would cook bacon and eggs. Anyhow, they didn't need them very often, but occasionally. Then
- 23:00 we would worry about the trainee pilots, that was predominantly my job across the board. Oh, I came into my office the next morning, and the boys had started tampering with the food supply when they were night flying, and start drinking up all my coffee, all the supplies, and then of course the
- 23:30 cupboard's bare the next morning. So this particular morning they got into it, and I had put a little lock and padlock on the door. But they got the screwdriver out and undid the lot; they still got in and cleaned out my tea club. So I said a few fairly well chosen words about them being useless, bludging bastards, I think I said. So they said, "Topsy's getting out of order." And they put me out the
- 24:00 window. The sills up here, Topsy's got her hands on the tarmac and her feet on the windowsill, I had blue jeans on. So eventually, well, "You stay there until you say you're sorry." "I'm not sorry, grrrr." Eventually they pulled me in, I looked around me and there's a gentleman in a blue patterned flying suit,
- 24:30 I didn't know him. "Oh," they said, "ACW Francis, this is Wing Commander Bobby Gibbs." Who was a great a great air racer in those days, Battle of Britain, New Guinea, you name it. And here I'd been calling them silly bastards and all sorts. He asked, "What did they do, dear?" I said, "Look at the mess, all those ring marks on my furniture." He said, "Well I couldn't agree
- 25:00 with you more." He said, "You fellows smarten up," he said, "the girl shouldn't be cleaning up your mess." So that was the tea club. But now I can get on to a couple of funny stories that are in there, relating to the one in there relating to Lindsay Rowell my commander. Lindsay was a great big raw boned fellow, very rugged, good looking
- 25:30 with a very loud voice, very manly type. Lindsay had a gang of friends, they used to drink in the mess at night. On this particular morning, he came down to the flight office with a terrible hangover, he'd been giving it a bit of a nudge all night. He was taking up Flight Lieutenant McNamara on air-to-air gunnery. So he hopped in the Wirraway, in the back cockpit,
- 26:00 just sat there. McNamara got in the kite and just tootled off to the ITS [Initial Training School] extension to take off and he took off, and of course Lindsay Rowell. So off I go over into the wide blue yonder and over Allendale, where they could see the aircraft towing the drone, which of course they had to shoot at, McNamara looked at the thing and went up
- 26:30 and hit it. Called out into the speech tube, "How was that, sir?" No answer. "I think I hit it, how was that?" He looked round. No sir. He'd gone like that. Gravity took sir who hadn't done his lap belt up. Fell out, straight out of the aircraft. And poor old McNamara went on a steep turn and there was sir drifting earthwards under his
- 27:00 parachute. He came back to earth and he landed, he came back to the flight office. Ben Chaffy was the lieutenant in charge. It's well known Chaffy's at Mildura, the wine people. Mac said, "S-s-s-sir, I lost the f-f-f-flight commander," "What do you mean you lost the flight commander?" Of course, he told him. Well by this stage, talk about
- 27:30 an operational signal workshop, the hangars, the 'Erks', air force slang for ground staff, appeared from everywhere. They got two tenders and they went out into the bundoon to look for Lindsay Rowell. They found him, of course. McNamara pinpointed the spot over Allendale and that. Eventually Lindsay came hobbling into the flight office, saying, "Hooley dooley, now I'm a member of the Caterpillar Club."
- 28:00 Now the caterpillar was a small gold stickpin, which you wore over your wings if your life had been saved by a parachute. I think made by Turner Chutes, but I'm not one hundred percent sure on that. Because if you 'hit the silk', air force slang for baling out, that is what they awarded you, a caterpillar. Lindsay Rowell, having busted a small bone in his ankle on landing,
- 28:30 ended up with Doc Sangster, and being plastered up and we all wrote rude things all over the plaster. That's one story, and following that story, the same Lindsay Rowell and his gang of pirates, they were in the mess again this night misbehaving. And they were very hungry and it was after ten and the stewards had all gone off, so they thought they would go have a look in the kitchen.
- 29:00 They opened the fridge, and what should they find, but a beautiful silver platter with a Murray cod on it. They took the Murray cod, they barbequed it, they ate every scrap of it and put all the bones back on

the silver plate and put it back on the fridge. The next morning all hell broke loose. It was the CO's [Commanding Officer] fish. Group Captain P. G. Graham

29:30 had caught the fish in the Edward River, and he was planning to have a few guests for dinner the following night, and it had been put in the mess fridge. Well, was he furious, and everybody around the station discussed the merits of barbequing Murray Cod, and not a soul didn't know who it was. The only person who didn't know who the culprit was I think was the CO, Phil the Dill, his nickname, was

30:00 Group Captain P. G. Graham. Phil the Dill, hated, nobody liked him, from the highest to the lowest. So that's two stories about the life.

They are great stories, and wild. Truth is stranger than fiction.

Lindsay ended up after the war, I believe as a farmer on Kangaroo Island.

30:30 **So who were you answerable to? What was the chain of command where you were?**

I was answerable to Lindsay Rowell, one of the flight instructors, which amounted to absolute freedom, as long as I did my work. I didn't have to click my heels. Oh, a WAAAF officer of course, was Flight Officer Mendel

31:00 and she was Jewish, and she was wonderful. Mandy as we called her, was the fairest WAAAF officer I've ever come across. We all had endless respect for her. She naturally was in charge of all the WAAAF, in charge of anything to do with the sections. See, I mean you had WAAAF in medical, we had WAAAF in the orderly room, we had WAAAF parachute packers. And

31:30 Vera Evans, there in my book, Vera ran the parachute section. You had maintenance records, you had all across the, chemists, you had mess staff. So she wasn't in charge of all that, she was just the head shebang, covering the WAAAF, their behaviour, their leave, their seniors. Their the WAAAF'ery. What should be done and what shouldn't be done. You know, just general.

So a long as you were doing your work

32:00 **and behaving you were left to your own devices pretty much. It would be great for the archive to get a sense of your work, your office, what that was like, who was there and the routine of the day.**

My office would be about twelve feet square, had a desk in it, it had the tea club cupboard, it had little black aircraft for identification.

32:30 And I collected those, so I put them up hanging from the ceiling. And it had flying charts pinned on the walls, and it had a blackboard, it had a desk and my chair and that's all. It had the, as the trainees' log books came in, they'd fill in their log books, what they'd done how many hours or whatever it was,

33:00 and whether it was air-to-air gunner or navigation or cross-country or what. And I transferred to the charts so the instructors could see at a glance what was going on, because you can't rattle through fifty log books in a hurry. And so the flight charts of fifty trainee pilots.

That's interesting because we interviewed a lot of men who did their training at places like Deniliquin and

33:30 **have shown us their logbook, so this was all those log books translated onto one board.**

I've got Harry's logbook in my safe; it's very valuable with the detail in it. The first section of the logbook, from the time they start you off, had their service number and everything; you go to ITS Somers, EFTS [Elementary Flying Training School]

34:00 Elementary Benalla, Tiger Moths. Then 7 SFTS to finalise your flying career at Deniliquin or wherever. If you are on twin you go to a twin, if you are on heavies or going on to Lancasters you usually go to an aircraft to start with and then convert to four engine aircraft at OTU or in England, or wherever at the time.

Are you able to recall what the flight logs

34:30 **looked like, how that was?**

It was just like coloured in, not a graph like that, ribbon up with the arrow across, so at a glance you could see, you know, in each section.

So you were quite in the know in terms of what was going on with lessons?

Oh, very

35:00 much so. Oh yes. And of course, I didn't have to go on parade every morning, which was lovely. I'd hop on the bike and go out the back way and around the tarmac to work. Parades were boring, you always tried to get out of them. All the headquarters staff and the others, no way, they had to turn up. So parade was at eight o'clock.

35:30 By that time I was in the safety of my office door, and of course, then the boys, Lindsey Rowell and all of the... said, "Oh no, Topsy you can't go on parade, we need you. We have work for you. We were night flying last night." And you know. And that was their excuse, and I went along with it.

So how long were the shifts when you were doing that?

Eight o'clock to five,

36:00 with three quarters of an hour for lunch, unless they wanted me to go into town to do some shopping for them, then they would have to sign my leave pass. And I could always dawdle if I wanted to, no one was keeping tabs on me. They couldn't have cared less, as long as I came back with the goodies.

So how much would you have to do with the WAAAF officer, Mandel?

Not a lot.

36:30 I liked Mandy very much, she was a good hand. And she came into our hut in winter time and we had a pot bellied stove. And of course you were not allowed to cook, but we had jerry cans, somebody had acquired some steak, by obviously foul means, and we had it all going with eggs, also acquired, on the pot bellied stove. And in came Mandy,

37:00 oh goodness, we're sunk. She looked down between the bunks and the stretchers, "You ACWs know that cooking is illegal." "Yes madam." "Now what have you got to say for yourselves?" "Nothing madam." "Well, I'll tell you what. I'll give you a warning this time, now give me that

37:30 stool." She sat down. "See that piece of steak there, I'm going to have it." You've got no idea how quickly it went on the plate. We gave her the best feed she'd probably had in a week. And she forgave us and left the hut. "But I don't know anything about this, make sure there is no evidence." That was Mandy.

38:00 **You mentioned the hut, hut thirty-four if I'm not mistaken. Tell me more about that, can you describe it for us, and who was in the hut with you?**

Hut thirty-four, that brown album there, there's a picture of it.

Do you want to have a look at it?

I think I can manage it without my glasses. That's the flight

38:30 office, and there are some of the flight officers, hut thirty-four, that's all the girls outside hut thirty-four. That is Vera and Muriel sitting in the window. It was just an elongated tin hut, a corrugated iron hut with a board floor, and board roof, just with the air force

39:00 stretchers and same as everywhere. The nice thing about it was that when I got there, the pilots, the one's on tarmac duty, the ones who had missed out on going straight up, they were busy digging out a swimming pool. The hut had a back door, right to the swimming pool. And it finished in no time, and it was thirty-three yards long, so

39:30 you could do laps, one hundred metres and it was very nice. As I said, the trainee pilots on tarmac duty, they built it. They concreted it, and it was good.

Did you train there for your inter service?

Oh yes, I used it for training. And we had a tin fence 'round the WAAAFery, with an overlapping, so that you could come in there

40:00 and no one could see through, do you get me? Tin fence with another section there. And one night the girls in hut twenty-nine, they heard water running, and two of these pilots back from partying somewhere in the township, they got the fire hose of the hydrant and stuck it through the window of hut twenty-nine and turned it on. Of course, you could imagine

40:30 the shoes and gear and everything flowing out the end door. Oh there was a rumpus about that. But nobody knew who did it, well I know first who it was, Leo Kilgareth and Rusty Cubby.

They've been outed.

But see you remember all the fun things and you are inclined to sweep the sad things under the mat.

41:00 There is a cemetery on the end of the run, full of trainee pilots who did the wrong thing.

Tape 6

00:32 Now, I will tell you a rather amusing story from a long time ago, about 1939. "Some gent from Camden, New South Wales, possessing a definite sense of humour coupled with a talent for painting, painted an amusing picture of Hitler in various colours. He framed it in a hollow sink, you know the type, hung on

the wall

- 01:00 by a familiar chain," in brackets "(Air Personnel For The Use Of)". He then presented it to the officers' mess at Central Flying School. From then onwards, all stations in eastern Australia were the competitors for the purchase by fair means or foul of A.C.T. Hitler. The rules stated that it had to hang on an open hook in the mess, that it was readily removable
- 01:30 in a smash-and-grab-raid. Well, he was soon grabbed by CFS [Central Flying School] and after some two years or so landed at Deniliquin. One day a team left from Mildura, with Spitfires, twenty Kittyhawks, and a couple of Boomerangs plus one Wirraway. There was a mass attack on Deniliquin."
- 02:00 In other words they had a big shoot up. Now a shoot up of course, everybody is out there from officers, hangars everywhere watching the show. So while this was happening I would like to tell you that two flying instructors landed the Wirraway, and they landed the Wirraway at Allendale, which was a satellite drome. Being officers they didn't have to talk to the ground staff around, they just hopped in the tender and took off.
- 02:30 So they came straight through to the drome, in past the guard, waved a piece of paper at the guard and kept going, and of course into the officers' mess they went. Couple of officers sitting there reading a paper, these two looked and said, "A Spitties pranged on the drome." And with that, two of the officers went off to have a look at the Spitfire that had crashed on the drome.
- 03:00 Pranged, crashed. Of course, when they'd cleared the mess, these two carefully went unwound the Hitler's face, which was on a hook like a furniture spring. But it had already been connected to the burglar alarm at the stations alarm system, and these two knew what they were doing. They turned the power off before they took Hitler. So they put it under their arm, rushed out,
- 03:30 jumped in the tender, tore out the gate as the guard was leaning on his rifle, smoking a fag. And they just waved to him and blew him a kiss and shot off. And of course, guards don't fight officers, so he went on smoking his fag, and off they went to Allendale. Got in their Wirraway and flew back to Mildura with Hitler. Well, Peter Jeffrey was the CO who'd been famous in the Western Desert in 3 Squadron, and Pete
- 04:00 was very happy to see Hitler back in the mess. So there again, he's put on the wall, on a very tight hook with a gun pointing at him, fully loaded so that if anyone tampers the gun would go off. Also connected again to the burglar alarm system. Everyone rubbed their hands, they had Hitler back again. Now there was one young electrical mechanic,
- 04:30 who'd been confined to barracks for some sin, so he wasn't very happy in the service. And he thought 'I'll fix the bastards.' So on this particular occasion, when everyone was fast asleep at night, he nipped into the officers' mess, being an electrical engineer or tradesman, he turned off the power, removed Hitler, and put Hitler in the suitcase and put it under his bed. He was
- 05:00 posted to Cressy, with effect from three weeks hence. Well, would you believe it, the next morning, when they went into the mess Hitler had gone. The CO was ranting and raving and bellowing like the proverbial bull. He had the Melbourne train stopped and searched it. They searched everything coming and going on the station but there was no Hitler, and three weeks later, our little friend
- 05:30 who had Hitler in the case under his bed, left the station quite happily and arrived at Cressy and gave Cressy the present of the Fuhrer. And of course, Cressy was beside itself. So of course, that's when the air force headquarters started getting a bit tired of this business because it had been going on for years. And not only there were no spare aircraft, there was an awful lot
- 06:00 of RAAF fuel which was short in wartime. So they, somewhere along the line after Cressy, someone confiscated Hitler. What they did with it no one knows to this day, if it was found ever. Well it would be in the war museum in Canberra, because it's a true story, and the skulduggery that went on during this time was absolutely astronomical. So
- 06:30 that's the story.

That was fabulous Elaine, that was very well conducted I must say. So you've written about that story, it's your writing?

That story, beautifully put together, has gone to that competition for Vets. You know I did the poem as I said, and got second prize last year. Seven hundred and seventy one entered

- 07:00 for that.

What I want to ask, is that story known outside of the air force or outside of the service?

I can't answer that question, I was inside. It must have been talked about. It's famous, everyone up to this day who has served in World War II would know about it. All the flying types would. They are commonly known as general duties.

- 07:30 If a pilot is GD, general duties, meaning aircrew. Well, there you are, there's the two holding it. I funnily got on to a fellow in Townsville through my writing matter, and he had that picture of Creswick and the

other bloke holding it and he sent me a photo copy.

08:00 So, it's a very true story that one.

And no one really knows what happened to it?

No one knows what happened, everybody from Sir Fredrick Scherger, who was chief of joint services, Scherger doesn't know. Bill Townsend, they were all air com. There was air vice marshals, David Evans is alive still, he was chief of air staff in Canberra. And I know the whole damn lot of them. Apart from David the rest are all dead.

08:30 They'd give their eyeteeth to know where it was. I mean this is like Bill Dargie, Sir William Dargie who painted Harry's father, in the hall, as a young wartime artist. He was in Townsville at a mess party, they were all kicking on, you know, and he decided he'd like to paint General MacArthur and they didn't have any, he had paints with him but nothing suitable.

09:00 So they took the dunny door off didn't they, and he painted MacArthur sitting on the dunny like this, with four stars across his helmet. And in the late seventies I think it was, there was a church out at Townsville that wanted it's spire fixed, so everybody was asked to contribute to a jumble sale, and this old lady had this old door in her back shed that someone had painted, "Daubed on," she said,

09:30 during the war, and would like to donate it to the jumble sale. And it was signed Dargie, and it was of MacArthur on the dunny. Now that is true, and it sold for about four or five thousand, helped build the new spire. So you never know, this talent that appears in the most unusual places.

10:00 **Well it sounds like a pretty talented crew up there at Deniliquin, you know, the pranks you got up to and the imagination that people had.**

We also had a tennis club. They had the Air Force House in the township that was put together by the wives of the local station owners, sheep stations, not the railway station. Mrs Ruth

10:30 Millier, and Mrs Everett and the Faulkners from Bulla, they all contributed. They bought this house in the township and they used to have the most beautiful roast dinners for us, and dances, and magazines, and writing paper, you name it, it was a home away from home for a lot of people. I must say that there were those that

11:00 went there were mostly aircrew trainees, the ground staff didn't care for it because there was friction between aircrew a bit. It's not right to say friction, but there was a feeling that, you know, they were up there and God, and they were down here doing the dirty work. But I didn't see too many ground staff, and there weren't very many WAAAF

11:30 there either. I think some of the transport girls did, but I was rather lucky because when I hit Deniliquin, I found three girls living in the township who were borders with me at school. Pat Bolt as the local chemist, Fay George was the local dentist's daughter, and one of the others was the doctor's daughter. And from those three, that lead me to knowing all the property owners and going out for weekends at Stud Park

12:00 or Bullocks Stud. Oh wonderful, but we all kicked in, we helped. Ruth and Tom Millier would have at least eight or twelve staying every weekend. Naturally we made our own beds. I'm not too sure who stripped them or how often, but nobody worried about that in those days. But we'd sit down on the back doorstep and shell peas.

12:30 I've never seen so many peas in my life. We'd do the spuds, and we'd all contribute wherever we could, that was just lovely to be there. All the people, we had a lot of fun with them. Rosie, their eldest daughter I know, they live at North Deniliquin. And David Lowey her husband is still friends, the rest have all departed. And

13:00 David's been very involved with the RAAF's board and he got an OAM [Order of Australia Medal]. He's been very active in a number of fields up there. But they sold Stud Park because it was getting past them. And besides, the merino industry died away up there and everything went into rice. Irrigation came through the Mulwala canal which was built during the war,

13:30 our war, but it was never filled, they hadn't connected, joined it up. But of course, when it filled up they found that Denny was a very good rice growing area.

That leads me quite well onto what the Deniliquin environment was like. Can you talk a bit about Deniliquin back then, when you were posted there, the environment and

14:00 **the conditions, the dust storms?**

Oh yeah, well dust storms were part of the, it was drought years and there wasn't a blade of grass to be seen anywhere except on the back of the gunnery range. Of course, the air force kept it watered to stop it blowing away. Gunnery range being a bank that they tested the cannon on the aircraft against the front of it. But oh no, those

14:30 dust storms they were horrible. I mean, I'm not kidding. If one was in this room, you could see possibly

as far as the central table, inside the hut. On one occasion, it was after five o'clock, I lied down on my bed and we stripped everything put them in the locker, put newspaper over them. I couldn't see the girl in the next bed, which

15:00 was as far as far as that table, inside the hut. And the clean up, was horrendous. So dust storms, but Denny's covered in lovely green grass now. 'Course the canal went through the irrigation, although we had droughts and they had droughts. And then the next time after the war, Harry and I went up there with my sister, and Brian King for the Easter tennis

15:30 tournament and there were floods.

You also mentioned earlier that there was a cemetery just inside the gates, or near the base there.

On the edge of the drome.

Can you talk a little bit about the trainee pilots, and the accidents that occurred? I understand that there were quite a few casualties.

Well, I only know of about fifty

16:00 air force pilots. I've been around it often enough, on reunions we always visit the cemetery. It's next to the local cemetery. John Gerard comes to mind, he was on 43 course, one of my mob up there. But I can't, the graves are all tended, the War Graves Commission does a wonderful job, wherever it be. Whether it's the Bomana War Cemetery in New Guinea or whether it's in Banbury,

16:30 Oxford in England, they do a splendid job.

So were there many accidents with training pilots while you were there?

A few accidents, I remember three killed in my time. Smithly, Gerard and I think one other. I can't remember his name. As I say, there is about fifty in the

17:00 cemetery. And some were taken away, families wanted them put in the home plot or whatever.

So can you remember them occurring, can you tell us, the accidents?

They were mostly night flying and I didn't see them. I happened to be down at medical one day and a fighter came in, I don't

17:30 know where it came from, but it flew low over the drome and then it flipped and went in, over the Cannago Road which was about two hundred meters from where I was, two hundred, three hundred yards. And I think it went in and burned and we washed out. And Frank Bushell, I think he was the senior technician,

18:00 he x-rayed the parts and he managed to pull the pilot out, somebody called Davis, can't think of his first name. Davis was his second name. We got him into hospital. He mended but the other pilot was killed.

So these night flying accidents would happen...

Oh occasionally, Smithwick I think, went in at night.

18:30 It was par for the course at most training stations. The instructors used to make a joke about it and talk about a nice piece of roast trainee. I suppose that's one way of looking at it.

19:00 **So how did it affect the atmosphere in the mess say, or on the drome? You know, how did it affect morale?**

No, here today, gone tomorrow. Some 'bought it', that means killed. If you 'bought it', you killed yourself.

19:30 Pilot error, usually, nobody paid. Well everyone was sorry that someone was killed, but you don't start the whole station weeping over it. Thousands were being killed in the desert and in England and everywhere else. It was taken as a fact of life.

20:00 **Would there be a funeral or a memorial service?**

Well if there was, I never went to one. Oh, they'd have a funeral naturally, because they used to put them in the plot over at the ITS runway at the cemetery. I never saw one. I don't know when it happened, and it must have happened because they were planted lets face it. Obviously their families if they were,

20:30 came to it. I don't know. We were more worried about a little girl that got lost in the Gulpa area down past Mathoura. It was all muck and trees and billabongs and things. This kiddie wandered away from her parent's farm, and the whole station had to turn out, and they took us within three miles of this area and dropped us

21:00 in a circle, we all had to walk in. We found her, she was found all right, but she was dead. And of course

snakes, not very nice.

Can we talk about Harry, when did you meet Harry?

I met Harry a week after VP [Victory in the Pacific] day. I'd been discharged a couple of weeks

- 21:30 and I was being pursued by a naval officer, called Larry Wedge, who became judge advocate of the navy years later, in the end. Larry was keen on me, but I wasn't keen. His parents were pushing it and my mother, "Oh, the navy dear," was pushing it. So I decided to hotfoot it out of Melbourne
- 22:00 and went up to Mildura. A school friend of mine had a property up there. So I rang her and she said to come up. So I said, "Book me into the best hotel in Mildura, and I'll come up for four days, until he goes back from leave." Which he did, and I was coming back to Melbourne on the train, there was the air-conditioned carriage and there was a non air-conditioned, and then there was steerage, you know, for the
- 22:30 also rans. And Gwen, a friend of mine who was in the WAAAF up there said, "What are you in?" I said, "I'm in the non air-conditioned first class carriage." "Oh, I know Joe Blow over there, the service policeman, he's got the officers' bookings." So she went over to him and she said, "Joe I've got a friend going back to Melbourne, ex WAAAF, what could you do about this?" He looked at my ticket and he said, "I've got one here in the first class
- 23:00 air-conditioned carriage. It's for a wing commander Air Training Corps, hate the quiz kids." They were schoolmasters that trained personnel before they joined the air force, they were called Air Training Corps, and they wore a uniform. So of course, we swapped tickets and I got in this air-conditioned carriage, and I saw four parachute bags on the rack, and of course only officers travelled first class. And I saw a WAAAF officer's cap there, so I plonked myself
- 23:30 down here. The flight attendant here, and one, two, three flight attendants opposite. I was in civvies, I'd been discharged, young Harry was opposite me and we introduced first names, then down came the parachute bag with the beer in it, and I passed one to the WAAAF officer and I, you know, you don't drink with strange men.
- 24:00 So I had one and they wouldn't take it, so I thought oh well I'd better drink it. Then by the time we got to Ouyen, John Riccard, opposite here said, "Elaine, what's your surname?" And I said, "Francis." He said, "Oh, I thought so. It's in our teledex at home." He said, "I'm John Rickards." I thought, oh God, Jocelyn was at grammar with me from kindergarten until leaving.
- 24:30 or until 2C to leaving, and he was the eldest brother. Of course, we were friends and so we slept through the night, and I slept on his shoulder and Harry nursed my feet, he was opposite, and I nursed his feet. And a long trip in a tiny carriage isn't very much fun, no one can move, you know. When we got to Melbourne, Rickards and Markby and I, we all got the same cab we were all going...
- 25:00 John lived in Queens Road, Harry on Dandenong Road, Armadale and I lived around the corner in Orrong Road East St Kilda. Riccard said to Markby, "You'd better cop on to her, before someone else does." And that's what happened.

Lovely way to meet.

And I was most impressed when I grabbed Harry's logbook, cause Harry didn't know

- 25:30 that I had been in the air force. He'd made a squash date with me, and we went, we played squash, when he came home I had a beer and oyster supper for him. And there was that magnificent picture of mine that's in the front room, of me in uniform. I waited and waited for him to say something, not a word did he say. So I didn't say anything, he found out later on.
- 26:00 Cause I grabbed his logbook when I up at his place, and I looked at his classification, FTS [DFC] which I knew and dealt with so often in my air force career. It is an exceptional rating as a pilot. Four were given out during the war. The best thing I ever saw was above average, fair, very
- 26:30 fair, very good, but exceptional, excellent. So, of course I commented on that and I said something else and he said, "You seem to know a lot." And of course I told him then. And of course, after the war
- 27:00 I did the Red Cross course in handcrafts and nobody, but nobody on course, wanted to go to Laverton. We had one car, he'd just acquired a Morris 8-40, before that we'd been rattling 'round in the firms truck with the gas producer on the back of it. So I said to Harry, I told him I'd like to go to Laverton, and little did I know that I was an honorary member of the officers' mess when I volunteered,
- 27:30 but that was a bonus. So I dropped Harry at work and took the car over to Laverton, work there and came back and picked him up. Starting there, that's where I met the whole of the hierarchy of the RAAF, right through until these recent years now. There's only David Evans, air marshal in Canberra left.
- 28:00 The rest have gone to God, but they were all there, all in their prime. Phil Scott broke the sound barrier in the Sabre when I was there, Jim Roland of course, was in charge of ARDU, Aircraft Research and Development Unit, he became Governor of New South Wales, Sir James Roland. I've got his state

funeral thing over there. Ken Robertson flew a helicopter, and of course he was highly decorated in the desert

28:30 for training these sprogs, that's an air force term for trainees on Sikorsky 180. And Robbie being a smart cookie, the RAAF had a lodge, 'Nettie' at Buller, and he wanted to get his booze up there for the winter. So he took all his trainees in his helicopter and took the helicopter up to Buller, dropped off the grog, and it's called Helicopter Flat to this day.

29:00 It was named that, and Robertson dropping his (UNCLEAR).

Very exciting times for you.

Well see, this is it, you remember all the funny bits and you sweep under the mat other bits. I mean the boring bits, boring bits, well everything's relevant, it depends what you make it too.

29:30 **You do seem very well informed about the air force, the structures, the hierarchy. What about the planes, the aircraft, were you very interested in the planes?**

Oh God yes, you name it I know it. I'm very well informed about aircraft, right across the board. Except the Russians - Volutions, MiGs.

30:00 Not too well informed about them now because everything's changed. But as far as training aircraft, operational aircraft, fighter aircraft, bomber command, coastal command, I can tell you exactly who flew what, and where. I've got a wonderful library up there too. People came into this house and congratulated Harry on what a wonderful library. Grrr, it's not Harry's, it's mine.

30:30 They can congratulate him on being an ace flier and a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] and all the rest of it. And of course, he was club champion and flight champion and aerobatics champion at Royal Vic Aero Club at Moorabbin, so he's got his very interesting history, all related to air.

31:00 He used to play golf once a year, paid the sums to Victorian Golf Club; I reckon he bought it with the subs he paid once a year. I said, "For Gods sake chuck it in, it's not worth it." Besides golf clubs are very expensive, but oh no, he'd need it some day. Eventually he did give it away. They always went flying.

When you were up at Deniliquin, at the drome there, did you get the opportunity to fly?

31:30 Oh yes, I'm in there. There are two Wirraways that I took. I was in the other one that took it, and I coloured them. I suppose I got about twenty hours. When they did the 240 hourly test on the aircraft, after it had been in the hangar and gone over in other words, then the instructor would take it up and put it through its, you know, paces,

32:00 to see that all was well, and I'd hop in the back cockpit.

Was that part of you're your job, or was that just because it was...?

No, flying wasn't part of my job, that was a bonus. Like I had a trip in a helicopter when I was working there. I was with the Red Cross. Bobby said, "Put on your Red Cross uniform and come down to the ARDU hangar." Aircraft Research and Development Unit hangar for the uninitiated. He said, "I'll take you up in the chopper." So I

32:30 went with him. Interesting.

And did you have a hankering at all, to learn to fly?

I did, but I also had two little girls, which kept my ankles on the ground. Harry was flying every weekend and on flyways, and I was at home with the kids. I kept to sailing.

33:00 If anything happens there, you've got a chance of swimming, or a life jacket. No, I gave the flying away. You have to have the time, there is a lot of study involved, navigation, maps, you've got to have the time, it's expensive. I thought I will never use it. I would have liked to. Well, because Debbie Lawrie has just come out, did you see it in the paper?

33:30 You know she took Reg Ansett on, to become a pilot? And she was highly qualified, with instructor's ratings and university degrees and sciences, and they scrubbed her and took all the men. She ends up, I cut it out, it's up in my file in my room. There was a big picture in the paper the other day, and then she eventually won her Equal Opportunity case, and following that, she got involved with the pilot's strike. And

34:00 Bob Hawke and Sir Peter Abeles did all the mucking around and all the pilots got scrubbed. And a lot of them couldn't get jobs and they brought pilots out from America and whoop whoop. And she eventually got a job in Amsterdam, she's still there, she'd married Wardley in this time. So while they were fighting she managed to produce her son, who's fifteen now.

34:30 She's never married again, and she's now a very highly qualified senior captain.

I do remember the case. So back then, when you were at Deniliquin and you were flying, was this something that frustrated you, that women weren't flying in the air force?

No, not then.

- 35:00 I never thought much of taking up flying then. I was very happy. Well of course all the girls, I belong to Vic Aero Club, but I wasn't a flying member I was a serving member, down there they are all pilots, and I was delighted when Debbie fixed
- 35:30 Reginald Miles Ansett. And then of course, I kicked off with the next big case, Equal Opportunity, no, not worrying me. But it certainly annoyed me to be told no I couldn't, as an ex-service woman be accepted into a club for ex-service personnel, a licensed premises. The Toorak
- 36:00 RSL, the Heroes. It's still discrimination there, they get away with it only because they own their own real estate. See Beaumaris and all the others can't. So they can discriminate against women there, but the rest of them, after my case, they all opened up right across Australia.
- 36:30 And the yacht club was notorious, Royal Brighton, to which I owed my allegiance. I wouldn't join Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron because it was open to women, because Royal Brighton was where I'd learnt, and where my friends were and that. But eventually they opened up to associate members. That's another word I hate, like auxiliary. And of course, after the first year, president said, "Don't make waves."
- 37:00 So I said, "I'll make a tidal wave if necessary. We can work on the boats on the weekends, we can win eighty milers 'round the bay. When we come in on Saturday, instead of being able to drink with your crew up in the bar, you've got to sit in the ladies lounge downstairs on your own, it's not on." So of course, I got all the girls onside, and I got of the commodore at the meeting and I said to Bev, his name was Beverly George.
- 37:30 "In that case," I said to Bev, "open the bar in the Olympic lounge, so we can drink with our crews down here." All the girls voted unanimously for that and they opened the bar, three weeks later. Seventeen dollars fifty an hour for a barman downstairs, plus the barman upstairs in the big bar, they decided it was cheaper to let the girls in. I won that round too.
- 38:00 **Economics won out there.**
- Oh look, it's been terrible, right through the war. I mean when the women served, some of them five years service and that war service loan, we didn't get that. A man got it, naturally. A returned serviceman, sure, even servicemen that served in Australia. A man serving
- 38:30 in Australia, it's not his fault that he's not serving in New Guinea, the Department of Postings posts him and he goes where he's damn well told. But a war widow gets it, fair enough. But a de-facto wife got it. But seventy thousand ex-service women didn't. So while I was getting all that unsolicited publicity over those two
- 39:00 albums with the Equal Opportunity case, I aired this fact to the press, and they took it up and in no uncertain terms, ex-service women have got it now. So they've had it since the middle eighties, since I kicked up a fuss.
- It's still forty years later though, isn't it?**
- Yeah, I mean everybody in those days
- 39:30 thought that because you are a woman, you married a man and you were kept for life. What a lot of crap. Oh it does make me cross. And of course, I'd say in hard times, sure a man you marry you've got children, you can't do everything at once, a lot of people are trying with women these days. You are home, you are creating a home, you are working seven days a week,
- 40:00 and with babies, yuck, terrible time of life, it never stops. So you are looking after them, you are looking after your husband, you are looking after your mother, you are looking after the house, you have no time on your own and then they tell you that a man supports you. What do you think I am? A plank on the pier? I support him. How the hell would he get on without me? Everything's done for him, and if he builds a house so be it.
- 40:30 Men don't like living in the gardener's shed, they like their creature comforts too. I really feel that this has a lot to do with what I term, the contracted marriage. One looks after or contributes to the other. These days, everybody seems to get divorced, including my two daughters, they didn't get divorced they divorced their husbands.
- 41:00 So I would never marry again, not on your life. I've seen too many bachelors of my age, or over sixty, their wife dies, the next thing they are on a cruise looking for another mug to do their washing and cook their meals. Sorry about this, Colin [interviewer], but it's the truth.

Tape 7

- 00:31 You just get discharged at PD [Personnel Depot], you sign the paper and Bob's your uncle and you are

on your way home. Then you decide what you are going to fill in your time, so nothing worth recording there. Well I met and married Harry. I was working. Mother she was very interested in a little gift shop she wanted.

01:00 Which she did buy and lost interest in very quickly. So Dorothy and I were left to run it. It was on the corner of Dahlia Street and Toorak Road. We did that until she sold it and then I did the Red Cross course out at Laverton.

Ok, that's a good summary. I have one or two questions about Denny.

01:30 **You've told us some really good yarns, entertaining and very true stories, but I'm curious to know, I imagine you didn't get a lot of time after working hours to socialise, but I'm sure there would have been weekends when you had leave. What sort of things did you get up to?**

Swimming in the River Edwards, Brewery Bend, the Water Tower beach, two lovely areas with

02:00 sandy river banks. And in the township they had a nice area with two turning platforms and a high dive, a nice grassy bank, everyone sat there in the hot weather. Cause it was always hot at Deniliquin except in the winter. I liked tennis and I was good at it, and I belonged to tennis clubs. Had played of course at school and

02:30 now I'm a member at Royal South Yarra tennis club. I've been there for twenty-five years. I don't think there was a great deal other than that. I told you about the station properties and going out there at weekends. When you were at work, you were at work and station activities all revolved around it and there wasn't a lot of time, you got limited leave.

03:00 They weren't exactly generous with it either.

Any encounters with the wildlife?

No. The kangaroos popped around here there and everywhere.

Snakes?

I never saw one, but there would be plenty. I was always wary of them, particularly down by the river and Water Tower beach and Brewery Bend. I never saw a snake,

03:30 I saw plenty of kangaroos. But I did, I believe there were snakes in the grass at the back of the gunnery range. Cause one night we were all down having a swim, and the gunnery range backed onto the swimming pool, probably as tall as this house with grass on it. So they fired the cannon into the sand banks on the other side onto the grass,

04:00 otherwise it would have blown away. Drought conditions up there. We were sitting by the pool and all of a sudden there was a yell, a snake crawled over my feet. The whole gunnery range got up and walked, there must have been six couples parking amongst the long grass. So there were obviously snakes around. Nobody went back onto the gunnery range.

04:30 **So there were opportunities for a little bit of fraternisation like that, canoodling?**

Oh you could fraternise any time, except when Phil the Dill arrived on the scene, Captain P. G. Graham. He ruled that no officers could fraternise with WAAAF. That was all right for Phil, but nobody could see what went on after dark. So no one took much notice, except to believe in the Eleventh Commandment, 'Don't get caught'.

05:00 Otherwise you could go out with who you pleased. Any trainee pilots, airmen, pilots, warrant officer pilots, but not officers.

You very sadly lost your boyfriend Hugh while you were in Adelaide. Now during Deniliquin, were there any romances during that period there?

Well

05:30 I knew a few awfully nice people. Doug Lieder in Sydney, David Murray I wish I could find him. I've tried in Sydney, Doug's in Sydney and Ken Fraser's gone to Buderim. But I knew Ken at school. Eddy Wilson from Melbourne, he's in Adelaide. We've had friendships forever.

06:00 But Titch died last year, Nicky died, they are going one by one, but they are irreplaceable. But I wouldn't say they were friendships like a mad passion, or any affairs. They were lovely everlasting friendships. There are all sorts of

06:30 lovely people you meet, with my activities through the air force. And politically, I was a candidate for Senator Dawson. I did writing and research at (UNCLEAR) headquarters wrote a five-thousand-word history of the Liberal Party for migrants and scholars, and off I went to Canberra. And I did a Federal Parliament charter flight round Australia, mining and agricultural committee, run by Jefferson Bates. And took Dame Zara along for the ride.

07:00 That was interesting, wonderful, because I love anything connected with the land or minerals or Tom

Price. It's fifty-seven percent hay in that item, seeing the primary crusher and the tertiary crusher, it was a wonderful program and I spent a lot of time in Canberra. And I was running around Parliament House with a pH [Meter] stick as if I owned the joint.

07:30 And of course, I became very great friends of Jim Killen. Jim's still alive and going and Tom died last year, Tom Persil. He was the Federal member for Franklin and he was on the Board of the Railways. And Postie, Sir Alan View was the post master general. Andrew Peacock, Andy I know he's around in Sydney with a new wife, number four.

08:00 I've always had a habit of collecting wonderful male friends rather than mad love affairs. I do get on, and I'm not boasting, extremely well with men. Because I think, number one, I can talk most subjects that they can, as long as they don't get the odd football. No, I mean I love the services. I love

08:30 mining, I love agriculture I love anything connected politically. But this girls' luncheon, you wait until the main course comes and they all start yapping at once, they drive me barmy. It's supposed to be this Friday, but I've started....

Can't you call in sick that day?

09:00 Well, at the rate it's going, two are cruising the Mediterranean, one's going on Sunday to cruise the Med, they are all wealthy. Don't know what's gone wrong with Julie, she's married to David Litticker who's the International Yachting Challenge, she's good news. Julie Coles is the widow of one of Arthur Coles, G J Coles. There is nobody who talks

09:30 my language. Nobody knows the first thing about army, navy, air force mining, industry, they, so I just have to....

You know you were talking about Phil the Dill, is he still alive do you know?

He came from Sydney. I wouldn't think so judging by his age. If he is alive he would have to be well in his nineties.

10:00 I was eighteen, he would have had to be thirty-five when he was CO. But there was one funny incident, I was in Canberra and of course the invitation, it's all signed there, and I was in Canberra on one of my political jaunts and I went to meet Ian McLaughlin, who was our member for supply and equipment, and Sid Brazier, commonly known in the air force as the 'culture vulture',

10:30 he became. David Calhoun, another group captain, dumped his wife, married again. Sid Brazier had dumped his and David Calhoun became the illegitimate, the de-facto father-in-law of Sid Brazier's illegitimate child. How's that? It was very, very funny. Anyway, I was at this, they were having a meeting and I looked at the plan

11:00 and I said, "Where does Sir Bobby Murdoch,..." Alistair Murdoch was chief of air staff. "And where does, ..." "Oh," they said, "There's no women, only women involved in the Air Force Association." "Oh," I said to Sid Brazier, "I'll come." They said, "You can't." I said, "Yes I can." And Ian McLaughlin said, "Of course she can, didn't you know she was in the air force?" No, he didn't know, so I went. Well, I had the most wonderful night. We had three cocktail parties before the dinner, then the dinner,

11:30 then the Hotel Canberra opened up the bar again and so I was staying there. I nicked into my room to pump the bilges and joined in this little bar and who should be right inside the door, Titch McFarlane who was secretary for air, and he looked at me, little squirt, and he said, "No women." I said, "Go to hell Titch." Oh, and he was segregant, nobody but nobody had spoken to him, he was very Public Service.

12:00 Sir John McCauley passed their staff, was standing about there clapping. He said, "I've been waiting for twenty years for someone to tell McFarlane to go to hell, good on you." Oh was I pleased with myself. I've got Titch McFarlane's obituary amongst the others. But he was a, for want of a better word, what most Australians would call, a know-all bastard.

12:30 You know, there is the nice bastard and then there is that bastard that you need a bunch of fives for. There is all sorts of terminology of that word, and of course I've tried to enlighten an Italian, Con Sumari, who was the flight, very good pilot at Royal Vic Aero Club. Somebody called him a silly bastard, he was bristling, and I told Con that I had the screed with all the definitions of the word.

13:00 Well, he learned, he's been club champion now and he's such a nice fellow. I think Con was ready to thump someone, I diffused that situation. And then the same thing happened at John Bell's, at a party. One of the other members of the club, who was not exactly blessed with tact, he called Con the silly wog.

13:30 I could see trouble looming I said, "What do you mean Eric, the wog you catch or the wog you scratch?" Well of course, they all burst out laughing, that diffused that situation. You've got to be quick.

I guess we can sort of wrap up on the war years. Is there anything more about Deniliquin that's worth covering, do you think you've covered all of that?

Well, very little.

- 14:00 Harry and I went up to the Easter tennis tournaments, when the floods were there, and we were going to camp with two other friends, Francis Brewer and Brian Keen, down at Brewery Bend. But of course the mosquitoes, they came in swarms because of the flood. So I said let's go out to the drome. When we got there, there was very little, of course it's a civil drome, workshops and
- 14:30 hangars there, and only the sergeants' mess was left. "Oh look," says I, there were WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s running 'round so someone must be there. And Harry went up to the door and this old guy says, "No way, this is a DCA [Department of Civil Aviation] property." And I took one look at him and I hopped out of the car, and walked up to him and I said, "Hello Con." He threw his arms around me. It was the bloke that used to clean the showers and the toilets in the WAAAFery in my day.
- 15:00 He must have had a memory like an elephant. We cleaned our huts but they had civil cleaners to do the ablutions and all the cleaning. I told him we'd been to Brewery Bend, and the mosquitoes and we had left it too late to book into a hotel, "Don't worry, my dear, I'll put the kettle on to boil and get some hot water going, bring your friends and camping gear into the mess and I'll light the stove for you."
- 15:30 We camped in the sergeants' mess. That was very, very nice. And what's more, the next night, he'd caught a Murray cod, which I cooked and he dined and joined us, we made sure we left him plenty of booze and thanked him. That was a bit of luck. I've been back to Deniliquin to reunions, they are always fun, you know, particularly see who shows up. I loved the place.
- 16:00 But it hasn't changed much. Cressy Street's the same, it hasn't exploded, you know. There's a few new motels around, but it's still a bit in the backwater. Can't think of much more about.
- You were regaling us with some very entertaining stories, which were fundamentally about discrimination, women**
- 16:30 **and Italians. Did you, and those were post war stories, but during the war were you experiencing much of that?**
- No, women worked on aircraft, they worked in the hangars they did everything except flying. Musterings other than aircrew were open to both sexes. I never had any problem.
- 17:00 Sure station romances, I can at least remember two or three got married, but, no.
- Those experiences that you were having after the war where there was a bit of, was that something that....**
- Everything changed because before the war everybody seemed to fit into their little pigeonhole. Come the war all the troops went off overseas, the desert,
- 17:30 England, whoop-whoop, islands. Then the women took over jobs that men had done naturally. And after the war the men came back, the women were kicked out and told in other words to get lost, or get pregnant and behind the kitchen sink. And women had become used to earning their own money, not kowtowing to men. And then, of course, Germaine came along and wrote the 'Female Eunuch',
- 18:00 and that stirred up the world's population, certainly a lot of them. And of course, things have progressed from there on. I mean look at the National Bank case, what they were trying to do to this Sweeney, what was her married name? Making her resign, and she was right. The father was a judge and her brother was a judge.
- 18:30 I keep thinking Morgan, no it wasn't Morgan. It still shows its ugly head, but I just laugh about it. If some male has a go at me I tell him to pull his head in or something equally lady like. At the tennis club, I went in,
- 19:00 I always go in the bar, there are a whole lot of bar flies there, and I know them all very well, I join them. I walked into the billiard room to show some friends one day and Tony van de Kiln says, "No women in here." "Pull your head in," says I. We proceeded, they took no notice. When they say something like that, it doesn't worry me one bit.
- 19:30 But it's not rife now; everything is wide open to both sexes. From the tennis courts to billiard rooms, swimming pool, it's a lovely comfortable old club. They have excellent functions once a month. Seniors group, all the olds from the bowling club who can't play tennis any more. We go on coach trips and
- 20:00 have a luncheon once a month. It's very, very nice. I was working at Rhodes Music Yamaha, on one occasion and, for a few years, I enjoyed that, but I found, actually the girls had grown up of course, and left home at that stage, and that was just about
- 20:30 the time I went to the America's Cup. There was a manager, he was a Pom and he was a delightful expression, he was up himself, which a lot of people thought. Anyhow, when I came back from my leave after I'd been up in Cairns, I found that the workshop which most of my work
- 21:00 came from, down below, not workshop, the dispatch. We were sitting around; the union had called a strike because it was a non union shop. And Crickey was bellowing over the phone, "Landahue," do you recall that name? He was a minister in Victoria for labour and industry; they couldn't get anyone along to talk to the boys,

21:30 to get them to join up. See they had you, once they couldn't move anything, from a mouth organ to a grand piano and they were all just stacked up all over Australia. Of course, I happened to know Ken Stone. Are you a Victorian?

Queenslander actually.

Remember Ken Stone was the secretary of the ACTU [Australian Council of Trade Unions], Trades Hall? Well I knew Ken, cause he was PKIU [Printing and Kindred Industries Union] when my husband was

22:00 in business, and I'd met Ken socially through my political career. I went over to Crickey and said, "If you can't get any action from Landahue, what about Ken Stone?" "How do you think you'd get hold of him?" I said, "Easily, he's a member of the Trades Hall, you've got a phone book there, you ring the Trades Hall and ask for him and tell him I want to

22:30 speak to him." He was there, he spoke to me, and I told him I was the chairman of fundraising of the Air Force Club at the time. I told Ken I wasn't going to trap him into coming as guest speaker or something, but I said, "We've got a problem." And I told him what had happened. And I said, "Landahue wouldn't get anyone to sign the boys up for ten days and we can't move anything, can you help?"

23:00 He said, "Put me onto this peanut of a manager." Ron didn't hear this. I said, "It's all right, thank you," and I handed the phone to him, "Yes, no, yes, no, all right." Nine o'clock the next morning, there was a rep to sign the boys up. And then the boss came up to me with Liberal references and what you've got, "How on earth did you do it, how do you get on so

23:30 well with Labour representatives?" I said, "I've always had a happy knack of getting on with men, political, yachting across the board. I've known Ken Stone for years and he's an awfully nice bloke and very fair." He said, "You've saved us ten days trading."

24:00 And he was very happy about that. It was also a matter of how you handle the situation, if you go like a bull at a gate and get peoples back up, it's not going to do you any good or fix the situation. If you make a joke of it, it's much better, softly, softly.

24:30 **Elaine, you mentioned before that you had some time in Japan during the Korean War, can you give a bit of a background to that, how you ended up there?**

Before, as I say 'BC', before children, we went up, Harry went on a business trip. It was supposed to be for three weeks and it ended up being for three months. We had a field day, he certainly did some business.

25:00 I've always been involved too in buying and selling ceramics, jewellery, not furniture, I like wheeling and dealing in those fields. The Korean War was on. Bomber Wells was the general in charge of Bangkok and Colonel John Poole, whose photo's in the front room was my brother-in-law to be. So, and Harry's old squadron friend,

25:30 Dudley Dunn who flew Spitfires in the desert, DFC. Dudley had been Qantas rep in Tokyo, so of course between John and Dudley, doors opened everywhere, we got to know oodles of people. It was wall-to-wall parties every night and fun, and the most gorgeous scenery and a clean interesting place, how they ever went to war. And as I say to people, you can't

26:00 blame the Japanese people of today for what Tojo did. And the hierarchy, Hirohito, who was in it up to his neck, he could have stopped it. I've been back twice and I've been thinking of going for another look. But these days I find I can't walk for a long, long way. I get tired.

26:30 **Well what, you were there what, 1959? So just six years after the war, what sort of shape was Japan in?**

Well, it was very, very good, there was cleared areas 'round Yokohama, and I went through Hiroshima and I wonder if Hiroshima had any effect on my cancer, twice. John Poole died of it. Monty died of it, they were all in Hiroshima, and half the air force, died recently,

27:00 were there when they exploded the bomb at Maralinga. Bill Townsend, Ron S (UNCLEAR), all air vice marshals, all gone with cancer, so I wonder if mine's connected with that, but who knows. No, it was clean, beautiful merchandise, great food, wonderful booze, got lovely, a fascinating place.

27:30 I loved it, and as I say, I've been back twice. Once was only a whistle stop, flying in from America with the wings, we had to divert to Anchorage, and then fly from Anchorage to Japan and that was after the Tokyo Olympics. That was about four days in and out. But I went back on another occasion, oh yes, I had a

28:00 wonderful time. I stayed at the residency, the general's house, unbeknown to the general.

So you stayed there?

Yes, he didn't know, he was in Tokyo, with Colonel Poole, Johnny, my brother-in-law. Chris was a Seven Tazza's bloke and Chris installed me in the residency. So I had,

- 28:30 and then of course, I got off the ship. I'd been coming through the inland sea on the way back. Harry had left me to meet him in Hong Kong; cause he wanted to stay on with Dudley who'd come up. The ship went round to Kobe, no, it went to Hiroshima, so I told the captain that I would be joining him after I'd been to Kure, and of course I got to Kure in the cab and Chris met me
- 29:00 and installed me in the residency. Oh, the stories I could tell you.
- You said that after you came back to Melbourne, after Deniliquin, things were just wrapping up, can you recall much of that time, VE [Victory in Europe] or VP day?**
- Oh, VP day, the streets were
- 29:30 absolutely packed with people jumping up and down, it's like the Greeks at the football matches. I can't say much, VE Day, I was somewhere else, can't think, it would have been, no I can't remember. I didn't go and join the maddening crowd,
- 30:00 because unless you were going somewhere, or with someone especially, it wasn't a good idea to be one in a mob of people, no.
- So when had you been discharged?**
- When? Well I was discharged in early '45; I can't find my Certificate of Service and Discharge,
- 30:30 unless it's in all the papers for the Equal Opportunity case. I've looked through all that stuff of mine and unless Harry took it. Because Harry and a few of the others put me up for a OAM, which I didn't get because Harry, families shouldn't, I didn't know. Mary Owen and Val Bryce have both got OAM's from this electoral lobby, they were involved.
- 31:00 And Colonel Bruce Starrit my skipper, he was involved but because Harry's name was on it, it didn't gel. I'd have liked it very much, particularly while Mother was alive, but Mother's departed now. Ruxton's got it at the moment, Ian Phelps, cause Jim Killen told me to give it to someone closely involved with the case. Well Bruce is, but he's retired,
- 31:30 and Joe, he's up at Noosa. I've sent him all the guff, if it happens it happens. So what.
- Good luck. How would you assess your time with the air force, thinking back now, those couple of years that you had?**
- Absolutely a memory never to be forgotten, the good, the bad, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. In fact,
- 32:00 I think I've been blessed when I look at these, excuse me being derogatory but, dumb sheilas that have been on the phone annoying me today. I wish one of them would get off their butt and do something other than spend money and yap. There is not one of them with a university degree, or who's taken a job, anything constructive in this life, and yet, they all...
- 32:30 I don't know, I shouldn't be saying that, but that annoys me a bit, and I've been very good and kind to them.
- You sound more disappointed than...**
- That's it. They were all at Harry's eightieth birthday party. Oh, they are good party girls, and beautifully dressed, but spoiled, never contributed to their country
- 33:00 or to their own livelihood. I don't know. Nobody you could, well of course, it's not a good idea to whisper any confidences to anybody, but if I have confidences in my life, a few men know about them, but I wouldn't tell those women. It would be all over Melbourne.
- 33:30 First with the latest, you know what I mean. And I'm a feminist and I believe in women's rights, believe me, as I've proved. I also wish to goodness some of them would pull the proverbial finger out and get off their arses and do something.
- Well that sounds like a good little springboard into the Battle of Beaumaris, we've only got about five minutes or so left, can you tell us that incredible story?**
- 34:00 I had joined the Beaumaris RSL following a visit down there. At the time I was on the committee of the Air Force Club of Victoria, and I joined the sub branch, so I was paid up and I wanted to join the club, and I found from the club's constitution that it was for males only, and therefore women were not allowed in the bar. So I got
- 34:30 hold of Bruce Ruxton, who was the state president of the RSL at the time, and Rucko said we'll get to work on this and change the constitution at the annual general meeting. Well this, with Laurie Black's help and a few others, was changed and the members voted for 'males' to be scrubbed and 'persons of good character' be inserted, and of course I'm on my way. I waited for weeks and weeks. And I rang Frank Reid the secretary to find out what
- 35:00 the hold up was. He said that the Liquor Control Commission hadn't rectified the constitution. So little

did he know that John Campton, Judge Campton was with me from school days, and my father had been a partner with his father in the law. So I rang John Campton. John Campton was in Canberra, Judge King was in Queensland, but I spoke to Mr Brophy who was obviously

- 35:30 the head of the office. He said, "We're not concerned with what sex you are, as long you are over eighteen and of good character. I think you are being had." So, of course, at this stage I went off to see Commissioner Fay Miles at the Equal Opportunity Board. And Fay said yes, we will put you through a provisional hearing. That went through, it was accepted as discrimination, and of course I started a
- 36:00 case against them. Les Smith had become the president, he had served as an ordinary seaman in the navy, he had never seen a shot fired in anger, he was too young. He got into the tail end of the war and he did a couple of trips to Japan. And he said, "No bloody woman will get into this club while I'm president." So therefore, I got blackballed. He had photocopies
- 36:30 of me objecting to me handing on the bar when the case started, for all the men to object, and it was on for young and old. Even Bruce Ruxton and Laurie Black who'd been instrumental in changing the constitution or putting it forward, they were served a coventry in the bar, no one would talk to them. So it was quite a battle. I went through the first case and I lost the first case, section 331B on a technicality.
- 37:00 I had to apply to Equal Opportunity six days after they had stacked the meeting of the women haters and changed the constitution back to males. So Dr Ian Sharpe, Dr Bryce Creighton, president Joe Dwyer rang their hands and said because of a technicality they couldn't award in my favour. So of course, the press were all for me, jumping up and down saying have a go under victimisation,
- 37:30 section 17. So I went under victimisation and I hung draw and quartered Les Smith. And of course he had said that there were a lot of men down there that were willing to put their hand in their pocket and pay for the case. Well of course, it was Government anyhow, they were paying the lawyers involved. And when I was awarded a thousand dollars for wear and tear,
- 38:00 car parking, sleeping pills, stress and trauma I accepted it. A third I gave to the Women's Electoral Lobby, a third to the Working Women's Centre ACTU that were wonderful to me, I kept a third. They told Ken that he had to pay up. And of course he attacked all his friends, they all had snakes in their pockets. He had to pay out of his own pocket. Bruce Ruxton and Laurie Black
- 38:30 are watching the books to make sure it didn't come out of club funds. So Smith got what he deserved. At that stage John Cain was the state premier and said, "Goody, goody, I've been waiting for someone to take on victimisation." He opened the MCC [Melbourne Cricket Club] to Melbourne and he got rid of the white line and opened up the membership at Flemington, VRC [Victorian Racing Club], and following that, every RSL across Australia
- 39:00 followed unless they owned their own real estate, to wit, the Heroes RSL, they didn't have to comply because they owned the house and the real estate on Clemdon Road. But the rest are all open.

And did you represent yourself?

Yes.

That must have been a hell of a lot of work?

Well, there is eight hundred and twenty pages in that bag of court transcript.

- 39:30 I did get a little help from one university student, a little Jewish girl called Gail Silverton. She was wonderful, particularly, because my memory of what happened, I'm good. The doctor in charge congratulated me as a layperson, on the way I conducted my case. Possibly it was a help because of my legal background through Dad at times.
- 40:00 But Gail, in the final summing up, tied up all the facts. She stayed up all night and did it, and all I had to do was read it out. Poor kid, she's dead now. I don't know what happened, I saw the name, it's an unusual name and I saw it in the notices and I read it through. Her father died and the late Gail, so she's gone, she was only at university then.
- 40:30 So it was '82, twenty-odd years ago. She could have died of anything in the intervening period, but bless her heart, her final summing up was magnificent.

Where did you celebrate the victory?

I took them all to Royal South Yarra tennis club, particularly to annoy Harvey Holdinson who was an MC [Master of Ceremonies] who thought he owned the bar. Put them all down in the bar,

- 41:00 Harvey was livid. And of course, very few women went in the bar. Most of them, you know, were too tame or too frightened. But I wasn't, and of course now.

And what sort of a reception did you get the next time you went down to the RSL?

All was well, no

41:30 problem. And then I did re-join Beaumaris, and Harry and I went down there a few times, but lost interest. I am a member of Hampton RSL but I don't go very often. My favourite watering hole is the tennis club. I've got a lot of friends over there. So I think that's about it.

42:00 If anyone's interested at any other time, I've got plenty of stuff.

INTERVIEW ENDS